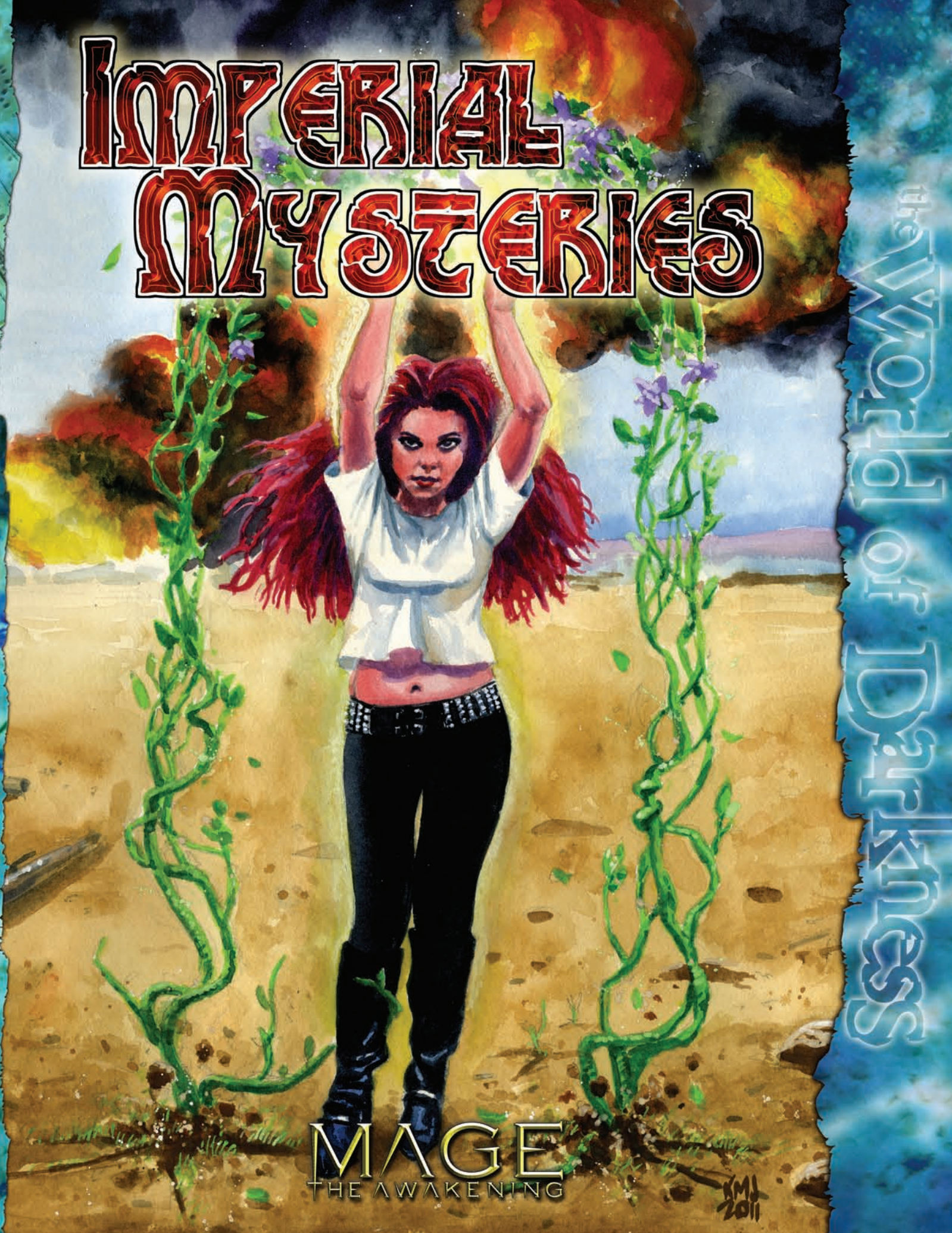


# IMPERIAL MYSTERIES

The World of Darkness



MAGE  
THE AWAKENING

SM  
2011



*Imagine Awakening again.*

*Imagine walking in a universe of dust,  
feeling it shape to your desire  
and retreat from your wrath.*

*Imagine knowing that everyone  
and everything you ever cared about  
can be changed, forever,  
by your actions,  
the actions of your peers  
and those of your rivals.*

*Imagine the fear,  
the crushing responsibility  
and the intoxicating, addictive power.*

*Would you trust anyone with this?*

*Would you trust yourself, Heirarch?*

*- Aaliyah, Bodhissatva*

- Full Rules for archmasters, including the Practices of the sixth to ninth Arcana dots.
- Details of the Threshold, the trials that await a mage attempting to become an Archmage.
- Information on the World of Darkness as seen by archmasters; the Ascension War between rival visions for the Fallen World, the alliances Archmages form to promote those visions, the strange realms they explore and the godlike entities they encounter.
- Exploration of the Supernal Realms and the nature of Ascension.
- A minigame portraying Archmages in the Supernal.
- Storyteller advice for chronicles of cosmic scope.



**MAGE**  
THE AWAKENING



# NAMES



Anamika pictured the hospital. She remembered the squeak of shoes on the hallway floors, the ever-present smell of antiseptic and air freshener struggling with the stench of sweat and disease. She hadn't been there for thirty years, but she had a very good memory—even for a Warlock.

She held the memory, made it an Imago. Placed herself and Verrill there in the ER waiting room. She released the Imago—distance and location sliding aside in response to Pandemonium's laws, following the thread in her heart. In the blink of an eye, every place they'd ever been in thirty years was gone. All the distance she'd put between herself and this town was gone, eradicated by a single spell.

"Shit, it's cold."

Verrill drew his coat tighter. The motion was that of the boy three decades past. Armor, not just against the cold.

Anamika looked around the deserted ER. All of the equipment was gone, from heart monitors to telephones. A patch of old graffiti bruised one wall, while a stain like old urine blossomed across the ripped-up seating. Opened cans that once contained food or alcohol crouched in the corners.

And, somewhere close by, the connection.

She realized that Verrill was watching her and raised an eyebrow.

"It's been abandoned since the 80s," he said, breaking the silence. "They film TV shows here every once in a while, clean up the parts that'll be on camera. Is it... Is this the place?"

She closed her eyes to better see, described the spell in High Speech and cast the Unveiling. The lines of sympathy, strung all over the room like frosted spiderwebs, appeared to her mind's eye. A thick tangle danced to and from Verrill. They swirled around her feet like disturbed dust.

And the old line. The oldest line. Upstairs.

"This is the place."

\* \* \*

"...Could you repeat that, Councilor?"

Anamika felt the other Councilors shift uncomfortably. Fortuna would be the first to recover, she thought, as soon as she realized what this meant for her order. Havelok would take it the hardest — she would miss the old man.

The hardest except for the Heirarch.

"Anamika? What did you just say?" Verrill repeated, betrayal and accusation showing through sudden cracks in his official demeanor.

"I am resigning from this Council. Phidias has been an excellent Provost, and he will be a credit to you in my place."

"Are you leaving us, master?" Havelok asked. He used the proper title, not the one she had just given up, and she silently thanked him for it.

She acknowledged the question and turned to Verrill to reply on the record. After a second of looking at him, she found her brother's eyes looking out from the Heirarch's face.

"I have decided to seek the Imperial Mysteries."

\* \* \*

The filming crews had done a good job ensuring the building was easy to move through, clearing the hallways of abandoned furniture, equipment and garbage. Any ghosts that had survived the long years did not make themselves known. The pair only had to pause once for Verrill to warn a spirit of abandonment away.

After a few more minutes Anamika realized with a small pang of guilt that it had been drawn to Verrill.

At the entrance to what had been Maternity, they paused.

"This is where you stop, Gareth."

\* \* \*

On the second night after Council, they fought. Politely. Anamika sitting, Verrill standing a respectful distance away, ready to leave the room if things got too heated.

A magical family drama, laid out as though blocked for the stage.

"But why? Why throw everything we've worked together for—"

"Everything you have worked for."

Verrill — Gareth here, in his home — flinched.

"We have responsibilities," he mumbled, both of them aware that he'd lost the fight already.

"Do you really want me to say it? You hide in your responsibilities, Gareth. We came to this Consilium temporarily, do you remember? But Havelok offered to make you a Herald."

"I am Heirarch."

"And a second-degree adept. You should be a master by now."

He looked ashamed, like a child caught without having done his homework.

"I've been—"

"Too busy? I know the feeling. I can't do this and be your deciding vote."

He reached out for the door handle unconsciously, then, but didn't run.

"If you're serious... If you want to throw your career away for an impossibility, then help me to understand. Why?"

She knew she had his support, then. She made room on the couch, and — hesitating just a fraction of a second — he joined her, taking her hand.

"Because my name isn't Helen."

"I know that—"

"Let me finish. I was five when Mom adopted me. I don't know why she changed my name, but I was too young. Years of being called Helen outweighed a brief life I could barely remember." A flicker of a smile crossed her lips. "Haven't you wondered why I can't take an Apprentice? Pass on my Legacy?"

"I just assumed..." he said, his voice trailing into silence at her reaction.

She shook her head.

"To bond with a student, you have to exchange names. Real, sympathetic names. And I don't know what mine is. You've never noticed because we grew up together. We Awakened together in the fire. You're my brother and I love you, but you don't know who I am. Anamika. One without a name."

His voice, when he found it, was oddly hollow. "And the archmasters know?"

"There's so much about sympathy that we don't understand. Why isn't my name Helen? We leave threads everywhere we go, with every interaction. We can sense, create, destroy and follow those threads, but we don't know what they're made of. We don't know why our first, oldest ones imprint so strongly. I want to know. I need to know, and Mastery is not enough."

"What do you need me to do?" He'd made up his mind.

"Take a leave of absence. Come with me. I need to sort through, well, everything. To find the thread that named me."

\* \* \*

Outside Maternity, they said their goodbyes.

"I'll be right here," Verrill said, "when you're done."

Anamika took a deep breath, turned away from her family and pushed the door open.

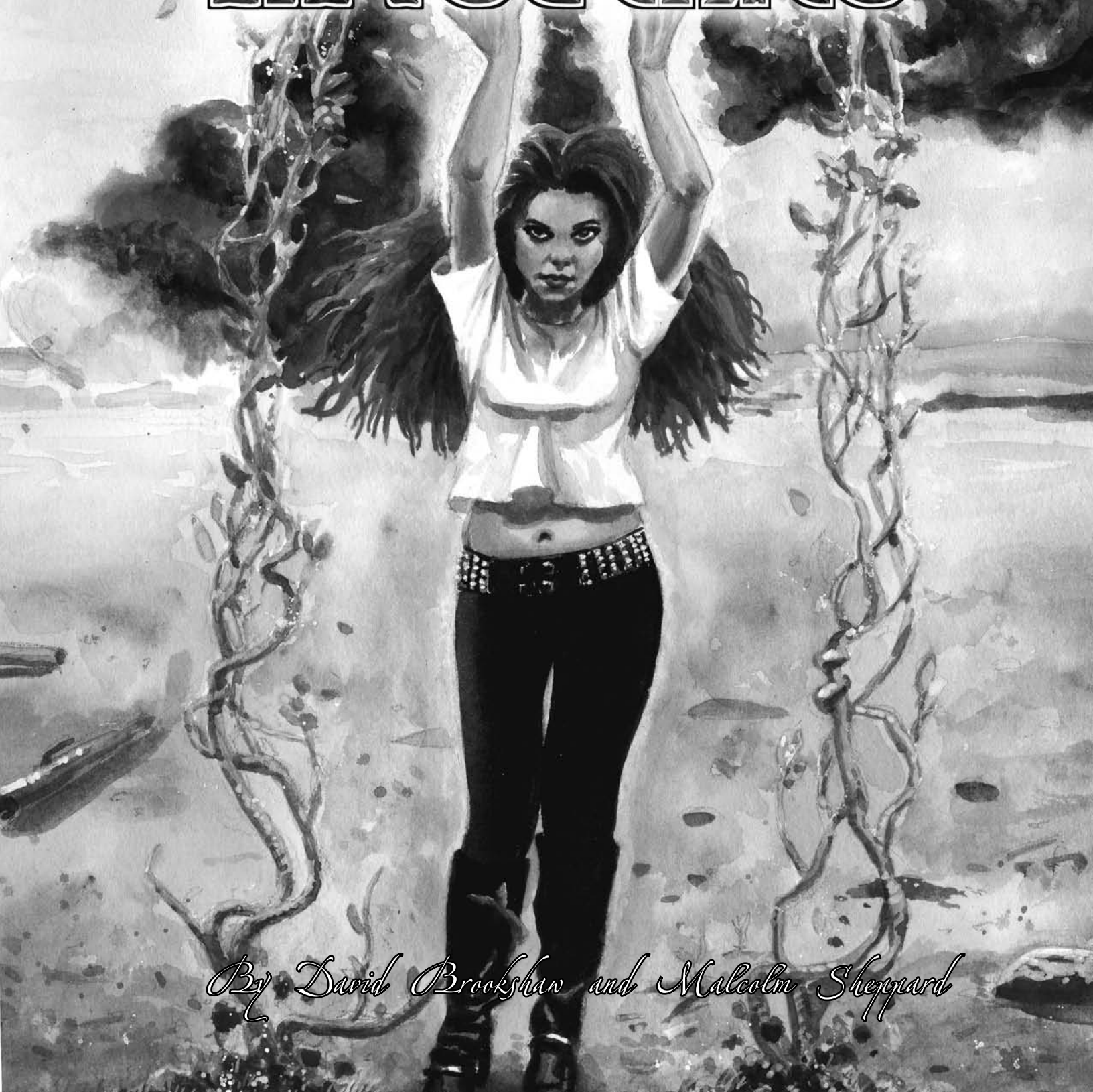
Her thread — her oldest sympathetic connection — led to a point three and a half feet above the cracked floor tiles, a few yards into the room. The cot was long gone.

Carefully, Anamika cast the spell she had designed. The point of origin grew in her sight, unwinding like the insides of a golf ball. The Knowing spell granted her understanding of what she was seeing.

She felt the room darken around her, heard her brother calling her name. Her name.

"I understand," she said. And then she was gone.

# IMPERIAL MYSTERIES



*By David Brookshaw and Malcolm Sheppard*



# Credits

**Written by:** David Brookshaw and Malcolm Sheppard

**Developer:** Matthew McFarland

**Editor:** Michelle Lyons

**Art Director:** Richard Thomas

**Book Design:** Mike Chaney

**Interior Art:** Vince Locke, Nate Pride, John Bridges,  
and Michael Wm. Kaluta

**Cover Art:** Ken Meyer Jr.



**WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING**  
**2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD**  
**SUITE G**  
**STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087**

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# IMPERIAL MYSTERIES

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# INTRODUCTION

*A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring:  
There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.  
Fir'd at first Sight with what the Muse imparts,  
In fearless Youth we tempt the Heights of Arts,  
While from the bounded Level of our Mind,  
Short Views we take, nor see the lengths behind,  
But more advanc'd, behold with strange Surprize  
New, distant Scenes of endless Science rise!  
— Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism"*

Immediately after Awakening, anything feels possible. The new mage feels a transcendent empowerment that offers control over the cosmos if he works to understand it. Once the shock subsides, the limits of the Arcana appear: Spells cannot be made to last on living beings. Masters can only apply their most powerful magic in person. The dead must stay dead. The road to the Supernal is forever closed. Querying these limits with his mentors, our apprentice hears of Archmastery for the first time. They tell him that archmasters are power unbound. The Golden Road of the Imperial Practices offers the fulfillment of any wish.

Years pass. The apprentice is now a master and has heard more. Perhaps he's met a cabal who had a mentor who once met one of the Invisible Masters, or read a grimoire penned by one. If he's a mystagogue, he's heard of the "Corpus Author" who founded the modern order. If a théarch, he knows rumors that archmages conceal themselves in the order's Magisterium. If he's exceptionally lucky, he might even have encountered one of the archmages himself.

Legends among the orders agree that the archmasters know more than common mages, and that the price for that knowledge is terrible. The Imperial mages sequester themselves, withdrawing from their orders for fear of breaking rules only they understand. Masters whisper half-understood terms heard from their position of safety. Terms like "Pax Arcanum" and "Ascension War" imply vast, unknowable chess games with ordinary mages as pieces. To know the

game is to be forced to play, forever, and the majority of masters have spent too long building their powers, their influence and their knowledge of the universe to have all that invalidated. Ignorance is bliss. Better to go no further, content with mastery of their Path.

This book is not about them.

This book is about those rare, driven mages who dare to leave the Path of their Watchtower to forge their own Golden Road to the Supernal. The risks are great, but the prize is greater: archmastery of the Imperial Practices, command of the fundamental forces of the Fallen and Supernal worlds and, ultimately, perhaps Ascension itself. A new archmaster finds herself a member of a very exclusive club. The abstract factional conflicts of the World of Darkness become personal rivalries: the number of opposing influences diminishes even as their power increases.

The transition to archmastery is called the *Threshold Seeking*, and is so shattering to one's worldview that it is rightly described as a second Awakening. After years of mastery, the new archmaster discovers that she really knows nothing at all about how the world *really* works. But she intends to find out.

## *Theme and Mood*

**Theme: You Can't Go Home Again.** Archmasters have undergone their second Awakening. The world has *changed* for them as they look on it with new understanding. The

price of that understanding is becoming significant in the eyes of all those who broke the Threshold before and becoming subject to new shadow laws which supersede any loyalties to friends, family or order they still have. Like Awakening to a Watchtower, the trip is one-way; once a Seeker grasps the lightning of the Imperial Arcana, she can't let go. What has been learned cannot be unlearned, no matter how painful the knowledge becomes.

**Mood: The Menace of Cosmic Mystery.** A Seeker uses the secret truths behind the Paths to forge a Road borne of his interaction with the mysteries. He knows that the quest for enlightenment and enlightenment itself are one and the same thing; that the way one seeks a truth changes that truth; and that while the Supernal may be the realm of truths, it is by interaction with the Fallen that those truths gain meaning. Archmasters struggle with one another to define the meaning of the mysteries they examine, and the stakes are high. At the very highest level of this Ascension War, archmasters war with Exarchs, gods, and stranger things to change those symbols at the source. The aftershocks of their battles alter the universe and may one day destroy it.

### *How to Use This Book*

**Imperial Mysteries** makes archmasters fully playable. While the limits of **Mage** can take years of play to explore, eventually a group may want to play a chronicle of truly cosmic scope or, at the endgame of an existing chronicle, have a character go through the Threshold Seeking and forge a Golden Road. The material here could be used to run side-stories, the actions of archmasters in Imperium causing the conditions that regular characters then experience.

Aside from the possibilities of player-controlled archmasters, **Imperial Mysteries** is a resource for Storytellers using archmasters as Storyteller characters. In a regular **Mage** game, archmasters become the plot devices and quest-givers, as cabals in search of a miracle first chase rumor and legend to find a Chantry and then have to provide the Quintessence for whatever Imperial Spell they so desperately require. Is the goal worth the quest, or is the quest the goal in itself?

### *Imperial Primacy*

If this were a different World of Darkness book we'd make an effort to preserve the integrity of the setting against world-breaking elements. If archmages edit the cosmos with impunity, doesn't that make crossovers with **Vampire** or **Werewolf** impossible without chucking those games into a subordinate position? Should we tone it down to give those games room to breathe?

We decided to let archmages fulfill **Mage's** promise of world-warping potential. Long ago, the Awakened conquered Heaven, and threw every soul into Sleep. That implies they could do it again. Saying otherwise would be a bit of a drag, right? We designed this book by assuming

that *some* mechanism provides room for other games to fully express themselves while archmages go about their business, but we didn't settle on what it was: Any answer would make definitive statements about the World of Darkness that really belong to you, the Storyteller. It's up to you.

**Imperial Mysteries** assumes that archmages contend with other entities of comparable rank: Old gods, Deathlords from the Underworld, and entities the archmasters can only guess at. For the most part, these entities protect some aspect of creation they assert ownership over. Every supernatural being in the World of Darkness that possesses a greater supernatural template (including vampires and werewolves) has its advocates in the Ascension War, but these have not been detailed to leave room for future development in other game lines, as well as leaving you free to develop the ultimate powers behind them. These beings may be able to change the Tellurian as archmages do, using potent supernatural powers and maneuvers similar to archmaster Imperium Rites.

### *Using Other World of Darkness Books*

**Imperial Mysteries** depends on nothing more than the **Mage** core book, but as archmages wander into other realms and weave plots that shake the cosmos, you may find these other supplements helpful. Rather than telling you to "see [other book]" repeatedly in the text, we've just listed the books that play well with **Imperial Mysteries**.

**Astral Realms** describes realms within the souls of Sleepers, mages and the primordial cosmos. The Aeons and the Temenos' ideological domains are especially relevant to archmages.

**Seers of the Throne** lists the major Exarchs and notes the role of archmages in the faction. The book also describes the Seers' place in the Ascension War.

**Summoners** covers entities from the Supernal Realms, Abyss and other planes, including Royal Avatars.

**Tome of the Mysteries** first described archmages and provides a perspective on how they appear to lesser mages.

**Tome of the Watchtowers** includes common visions of the Supernal Realms and the mythology of each Path.

**World of Darkness: Book of the Dead** provides rules and locations in the Underworld, including a domain called the Athenaeum that is of particular interest to archmages.

**World of Darkness: Inferno** might describe akathartoi from the Lower Depths. Like **Inferno's** demons, the Unclean Ones thrive on temptation and degradation.

**Keys to the Supernal Tarot** includes a character named Aldous, who might be an Bodhisattva or might be something else entirely.

### *Contents*

**Imperial Mysteries** is divided into chapters describing archmasters, the worlds they inhabit, the characters they meet and the final Ascension they strive for.



This **Introduction** offers advice on using archmages in a **Mage: The Awakening** chronicle both as Storyteller characters and as protagonists.

**Chapter One: Threshold** reveals the secrets of archmastery, detailing the requirements for setting off on the Golden Road, the trials of the Threshold and the changed world in which an archmaster finds herself. Full systems for Imperial magic follow, including the Practices found at the sixth to ninth degrees of the Arcana and examples of the spells they make possible.

**Chapter Two: The Invisible Road** describes the world of the archmasters, from the strange realms they explore to the secret ententes they gather in, from the Pax Arcanum to the Ascension War. When multiple truths conflict, how do you decide what is real?

**Chapter Three: The Supernal Ensemble** puts faces to the factions in the Ascension War. Rivalries among archmasters are *personal*, and individual Seekers of all the ententes are detailed here. Also included are beings that may serve as allies or antagonists in an archmage chronicle: rules for spirits of high rank, Supernal Gods, Ochema, Aeons and more.

**Chapter Four: Ascension** details the Final Key of permanently transcending the Fallen World. Ascension isn't only for archmasters, and it isn't a moral state, but what is it?

**Appendix: Imperium** rounds off the book with a system for playing archmasters in the Supernal Realms. Moves in the Ascension War can reshape the world — more, they can decide the *meaning* of the world.

## Storytelling

The advice in this chapter informs the rest of **Imperial Mysteries**, grounding the subjects of later chapters in the use they serve to your chronicle. A lot of concepts will be touched on here to be revisited in full depth later in the book.

## Overview of Archmastery

In brief, an *archmaster* (also called a *Seeker*, or an *archmage*) is a high-Gnosis mage who has experienced a second Awakening known as a *Threshold Seeking*, forging her own *Road* to the Supernal instead of relying on the path granted by a Watchtower. The Astral Path experienced by mages meditating into the inner worlds is replaced by the *Golden Road*, an astral world which the archmage uses as a retreat from the Fallen World and a staging ground for exploring the Tellurian. Many archmages expand their Roads by building *Chantries*, physical pocket-worlds within the Road.

Archmages remain capable of casting spells in the same way as other mages, but may also choose to use their Road instead of the Path to enhance a spell of the common Practices or cast a true Imperial Spell. Using the Road requires the archmaster to incorporate a Mystery they have encountered into their soul, represented in the game by Imperial

magic levying a cost in Arcane Experience. Spells of the 6th to 10th Arcanum dots require a special sacrament called *Quintessence* that provides most if not all of the Arcane Experience needed to cast the spell.

Archmasters may use their Roads to temporarily enter the Supernal Realms. The Supernal overwhelms and absorbs mortal minds exposed to it, so Seekers crossing the Abyss must filter the torrent of platonic forms and symbols through their Gnosis into a *Lustrum*, a set of Supernal symbols experienced as a scene.

By entering the Supernal and changing the truths there using *Imperium Rites*, archmages alter the entire Fallen World toward matching their personal vision for the universe. Mistakes made in Imperium, including staying too long, cause the world to change in unforeseen ways called *Aponoia*. When the Fallen World matches the archmage's vision for it, she may attempt to Ascend to dwell permanently in the Supernal.

The *Ascension War* is the struggle between archmages to promote their rival plans for the Fallen World, but it's a cold war. Acknowledging the risk posed by their powers to the universe, Seekers and other beings capable of manipulating the Supernal are covered by a semi-formal nonaggression pact known as the *Pax Arcanum*. The Pax prohibits the use of Imperial spells to directly attack the interests of any other being covered by it, archmages using their knowledge to rule lesser mages, or any action that threatens the existence of the Fallen World or humanity. Faced by the prohibition against holding leadership roles in the orders combined with the change of perspective that comes with the Threshold Seeking, most archmasters withdraw from the social groups known to normal mages (whom they call *Travelers*) and form bonds among the *ententes*, alliances of Seekers with compatible goals in the Ascension War.

## Tier Four

The **Mage Chronicler's Guide** applied the concept of *Tiers* — first introduced in other World of Darkness games — to **Mage**. In brief, the Tier system is a model to assist the Storyteller in focusing attention on the elements of the game that matter for a chronicle, story or chapter by stating the boundaries of the setting to be used. There are three main Tiers, each defined by the extent of the setting and the largest social group that the characters will interact with.

## Tier One — Locality/Cabal

The characters are either not members of an order or are members in name only, more concerned with their cabal and any neighboring rivals. They may be the only mages in the setting.

## Tier Two — City/Consilium

The characters have loyalties outside of their cabal to orders or Legacies, and have a sense of the functioning mage society in their region.

## *Tier Three — Global Order*

The characters are involved in inter-city and international mage politics, crossing Consilium boundaries, and are aware of the prevailing interests of their order across a large region.

## *Tier Four — Cosmic/Awakened*

An archmaster chronicle goes beyond the three-Tier model to a new level, broadening the scope of the story even further. This manifests in the following ways:

### **Cosmic Scope**

Archmages are not tied to any one region. They travel the entire Tellurian and have interests all over the Fallen and Supernal worlds.

### **Awakened Without Division**

Archmages have allies among all orders, sects and factions. A Bodhisattva is as likely to take an interest in a Seer of the Throne or a Banisher as he is to mentor a Libertine. They associate with whomever they choose in furtherance of their Ascension.

### **Potent Cast**

Storyteller characters in archmage chronicles are Gods, the Ochemata avatar-forms of Exarchs, archmasters, and mighty spirits. Archmages don't bargain with a spirit of pain, they make treaties with Pain itself.

### **A Universe of Dust**

Lesser beings and the Fallen World in general have only a slim hope of inconveniencing an archmage. Because of the ability to retreat into the Golden Road, the potency of protective magic they are able to maintain, and Imperial spells allowing proxies and intermediaries to be used whenever safety is in doubt, archmages are extremely unlikely to die at the hands of their inferiors. Combined with their cosmic viewpoint, this grants a disconnection toward Travelers and Sleepers that varies from professional detachment to outright contempt — or worse, apathy.

### **Strange Intimacy**

While the orders and Ministries are reduced to pawns, gambits, and endless faceless extras, the peers of archmages are brought into focus. With so few Seekers in the universe, the members of that community are aware of one another in a way that mirrors the members of a city's Consilium among Travelers with three differences — no one is in charge, there are no outsiders, and there is no way to leave. Archmages are stuck with one another barring death or Ascension and must settle their differences among themselves.

## *Storytelling Imperial Magic*

Archmasters vastly exceed the capabilities of any other supernatural being presented as player characters in the World

of Darkness. Even compared to one another or the various entities of their rank, they aren't "balanced." Archmages, the Ascended, and spiritual beings of high rank are all capable of rending the world given sufficient justification. Archmages do not possess the inherent weaknesses and game-mechanic blocks that prevent other mages from running wild with their abilities and force them to work together. The only restraints on an archmage beyond her own sense of what is a good idea are Quintessence, the threat of Paradox and the Pax Arcanum. That puts the ultimate decision on whether an Imperial spell can be cast up to the Storyteller.

Imperial magic is described in Chapter Two.

## *Paradox*

Archmages must still be wary of Paradox as all Imperial Spells are vulgar in the material world. Imperial Paradox causes lethal damage and more severe forms of Paradox effects known to lesser mages, with unfortunate archmages vanishing into prison realms formed of their own Paradox-tainted Roads. Backlash, however, still only poses a great risk when the archmage is pressed for time and forced to cast when already injured, or is prevented from absorbing the Paradox. Archmasters of Life can also heal resistant damage, but doing so is itself an Imperial spell and unlikely to be available in an emergency without saving Quintessence ahead of time. Most archmasters therefore reserve their most potent spells for use in the Astral or their own Roads, safe from contamination by the Abyss.

## *Quintessence*

The difficulty of finding Quintessence is deliberately left up to the Storyteller, depending on the needs of the chronicle. Archmage player characters should be able to research and locate the Quintessence for a planned spell within a chapter or two, but archmage Storyteller characters encountered by a Traveler cabal in an otherwise normal chronicle could take much longer to acquire the necessary resources — or, even better, rely on the mages to bring Quintessence to him. Quintessence should be increasingly difficult to acquire as the intended spell rises in Arcanum dots. Casting an eight-dot spell should be as rare in an archmaster chronicle as a six- or seven-dot spell in a chronicle about a cabal of adepts.

Archmages know what the Quintessence of any spell they contemplate casting would be — or at the very least what sort of symbolism would be appropriate so they can start looking. Acquiring Quintessence is an investment of time and resources into a particular Imperial Working. If archmage characters persist they will eventually find the component they need, giving the Storyteller a few chapters to adapt her plans.

## *The Pax Arcanum*

The terms of the Pax are covered in Chapter Three, and the response of the ententes to troublemakers is the primary



limit on archmages' activities in the Fallen World. The level of response should be relative to the offense. Archmages prefer not to attack one another for fear of damaging the world, which is itself against the Pax and draws more direct intervention from their peers and the Exarchs.

**Minor:** For accidental breaches or offenses against another Seeker's claimed property, Seekers tend to require apology and restitution, pitched to the level of humiliation that satisfies the entente relationships and any personal rivalries involved.

**Medium:** For activities that go against another Seeker's interests without outright preventing their goals, the response tends to be countering the activity. If the response can't be marshaled in time to prevent the offender from casting their spell in the first place (always preferable), the respondents will attempt Imperial spells of their own that contain or reverse the damage while more neutral parties attempt to mediate to prevent an endless cycle of change and counterchange. Recompense or punishment is an acceptable substitute if the changes cannot be easily undone.

**Major:** For activities that will completely prevent another archmage from achieving their goals in Imperium, or that cut across the interests of an entire entente, the response is swifter and firmer. Although prevention (which at this level can include the death of the archmage) is still preferable to cure, the Seekers whose interests have been threatened will tend to make an example of the perpetrator. Worse, in cases of this severity archmages typically curry favor with one another by helping to enforce the Pax even if the breach doesn't personally affect them. If the troublemaker succeeds, Imperial spells are cast to undo the damage.

**Severe:** Threats to the entire "community" are dealt with near-unanimously. Attempting to damage another Seeker's Golden Road, destroy humanity, enact gross cosmological changes to the Fallen World or similar offences invite openly hostile action from any other Seeker — ententes have been known to enforce the Pax against their own members at this point. The fervent reaction is born of self-interest; threats to the Tellurian at this level will draw the anger of the Exarchs, who dispatch Ochemata to deal with the troublemaker and any allies they still have remaining.

### *Agendas*

With so much of the attempt at an Imperial spell under the Storyteller's control, the temptation is there to throw obstacles in the way of any Imperial working that will alter the plot, but the powers are in the game to be used. The art is in discouraging frivolous use of the Imperial Practices in order to maintain their special mood while allowing the players to remain empowered. Imperial spells that follow a character's agenda in the Ascension War should be encouraged, while others should require the character to expend more resources tracking down Quintessence or fending off other Seekers.

The rules for the Noumenon and Omens in Imperium (see the Appendix) are set up to codify and reinforce an

archmage's goals in the Ascension War, his vision for the Tellurian and the Imperial spells he needs to cast to further them. This gives Storytellers and players a place to start in determining what an archmage will try to cast and when they will declare the Pax broken. If Imperium isn't being used (if, for example, the only archmage in the chronicle is a Storyteller character), the Storyteller has less guidance but more freedom; a few basic goals such as those outlined for the sample archmages in Chapter Three will suffice.

### *Imperial Chronicles*

The material in this book can be used in several ways. It can be added to an existing **Mage** chronicle, used to run an archmage-centered chronicle, or used as a framing device where the actions of archmage characters drive the stories of other denizens of the World of Darkness. In addition, the Threshold and Ascension offer two "break points" that can be used as chronicle endings, preludes or special stories.

### *Archmages as Background*

A chronicle doesn't have to feature an archmage Storyteller character in order to use this book as inspiration—most mages will never meet one of the Imperial Masters—but even without a direct encounter, the Ascension War still leaves ripples. Wholesale alterations to reality performed in Imperium can't be detected by mages in the Fallen World (who are changed along with the rest of the Tellurian), but there are plenty of other enigmas left behind by Seekers for Travelers to find. Imperial spells, if relinquished, can last for centuries until a being capable of dispelling them comes along. To obvious Imperial spells, add the descendents of magical creatures created with the Practice of Entities or Dominions, impossible materials such as the magic-resistant *Adamas* that many "Atlantean" sites are built from, the regalia of Supernal Gods, Artifacts, grimoires and the crystal boned bodies left behind after a successful Ascension.

The archmage responsible for the plot device doesn't even have to still be alive, but as with any Imperial spell the Storyteller should have motive in mind. When designing an Artifact, for example, first determine why it was made. What advantage in the Ascension War did it give its maker? Who has encountered it since then, and do the orders have any record of the event?

### *Archmages as Setting*

Every archmaster is a world. Chapter One describes the Golden Road and Chantries, the worlds built within a Seeker's soul, and Chapter Two details some of the strange realms in the Fallen and Supernal Worlds archmages visit. What's important for this kind of chronicle is that these places are not the sole province of Invisible Masters. Archmages build portals called *Irides* between their Roads and realms they often return to, and normal mages can use these doorways too. A cabal could uncover a strange portal while exploring



the Shadow, for example, and access it with the Space Arcanum only to find themselves intruding in an archmage's Chantry.

Roads, Chantries and Irises persist even after the archmage dies, although they usually become fragile and dangerous to explore. Even living archmages are often absent, on sojourns into the Supernal Realms or simply don't find trespassers enough of a threat to discourage them. The cabal could be using what they think is a Demesne inside a magical pocket, believe that the Road they've found the entrance to in the Astral Realms is an unusual Temeños Realm or even simply exploit the short cut they've found between hard-to-reach realms without knowing that their boon is the inside of a transhuman soul. The tendency of mages to keep potent secrets private within their cabals means many Irises go unnamed as such, even if the local orders would recognize them.

### *Archmages as Plot Devices*

Archmages may be the Invisible Masters, but they *are* sometimes encountered by Travelers, sometimes even without them wanting the contact. Other archmages who need proxies to work toward their Omens will sometime recruit cabals with promises of Imperial magic. This form of chronicle resembles a standard **Mage** chronicle, but has one or more archmasters as Storyteller characters. Details of the Threshold, the Supernal world, the ententes and even the Imperial Practices don't need to be given out to the characters — it is enough that the archmage even exists (and even then they might not be sure of his credentials) and that he can provide a miracle or serves as the advisor of their antagonists. Rumors of the extent of the Imperial Mysteries are noted throughout the **Mage** line. If the need is great, a cabal might go looking for one of the Seekers.

If the cabal initiates contact, they must find the archmage — a considerable difficulty unless they knew him before his Seeking. The nature of the Threshold occludes archmages' personal histories, forcing a cabal searching for them to piece together rumors and legends before finding a Seed gate for a Chantry or something the archmaster has declared his property. Successfully attracting an Invisible Master's attention is no guarantee of their aid, however — at the very least, an archmage willing to hear petitions will demand the cabal supply the Quintessence for any spells they want.

The reverse — an archmage looking to make allies among Travelers — is usually linked to



the archmaster's Omens in Imperium (pp. 76), an accomplishment in the Fallen World that the archmage needs to achieve in order to progress with her Ascension. Archmages are unlikely to admit the nature of their long-term goals, however. Revealing too many details of the Ascension War could itself be seen as a breach of the Pax by rivals. It is enough for the Travelers to be told that there are reasons and what the archmaster is offering in payment. This doesn't have to be Imperial magic. Blackmail and threats of an archmage's power are both time-honored traditions, especially among Tetrarchs demanding service from lesser Seers.

### *Playing the Threshold*

The process of breaking the Threshold (described in Chapter Two,) is long, complex, and draws people other than the aspirant into proceedings until the Abyssal Trial. As a chronicle, it is limited, but as a story within a chronicle it marks a sea change in ongoing events. When the Threshold is broken, nothing is quite the same again, whether it is a player's character attaining Imperium or a mentor figure leaving to seek the Mysteries.

Thresholds of players' characters are best played as preludes or conclusions to chronicles — or as the retirement of the aspirant, if the chronicle will continue as the stories of her Traveler cabal. Those of Storyteller characters signal a great change in a chronicle. If the new archmage is an ally or mentor, her Threshold and subsequent withdrawal from Awakened politics marks a coming of age for the cabal she leaves behind, while the Threshold of an antagonist is an ominous event leaving the lurking threat of his potential return with using powers and Practices they have no way of countering.

Including the cabal in the Threshold Mystery play, especially if it is one of their own members making the attempt, will make the Seeking personal and add to the payoff if (when) the archmage returns.

### *The Archmage Chronicle*

A chronicle of allied archmages requires careful setup of the characters' goals in the Ascension War if they are not going to work against one another. The nature of that agreement will decide the shape of the chronicle — at the loosest, allied archmasters run interference for one another when one attempts to alter the Supernal, heading off rival alliances and antagonistic entities. At the tightest cohesion, the characters are all members of the same entente, representing a significant number of that faction in the Tellurian and spending much of their time pursuing the Ascension War against the other ententes.

### *Playing the Ascension*

Just as the Threshold plays best as a prelude for an archmage chronicle, Ascension marks the break point at the

other end of the narrative. Allies more advanced in Imperium than the characters can Ascend during play, perhaps sending Ochemata to assist their allies at later dates, but the Final Key for a players' character results in that character being retired. For more information on Ascension, see Chapter Four (pp. 67).

### *Archmages as Framing Devices*

To emphasize how archmages use others as catspaws and agents in the Fallen World, seeking their Omens through subtle means, the troupe can use a framing chronicle. In this method of play, the chapters and stories of the archmaster characters are interspersed with stories where the players take on the characters their archmages have recruited or suborned.

A framing chronicle adds an extra level of structure called an Act, longer than a story but less than an entire chronicle. In the first story of an Act, the players portray their archmage characters, interacting with the ententes and deciding on their next move in the Ascension War. The story ends when the characters decide on their immediate goals — if the rules in the Appendix for Imperium are used, this point comes when Challenges are defined.

After deciding on a strategy, the archmages look for agents to carry it out. The troupe creates a new group of characters for this portion of the Act who may or may not know that they are encountering the plots of the Invisible Masters, then play on until the archmages' plan has succeeded or failed. The last story of the Act features the archmages again, experiencing the aftereffects of their catspaw's actions. To reflect the way that the archmages are directing the action from "behind the scenes," experience gains made by the agent characters are applied to the archmaster characters as well.

The framing chronicle allows a troupe to explore the World of Darkness in unusual breadth; the characters played in the bulk of each story arc needn't carry on from Act to Act, and even if they do, the way that successful maneuvers in the Supernal alter the Fallen World and everyone in it means that the setting may be radically different if the same characters are revisited. Archmages don't restrict themselves to using lesser mages as agents, either, so the chronicle makes for an opportunity to explore some of the other World of Darkness games for a few chapters or stories, all bound up in the ongoing narrative of the archmage characters and their Imperium. With the existence of sub-souls and living spells, it is possible — if challenging — for every player in the troupe to play different parts of the same archmaster in stories featuring goals requiring direct intervention with Imperial magic.

The optional system for determining the relative experience of temporary pawns later in this chapter might prove useful in getting an idea for each set of new characters, but it's only a guideline. Part of the framing chronicle is variety, after all, so experiment with characters of different experience levels and have fun.

## Playing Archmages

Beyond the transcendent powers and awareness of the universe, archmasters share a fellowship of understanding, secret knowledge of the universe, and tendencies toward hermitage, secrecy, subtlety, forward-planning and acting through proxies. The stereotype is not true for every archmage, with exceptions defined by their divergence from the norm, but even Seekers who allow themselves to get close to Travelers or try to maintain old friendships only do so to a select few favorites.

The secrets archmages know and the ententes they form are covered in the rest of this book. The tendency to individual action and acting through proxies deserve closer attention.

## Circles of Ascension

The stereotype of the lone archmaster forming Irises from her Golden Road to far-flung realms and working patiently toward her Ascension is perfectly suited to one-on-one play, but a troupe looking to play archmages need to either accept that competition between characters will occur when agendas clash or accept that their characters are breaking the stereotype.

Cabals of archmasters are rare enough that they may be the only such fellowship in the Tellurian during the chronicle. A Circle of Ascension is a group of archmages that seek a common Ascension by individual but complimentary means — if they seek the Golden Road Ascension in the systems presented for Imperium (pp. 67), each member of a Circle has the same Noumenon but defines individual Omens with the members of the Circle all Ascending together at the Road's end. As the symbols making up their Threshold still vary, they do not share Cintamani or Golden Roads, but their Cintamani will drift "closer" as they progress in Imperium. Should the Circle Ascend, the Cintamani merge.

Circles are rare because of the suspicion they provoke among other Seekers. A Circle is such a concentration of power aligned to a goal that they represent an imbalance in the Ascension War, and the Pax Arcanum loathes imbalance. Although Circles have far more ability to pursue their goals, they are opposed by other archmages and face an uphill battle to earn the trust of allies outside their group.

## The Use of Proxies

The troupe's players may not be used to relying on Storyteller characters to achieve their goals, but archmages can't be everywhere at once; direct action makes them targets. The following optional rules can be used to give mechanical emphasis to the use of agents in the Fallen World.

### Scaling Social Merits

The Social Merits in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and **Mage: The Awakening** define a character's social net-

work at the scale of a Traveler, rather than that of an archmaster. Mortal Allies, Contacts and Proximi or Sleepwalker servants all have their place in an archmage chronicle, but an Invisible Master walks in a different world.

Under this rule, the Allies, Contacts and Retainers Merits keep their earthly focus, but an Archmaster multiplies any dots in them by her Gnosis, allowing a global network of allies to be built. The Merits remain capped at five dots for each individual use, but may be bought several times; archmasters have *many* Allies and Retainers.

In addition, each Merit can also be bought as a "Supernal" version that isn't multiplied, representing entities on the same cosmic playing field as the archmage. Supernal Retainers are natives of the higher realms, cast-off Ochemata of other archmages, and other beings. Supernal Allies represent other beings capable of acting in Imperium. Although worldly Mentors aren't multiplied, that Merit also has a Supernal version. A Supernal Mentor is a fellow archmaster, an Aeon, Supernal God or, at the higher ratings, an Exarch or Ascended archmage.

There is one new Merit, "Pawns," that represents lesser mages loyal to the archmage.

## New Merit: Pawns (● to ●●●●●)

**Prerequisites:** Archmage

**Effects:** Your character has influence over lesser mages. Your pawns act on your behalf, carrying out missions you assign them to promote your aims in the Ascension War, although the Storyteller determines exactly how. Pawns may also require you to assist them in return, using your Imperial magic to perform miracles they can't achieve by other means.

The number of dots purchased in this Merit determines the power and number of Pawns.

- A single adept or a cabal of disciples, initiates or apprentices.
- A master or a cabal of adepts.
- Multiple cabals giving influence over an entire caucus.
- An entire Consilium.
- Wide-ranging influence over a geographical area.

## Archmastery as Status

Although the orders all profess to not acknowledge any rank above master, and a prohibition against archmages retaining political office is present in the Golden Law of many ancient Consilii, a Seeker who reveals her nature can still wield a great deal of clout. Tetrarchs issue orders to Seers of the Throne more frequently, but their abuse of their enlightenment is no less a breach of the Pax Arcanum as a Silver Ladder Exemplar who refuses to give up the Heirarch's seat.

Using this rule, after breaking the Threshold an archmage loses all order, Seer, Ministry or Consilium Status Merit dots. When interacting with Travelers who know

what the Seeker is, an archmage counts as having 5 dots in Consilium or Seer of the Throne Status according to their origin, or 4 dots against the opposite faction or apostates. Exemplars loyal to an order and Tetrarchs of a particular Ministry count as having Order or Ministry Status 6 when dealing with members of the group. Using either of these status advantages is a breach of the Pax Arcanum if proved, though the Tetrarchs have long flaunted it.

An archmage with a Traveler “cover identity” retains the use of Status Merits, now representing the false front — an Exemplar might serve her order as a Councillor while keeping her nature secret, by retaining her 4 dots of Consilium Status. If she were revealed as an archmage, it would begin counting as 4 dots to Seers, 5 to Pentacle mages and 6 to Silver Ladder members, but issuing commands on her authority as a Seeker would breach the Pax.

There aren't enough Seekers for specialized Status Merits for archmaster relations to make sense. Archmages usually defer to Ascended members of their own entente out of respect when those beings make themselves known, but only the Tetrarchs and Exarchs formalize such relationships.

### Temporary Pawns

Archmages often don't retain their mouthpieces beyond a single purpose, feeling it better to suborn Cabals or Consilii to then discard than build a permanent power base that can be used against them. The Social Merits above define lasting relationships that the character has invested time and effort in as represented by their experience cost.

Locating and gaining the loyalty of suitable agents is a large part of archmaster play, but if the troupe wishes to abstract the attempt the following system may be used.

When searching for pawns to use for a specific ploy in the Fallen World, roll Gnosis + Manipulation + Socialize, Politics, Persuasion or Intimidation, depending on the methods used. Awing lesser beings with Imperial might uses Presence + Intimidation instead, but lacks subtlety and draws the attention of rivals.

The player then “buys” dots of Social Merits at the rate of one dot per success. If the optional rule above about multiplying dots of worldly social Merits is used, remember to apply it to these temporary Merit dots as well. Without spending experience to cement the relationship, however, the Merits fade at the end of the current story.

## *The Great Revelators*

Archmages inspire deep questions about the secret history of the Awakened and the World of Darkness' true nature. No World of Darkness game line provides all the answers, because doing so would imply that the writers and developers' ideas take precedence over your own. Everything in every book is a suggestion to embrace, change or reject as you see fit. Nevertheless, if we described everything as an option (which it is) you wouldn't enjoy

some basic assumptions to play with. We need a baseline that fits everything protagonists might know right out of the gate.

Imperium Rites offer the power to revise the cosmos and imply that it's been through *many* revisions. Most sentient beings don't notice changes in names, places and natural laws. That's what Seekers believe, or consider a convenient fiction, at least. It structures the Golden Road Ascension and justifies the pain and danger of that journey. But the ultimate truth? Consider the following alternatives to Golden Road doctrine. They're just starting points, and by no means the only possibilities. That said, what if the Telurian is a simulation inside some Atlantean occult server farm? Could there be a second layer to the Lie that affects only archmages? Think about the possibilities.

## *Infinite Worlds*

Creation blossoms in an endless number of branching and parallel worlds. When an archmaster uses Imperium Rites he doesn't change any of them, but moves from one world to the next, searching for a universe that allows his Ascension. This explanation is not only convenient when you want to maintain a stable base setting for your chronicle, but manages crossovers as well. An archmage can enslave every werewolf in her personal universe without affecting your upcoming **Werewolf: The Forsaken** game.

This raises the question of what happens to other individuals when archmages walk to new worlds. Does a Seeker somehow take important companions with her, or are they replaced with alternate versions? Beings of sufficient power recall the changes wrought by Imperium Rites, so the archmage might “drag” them with her, but not lesser creatures. Perhaps such entities are not really individuals in each universe, but mass-minds built of alternate selves who instinctually tap into the memories of every world in which they exist.

## *Archmasters as Storyteller Characters*

As mentors and grand antagonists, archmages possess the intelligence, ambition and power to influence your entire chronicle. Be wary of clichés and brute force solutions, but remember that annoying, smarter-than-thou patrons and walking plot enforcers are degraded versions of useful roles.

Seekers exercise a degree of power and knowledge that lesser mages would be hard-pressed to access, but this doesn't mean they're *perfect*. Portray archmasters according to defined motives, and you'll both create color and discover limitations that make them imperfect, intriguing figures. Look at ways you can wrestle the annoying aspects of these types into functions that serve everyone at your game table.



## Archmasters as Patrons

If an archmaster uses players' characters as agents, determine why she can't do it herself. What is it that limits her knowledge of the situation so that she can't provide them with perfect intelligence?

The Pax Arcanum provides a rationale to limit archmage participation, but lean on it too much and you'll stretch the players' willing suspension of disbelief. In addition, take into account the actions of rival archmages. Players' characters are likely to get involved *after* Seekers employ spells and counterspells, cancelling each other's efforts out (or more likely, changing the original objective because a prior maneuver created some unexpected result).

In addition, consider the fact that Imperial magic requires significant effort, even for archmages.



Arcane experience grows progressively more difficult to find as Seekers exhaust the most accessible occult secrets. Quintessences are aspects of a supernatural Mystery, hard to find at any degree of power.

In the end, an archmaster's greatest flaws erupt from the human emotion and godlike ambition that define them. It isn't just a matter of blindness to their own biases, but the fact that the Golden Road demands that they revel in those biases, changing the universe to fit their visions. An Invisible Master fails to account for situations that fall outside her worldview or becomes blinded by too-human love and anger. Sorcery can sometimes correct the flaws of human nature, but a Seeker must acknowledge that those flaws apply to her in the first place. Without that realization, no spell or stratagem can escape the taint of human perspective.

**Example:** Xaphan's power over Time could provide tremendous assistance to a cabal, but he is unsure as to whether his predictions lock him into the personal timeline that erased much of his existence. He may know what would happen in the context of this future, but doesn't want it to occur, so he sometimes lies to Traveler cabals in order to forge an unexpected future that might solve his Paradox.

## Archmasters as Manipulators

These limitations apply to Seekers attempting to influence Travelers. The classic mistake Storytellers make with powerful characters is using them to force the story down a predetermined path, or as mouthpieces for the Storyteller's uncompromised creative vision. In a roleplaying game you're *supposed* to compromise — the chronicle is never your story alone. Avoid this issue by clearly separating the archmaster's desires from your own.

When you give an archmage ownership of her goals, it makes them *finite*. They receive support from the archmaster, not the basic assumptions of the chronicle. That means that opposing forces exist to moderate archmage agendas and it is always possible to escape their control. Consider that the Exarchs have had as total control of existence as any named power in the World of Darkness, and even they can't destroy the Pentacle or control every Awakening. List key differences between the archmage's will and the events you anticipate. Furthermore, ask yourself how many outcomes an archmaster can integrate into her ambitions.

It may not be about whether or not the cabal recovers a hidden grimoire, but how the quest to do it influences the world.

In any event, archmasters take a dim view of using naked force against Travelers, as it could escalate tensions amongst them. Often marked by the Invisible Masters without their knowledge, even relatively humble mages can spark tremendous conflicts, especially if the Traveler is a Seeker's lover, friend or relative.

**Example:** Achamán is an excellent archmage to use when you want to imply that a greater principle of justice exists beyond the interests of mages. Instead of using him as a direct mouthpiece, show the players that he also believes mages should surrender their moral agency to the Gods. Don't just balance Achamán with an unsympathetic antagonist, but introduce an influential moralist who disagrees with him. Make the antagonist a third party, and the players' cabal can set their own definition of righteousness.

### *Archmasters as Antagonists*

Archmages are classic epic antagonists, but how do you keep them from overwhelming Travelers? Again, motivation is critical. Not every archmage is interested in killing her enemies, and even if they are, they won't automatically succeed and might not want to take the risks required to intervene directly. The Invisible Masters don't possess unlimited knowledge and resources. Directing them to crush one enemy leaves them open to others.

As useful as it is to limit archmages' force, invoking the Pax Arcanum will come off as an arbitrary decision unless you demonstrate why it's important in your chronicle's world. Believe it or not, the Pax will feel more authentic if you break it occasionally and let the consequences reveal themselves. Beyond demonstrating its necessity, Pax violations reveal that even archmages suffer the consequences of rash actions.

Even without the Pax Arcanum, archmages are notoriously risk averse, loath to wager decades or centuries of occult study on simple revenge. Archmasters often lead large conspiracies. The more direct their rule, the faster their organizations collapse when they die or distract themselves with single cabals and other petty matters.

**Example:** Theumiél perverts the Shadow with Abyssal reflections of true spirits and takes action against anyone who threatens his "gardens," but his achievements depend on continual effort and a low profile. If he sends his most powerful minions they can't serve as anchors for subordinate anti-spirits. If he responds in person, his Paradoxical ecology might fall apart. Instead, he recruits protectors from outside his core concerns: mages he's deceived, or Abyssal cults who mistake his allegiance for simple nihilism. He doesn't want to kill anyone. He dreams of a compassionate universe, regardless of the mutations it would impose on spiritual and physical realms. He would rather trick or convert enemies long before he feels the need to unleash his power directly.

### *Storytelling Transhuman Ability*

How do you portray someone with Intelligence 7 or Persuasion 8? Minor archmasters may possess one or two 6-dot Attributes and Skills, putting them on par with the most gifted Sleepers who ever lived, but at 7 or 8 dots, traits approach levels the real world has never seen.

Intellectual abilities are particularly challenging because they affect characters' ability to predict events and uncover information. If this becomes a question, cheat — assume transhuman intellects guess and compensate for circumstances that would normally only be known to the Storyteller, or plans executed by player controlled or Storyteller characters. If you give this privilege to Storyteller characters, players' transhumans deserve the same privileges. Furthermore, you should make it clear at the outset that these benefits are available, and impose reasonable limits.

One approach to the challenge is to look at real situations that enhance natural abilities. A hyper-intelligent archmage possesses an internal "search engine" that allows her to exploit her memories faster and more effectively, never gets her math wrong, and can find patterns in extremely large data sets. Sleepers react to a Seeker with a Presence of 7 as if she was a celebrity, with the same degree of distraction and obsession. Characters with transhuman Physical Stamina scores recover from illness and injury as if they were under skilled medical care, even if they're alone in the wild. Characters with more than human Skills might be able to use them without normal tools, or possess an unusual level of focus and confidence in stressful situations.

It's important to note that traits in the Storytelling System do not necessarily match casual uses of the same words. For example, we may think that high intelligence correlates with the ability to predict and shape political institutions, but much of that "social" intelligence is a better fit for the Manipulation Attribute.

### *Optional System: Reversal Points*

If you like, you might give hyper-competent characters possess "reversal points" to represent superior insight and preparation. Each reversal point allows a player to retroactively declare a basic (1 point — bodyguards were shadowing you in case of attack), moderate (2 points — your counter-sniper shoots the sniper), complex (3 points — "My spy network knew about this weeks ago") preparation to deal with an event that has just been revealed in play, such as a betrayal or unexpected encounter.

Your character possesses one reversal point for each dot in an Attribute or Skill above 5, and may only spend points when the situation would apply both to the linked Trait and the declared preparation. You may also spend points to nullify other characters' reversal points on a 1 for 1 basis.

Your character recovers all reversal points at the start of each game chapter.

# Lexicon

Archmages are a small community, but their isolation from other mages and their interaction with the mysteries has led to new concepts requiring new terms. Most of what other mages “know” about those on the Golden Road comes from hearing archmasters use these terms and speculating about their meaning using context as a guide.

**akathartoi:** The “Unclean,” creatures formed from human evil that hunger for Mana. Inhabitants of Abaddon.

**Abaddon:** The “Lower Depths” of the orders’ cosmology, realm of the akathartoi.

**Aeon:** An Astral spirit representing one of the ten Arcana or Paradox, inhabitants of the very far edge of the Dreamtime.

**Agama:** A grimoire containing spells powered by one of the Old Gods.

**Alienated:** An entente of archmasters focusing on the natives of the Supernal, aiding the Old Gods against the Exarchs.

**Aponoia:** The alterations to Fallen reality caused by staying too long in the Supernal Realms or causing damage to the truth-symbols there.

**Ascension War, the:** The conflict between archmasters, godlike entities and Ascended beings in which the ententes attempt to promote their rival meanings for the Phenomenal World.

**aspirant:** A mage attempting to become an archmaster who is within the process of a Threshold Seeking.

**Astra:** A Supernal Artifact forming part of the regalia of an Old God.

**Astral Path:** The imagined journey meditating mages use to enter the Astral Realms, used by archmages as the basis of the Golden Road.

**Aswadim:** An entente of archmasters who believe that the Abyss offers the only true freedom from a universe of forms and laws.

**avatar:** An alternative name for an Ochema, used by archmasters who do not see their sub-souls as servants but equal representatives of the whole.

**Banishment:** Supernal counter-magic; an attempt to interfere with another archmage’s Imperium Rite.

**Bodhisattvas:** An entente of archmages focusing on Wisdom and guiding humanity to Awakening, attempting to follow the example (as they see it) of the mysterious Oracles.

**Chantry:** A physical pocket-world created within an archmaster’s soul by copying a region of the Fallen World as a Seed, serving as combination fortress, hermitage and laboratory free from the threat of Paradox.

**Cintamani:** The site in the Supernal that serves as the symbol of an archmage’s power, created during the Threshold Seeking.

**common Practice:** A term for the first ten Practices of the Arcana, distinct from the Imperial Practices.

**Dhatu:** A region in the Supernal ruled by an Old God.

**Emanation:** One of several stable realms on the far side of the Abyss, linked to the Supernal Realms but not fully Supernal.

**entente:** A loose alliance among archmasters of similar philosophy.

**epitome:** A mage or archmage who has learned the fourth Attainment of a Legacy.

**Exarchate:** A region in the Supernal containing the throne of an Exarch.

**Exemplars:** An entente of ex-Pentacle archmages remaining loyal to their orders, taking an interest in lesser Pentacle mages and performing feats of Imperial magic on their behalf when the Pax Arcanum will allow.

**Final Key:** The item, solution, Quintessence or realization that allows the Ascension of the mage experiencing it.

**Golden Road:** 1) Also referred to as just “Road,” an archmaster’s personal connection to the Supernal, built from the archmage’s Astral Path and the symbols of every Quintessence she has ever used. 2) The Ascension sought by the majority of archmasters, in which they forge a vision for the Fallen World and make it reality by altering the Supernal in Imperium Rites.

**greater Abyssal entity:** A stillborn or castoff world within the Abyss, made of hundreds of smaller Abyssal beings.

**Imperial Practice:** The Practices of the Arcana that an archmaster can learn to use in spells by channeling the Supernal through the Road rather than the Path; the Practices of Dynamics, Entities, Excision, Dominions and Transfiguration.

**Imperium Rite:** A magical ritual conducted within the Supernal Realms as part of the Golden Road Ascension.

**Invisible Masters:** A Pentacle order term for archmages, based on their legendary reclusiveness from the point of view of Travelers.

**Iris:** A gateway between worlds. Many types of Irises exist, but archmages are most familiar with those they create to connect the Golden Road to another realm.

**Kenoma:** The Ascension sought by Aswadim through freeing themselves of the universe, usually by attempting to destroy it.

**Lustrum:** The subjective experience of the Supernal Realms, formed by interpreting the raw power of the Supernal through Gnosis into something a human mind can withstand.



**Mandira:** A site in the Fallen World that resonates with a particular Old God.

**Minister:** The chief slave in the Fallen World of a particular Exarch, head of one of the internal Ministries that divide the Seers of the Throne. The most powerful Ministers are archmasters that are partially merged with their Supernal patron.

**Mitrata:** The Ascension sought by Bodhisattvas through Wisdom.

**move:** A measurement of time in the Supernal.

**Noumenon:** An Imago formed by an archmage of her own Ascension; the vision of the Fallen World she is working towards in her Omens.

**Ochema:** Lit. "Vehicle," a self-aware sub-soul of an archmaster created as an autonomous servant with abilities up to those of its creator. Plural "Ochemata." Also see "avatar."

**Old One:** A godlike native of the Supernal, often indistinguishable from the region of the Supernal Realms in which it is encountered.

**Omens:** The specific goals of an archmaster in the Golden Road Ascension, the changes she is attempting to make to reality in order to achieve her Noumenon.

**Pax Arcanum:** The rules of behavior for archmasters, which new Seekers are informed of shortly after overcoming the Threshold. Breaking or being seen to be intending to break the Pax leads to intervention from other archmages.

**Phenomenal World, the:** A term used by some archmasters to refer to the non-Supernal world as a whole, denoting a respect for the material realm and related cosmology that "Fallen" lacks. Based on the idea that while the Supernal is the realm of pure truths, those truths must be expressed as phenomena in the world Travelers are familiar with.

**Pneuma:** The spiritual energy making up the Golden Road.

**Royal Avatar:** A representative of a spirit entity of godlike power; a rank 5 "face" for a rank 6 or more being.

**Qliphoth:** A once-human "shell" filled with the lies of the Abyss, created from a failed aspirant or an established archmage who succumbs to the most severe forms of Paradox.

**Quintessence:** A symbolic representation of a spell drawing on the Imperial Practices that an archmaster intends to cast. A Quintessence is much more than a mere sacrament,

it is a Mystery; the act of seeking Quintessence out is what enables the Archmage to cast the spell.

**Sarira:** The physical remains left behind after an Ascension, containing jewels or crystals formed of solidified resonance.

**Seed:** The area of the Fallen World used as a basis for a Chantry. At the heart of every Chantry is a duplicate of the Seed, containing a gateway to the corresponding location.

**Seeker:** A term used by archmasters to refer to one another, distinct from "Traveler."

**Siddha:** An entente of archmasters focusing on the pure study of the Arcana.

**sub-soul:** An independent soul created from that of an archmaster, usually with a Gnosis Trait and Arcana included. Sub-souls remain mystically part of the archmage but survive after death and are capable of casting spells of their own. Also see "Ochema" and "Talisman".

**Supernal Work, the:** A theoretical spell that causes the Ascension of the caster.

**Talisman:** An Artifact that is also a sub-soul of the creating archmage, enabling it to cast spells without a user.

**Tetrarchs:** 1) The entente of archmasters claiming membership in the Seers of the Throne and serving the Exarchs in the Ascension War. 2) The political position within the Seers of the Throne hierarchy held by Seer archmasters who are not Ministers.

**Threshold Seeking, the:** The process in which a mage attempts to become an archmaster, starting as an obsessive need to understand a mystery relating to their Arcanum of choice, progressing to a Mystery Play and culminating in the aspirant vanishing to face tests in both the Abyss and the Supernal Realms.

**Traveler:** A mage who is still bound by a Path; a non-archmaster.

**Tyrannate:** A Chantry used by a Seer archmaster (usually a Minister), which has been passed down from one archmage to another for centuries and may have originally been built by the Exarch the Seer worships. Due to their nature, Tyrannates are larger than normal Chantries, but are not entirely within the occupant's control.

**Wending:** The Golden Road of a deceased or Ascended archmage, which can still be accessed through any Irises that remain.



# CHAPTER ONE: THRESHOLD

*By the power of truth I, while living,  
have conquered the universe.*

— Aleister Crowley

Travelers have debated the nature of the archmasters for centuries, writing volumes as to how a master can join the ranks of the Seekers. Speculation regarding the Invisible Masters is mixed up with half-truths and rumors of Imperial spells, offering glimpses of gold among the dross to a master contemplating the task ahead.

## *The Golden Road*

The truth behind an archmage's power is this: using her chosen Arcanum, she has unlocked her soul's potential to forge a personal Road through the Abyss to the Supernal. This Road can be accessed by contemplating the Mysteries from which the road is made.

All mages have a symbolic connection to a site in the Supernal World — the Watchtower of their Awakening — which they may access to cast a spell by forming an Imago. This connection grows stronger as a mage experiences the Mysteries and understands them using his magic; by facing the supernatural through the Path, the Path grows stronger. The process is largely subconscious, although all the orders recognize that magical strength comes from one's own experiences alone, incorporating that understanding in their teachings.

Mages who experiment with the nature of their souls learn to travel within themselves when meditating in a Demesne or strong Hallow. They find themselves on a symbolic pathway or "Astral Path" within their soul, which

they may leave in order to explore the Oneiros, Temenos and Anima Mundi. A representation of the Abyss severs the pathway after the Anima Mundi, preventing the mage from going further.

An archmage is a mage so strong in her Path and so dedicated to understanding the Mysteries that she has gained conscious control over how they affect her soul. Her Astral Path has transformed; it is no longer a simple pathway but a Golden Road paved with the Mysteries she has understood, reaching through the Astral Realms, through the Abyss and into the Supernal World where she has built a place of power. No longer bound to the Fallen World and only able to reach within under meditation, she has shifted her center to the entire Road and may enter any realm along it. Many archmasters go further and carve entire worlds called Chantries out of their Roads, filling them with ecologies of sub-souls and reflections of the Arcana.

By seeking out a greater Mystery — *Quintessence* — an archmaster adds it to her Road, allowing a spell of the Imperial Practices to be cast. By holding off from internalizing lesser Mysteries until they are needed, the archmaster may add them to her Road for a comparatively small boost in power, enough to enhance a spell of the common Practices to god-like levels.

In game terms, a mage encountering the Mysteries is represented by Arcane Experience. Lesser mages can only spend this Trait on dots of Gnosis (representing their Path growing stronger), but archmasters can also spend it to use



their more personal connection instead, allowing spells to be cast using the Imperial Spell Factors. Quintessence is both Mystery and sacrament in one; the Arcane Experience that would be gained from encountering the Quintessence is used to cast the spell.

## *Threshold Seeking*

Most masters will never seek the Golden Road, preferring to stay in charted territories. The majority of those that do search after the Imperial Mysteries never achieve them, following dead-ends and false secrets in the lore accumulated around the Invisible Masters in the eyes of their former peers. Those who do realize the secret know how dangerous the attempt to become an archmage is. The *Threshold Seeking* is not for the faint-hearted; aspirants (as the archmages call those who have begun the trials to join their ranks) face many tests. Failed aspirants return as hollow things corrupted by the Abyss — if they ever return at all.

A mage must meet the following prerequisites before attempting to become an archmage:

**Skill with the Arcana:** The aspirant must be at least a master in the Arcanum she wishes to attain archmastery of and an adept in three more. Most aspirants exceed this requirement; second- and third-degree masters who have had time to grow dissatisfied with their positions are more likely to attempt the Threshold than their relative juniors.

**Understanding of the Path:** The aspirant must have developed her Path to the point that her resonance blazes to those scrutinizing her spells and her human limitations are beginning to fall away under the force of her Supernal nature. In game terms, she must have Gnosis 6 or higher.

**Devotion to the Seeking:** The aspirant must actively work towards archmastery, not resting on her laurels but continuing to practice and study the Arcanum sought even though the effort might seem wasted. In game terms, she must have the experience needed to buy the sixth Arcanum dot — a significant amount of resources devoted to the task which could have been spent on other traits.

*Example: Jabir is a Moros Adamantine Arrow living in Istanbul, and a devoted member of the Uncrowned Kings Legacy. He has the prerequisite power — Gnosis 7 along with second-degree mastery of Mind and Matter — but most importantly he has the correct mindset for Seeking. He served as Sentinel for the city before retiring to train other Arrows in self-discipline and mental combat, and so doesn't have the distractions of a Council seat. His Legacy is based on examining his mind and soul by scrutinizing his own spells and Persian alchemy, which he uses as a means of self-perfection. This grounding in introspection will be useful in his Seeking.*

## *First Steps*

All sides in the Ascension War keep watch for masters who have the potential to break the Threshold, assessing them as would-be allies and enemies. As the aspirant continues to explore the limits of her power, she may come to the

attention of an existing archmaster. This attention can be dangerous if the archmage does not approve of the aspirant or her reasons for seeking the Golden Road, as the aspirant is not yet covered by the terms of the Pax Arcanum. The luckiest aspirants are discovered by a sympathetic mentor who wishes to aid them in the attempt — the development of archmastery does not require a teacher, but simply having the process explained can make the trials to come more bearable.

*Example: Jabir has been exploring the Astral Realms for years, searching for deeper understanding of his own mind, and has grown frustrated with the limits of his power. Deciding to attempt the Imperial Mysteries, he has sought out master Warlocks across Turkey and the Mediterranean along with ever-more esoteric texts and manuals regarding the mind-soul divide. He has even journeyed for an audience with Dahhak, the Aeon of Mind. This meeting is secretly observed by an archmage visiting Dahhak's astral citadel, a Siddha named Shodashi. She believes Jabir to be on a path she approves of and guides one of his contacts to discover an "ancient" grimoire of meditative spells she has created. She then waits to see what Jabir will do.*

## *The Seeking Quintessence*

Eventually, the aspirant realizes that the act of becoming an archmaster is itself an Imperial spell. More, she realizes how archmasters differ in their casting from normal mages and what the purpose of Quintessence is. The deduction can come about by a stroke of inspiration while investigating rumors of Quintessences, a leap of logic when contemplating the metaphysics of sacraments as they assist in channeling the Path or, for the lucky few, tutelage by an existing archmaster.

The Aspirant now requires a Quintessence that represents her soul, her quest, the Arcanum to be sought and whatever she may believe about the purpose of magic. If she belongs to a Legacy, the symbols of that association will be reflected as well. The Seeking Quintessence usually takes the form of a puzzle or Mystery regarding the Arcanum that the Aspirant encounters as part of her studies toward gaining Archmastery — it is a challenge, a thing that cannot be understood, and it is her task to understand it.

*Example: Jabir has read the grimoire and learned the rote within, a Prime spell for scrutinizing the flaws in a spell in order to better dispel it. As Shodashi hoped, this leads him into thoughts of repairing a spell instead, something that isn't possible with the common Practices. As he believes that his spells and alchemy are linked to his soul, perfecting one will by virtue of sympathy perfect the other. But how?*

## *The Mystery Play*

As the aspirant seeks the Quintessence, she may notice that others seem caught up in the same confluence of events. In a similar way to some Awakenings, she is experiencing a Mystery Play; events, locations, Sleepers and even other mages she has ties to begin to take on Supernal roles as she nears the Quintessence. Any Legacy students or mentors

she still has an arcane link to are especially prone to being caught up in the Mystery Play. If she pauses for long enough to examine what is happening, she may realize that the Mystery Play on the way to finding the Quintessence is the Quintessence. She is creating the conditions she needs to break out of the Fallen World.

At the end of the aspirant's symbolic journey, she encounters the Quintessence and understands it. In a sublime moment, her soul opens and she vanishes from the Fallen World. Any onlookers see her disappear suddenly, the only marking of her passage a strong wave of resonance and the flare of her nimbus. The aspirant is now committed. To return to the Fallen World as an Invisible Master, she will have to conquer both the Abyss and the Supernal Realms.

*Example: Jabir has reabsorbed his soul stones and undertaken cleansing rituals designed to purge his soul of gross imperfections. He has dispelled all of the spells he relinquished control over and striven to make every spell he casts as potent as it can possibly be. But it isn't enough.*

*Jabir's greatest creations aren't spells or alchemical preparations. He has been an Uncrowned King for decades, passing his Legacy on to a dozen students, many of whom now have apprentices of their own. He has shaped those students; they are a part of him. When he realizes this, he knows where the flaw in his Legacy lies.*

*Jabir has always had a distrust of Goetic summoning, believing the casting out of one's inner flaws to be the very opposite of learning to heal them by external action. He turned down a petition from a young Mastigos before starting his quest for Archmastery based on the petitioner's use of summoned Demons, and the Disciple made a deal with an acamoth before being cast out of the Consilium. Now certain of his course, Jabir makes his decision; he will find that Abyss-tainted youth, induct him into the Uncrowned Kings and redeem his soul.*

*Finding the warlock takes months. When Jabir finally locates him, he is in a worse condition than Jabir thought possible. With his command of the Mind Arcanum, he casts the acamoth out and promises to save his new apprentice. When the young man learns his first Attainment, Jabir, struck by sudden insight, scrutinizes the youth's soul and sees his own mind reflected in it. He vanishes.*

### *The Abyssal Trial*

The aspirant is bombarded with hallucinatory visions which, as they go on, quickly seem familiar. She is following the Arcanum deep into her soul searching for the truth of the Supernal; in response, the Abyss offers her lies. Every Paradox she has ever caused with that Arcanum is revisited, the pain of every Backlash she has absorbed is re-inflicted, and she suffers every Havoc, Bedlam and Branding along the way. Anomalies and Manifestations she was responsible for are especially dangerous, as the creatures of the Abyss she inadvertently created confront her during the trial. If she has actually bargained with a native of that place, those debts are now called due.

### Seeking the Throne

The Seers of the Throne differ from the orders in that their archmages ("Tetrarchs") remain part of the hierarchy of Seers, each serving a particular Exarch in the Supernal World. While mentors are far easier to come by for an aspirant from the Throne, a would-be Tetrarch is judged by his Ascended betters for loyalty, with the slightest blemish on his record leading to Ochemata being sent to stop the Seeking. The Lustrum for a Seer's Supernal Trial is always within the palaces of the Exarchs, with the patron putting him through a brutal series of tests.

To remain focused on the Road despite the dangers, the aspirant's player must achieve 15 successes on an extended Resolve + Composure action. Every roll requires the expenditure of one Arcane Experience. If the aspirant runs out of Arcane Experience, she becomes lost in the Abyss and doomed to become a Qliphoth (see p. 61). With enough successes, the Abyss parts and the aspirant enters the Supernal Realms.

*Example: The acamoth Jabir confronted returns as he enters the Abyss, as he twists in the agony of all his Paradoxes. Warning him with false respect to turn back, the acamoth points out Jabir's fear of Goetia and tells him that the inhabitants of Pandemonium are far, far worse. Jabir forces himself to continue and the acamoth withdraws.*

### *The Supernal Trial*

An aspirant who Awoke to a vision of the Supernal Realms may feel she knows what to expect once she crosses the Abyss, but this is false confidence. For all the terror and majesty mages feel when first Awakening, they are protected from the extremes of the Supernal as the Watchtowers actively stabilize the regions around themselves. The aspirant has no such protection, arriving in a confusing clash of symbolism as the truths of her magic are brought together by her crossing. An unprotected mage in the Supernal is quickly absorbed, unless she can filter the raw power around her into an experience a human soul can withstand by focusing on the specific symbols that powered her journey.

A set of Supernal symbols interpreted into a scene the traveler experiences is known by archmages as a *Lustrum*. Performing the act of will needed to make one before the Supernal kills her is the aspirant's challenge. To form the Lustrum, the aspirant's player must achieve a success on a Resolve + Gnosis roll and spend a Willpower dot. Failure erases the aspirant from existence.

As the Lustrum forms, a scene appears around the aspirant made up of the symbols relating to her Threshold. She is not alone. The natives of the Realm, who are themselves symbols, are incorporated into the Lustrum if they have appropriate meanings. If the Aspirant is lucky enough to have an archmaster mentoring her through the Threshold,

that Seeker may have synchronized his own Lustrum with hers to assist, but if she is unlucky rival factions (including the Exarchs) may have dispatched agents to interfere.

After resolving any interference from natives or fellow mages, the aspirant is confronted by a Supernal native representing the separation of that realm from the Fallen World. Only by defeating the guardian can she prove herself worthy and claim the symbols in the Lustrum as her own. The trial can be anything from a puzzle with no answer to a stern exchange on the morality of magic, or even direct trial by magical combat against a superior opponent. If the aspirant is victorious, the Lustrum rearranges itself around her into her *Cintamani*, the truths making up her magic coming together and changing to form the truth of her archmastery. It is now a part of her, the destination of the new-forged Golden Road, a *sanctum sanctorum* as important as the Watchtower but for her alone.

At this point, the stored experience is spent on the sixth Arcanum dot and the archmaster's mage template is replaced by the archmaster template in this chapter.

*Example: Jabir almost loses himself in the arrival in Pandemonium, but concentrates on the things that brought him here: responsibility to those he teaches, the temptation of power, and the abandonment of the innocent to sin through one's own selfish desire for virtue. The Lustrum forms into the imagined landscape of Jahannam, the hell of his Islamic upbringing, but he recognizes the tortured dead as everyone he has ever let down. Jabir knows that he can make up for his past failures, but standing in the way is Maalik, the angel who guards them. Their battle is one of debate; the Supernal god wearing Maalik's face argues that the damned had free will and chose sin, so must stay in Pandemonium until their weaknesses are purged. Jabir argues that as everyone is both craftsman and crafted, all minds informed by one another, some of the responsibility lies with himself. The god steps aside as Jabir enters the fires, which are extinguished after a second's pain by the Lustrum reforming into his Cintamani. The chains are broken, the prisoners freed. Jabir is now an archmaster.*

### *The Way Back*

The archmaster is in a state of euphoria as she senses the Road become part of her being, but the price of now being able to enter the Supernal is that she cannot stay. The Fallen World is no longer home, but holding the Lustrum takes effort. The Supernal threatens to absorb her if her focus slips. The Road now offers a lifeline; by meditating on it the archmaster can go back the way she came, through her soul and into the Fallen World.

The return is easier as the Road is protected from the Abyss, but the archmaster feels something wrong. Visions of the people, places and events that formed the Mystery Play skirt her consciousness, but they are all subtly warped. Individuals may be different or missing entirely. Details have altered. At the end of the Road, where she would once have spent Mana to enter the Astral, the archmage feels her body

reappear as her consciousness reenters the material world. As she takes stock of her success, the truth of the visions becomes clear. The world has changed.

*Example: Jabir feels the Lustrum failing and wills himself back into the Fallen World, chasing his new-found Road back through the Abyss. As he creates a body – a perfected mortal form to house his transcendent consciousness – he hears the mocking laughter of the acamoth.*

### *The Transformed World*

No aspirant has ever been known to fail the trials in the Supernal after successfully crossing the Abyss, for one terrible reason: aspirants that fail are killed in the Supernal and the truth of their existence is destroyed along with them. They cease to be so completely that they never existed in the first place. By entering the Supernal, the archmaster risked herself completely. Worse, she risked the truths that made up the Lustrum and now form the *Cintamani*. By altering the Supernal Realms to grasp the Imperial Practices, the archmaster has altered reality at that higher level and the Fallen World has changed in response. The tendency for people and places important to the aspirant to become caught up in the Mystery Play now cuts like a knife, as she finds that they are not as she remembers. In extreme cases, people and even entire Cabals that the archmaster knew are gone or changed beyond recognition. The archmaster knows that she could return to the Supernal, as the Golden Road is now open, but is also aware that if she does she may change the world even more.

The archmages are swift to welcome new arrivals. If the new archmage is clearly suited to a particular entente, that faction will handle the initial meeting, while the Bodhisattva Aaliyah meets the rest. The visitor offers congratulations, greetings and confirmation of what has happened. He tells the new archmage of her new responsibilities as one who can enter the Supernal to work her will on the universe; as above, so below. Alter the Realms, and you alter the world. The agreement between archmasters to not interfere in one another's goals or disrupt the Fallen World too much is the *Pax Arcanum*. The conflict between rival visions of what the world *should* be is the *Ascension War*. Whether she likes it or not, the new archmage is bound by both for the rest of her life.

*Example: All of Jabir's regrets at failing others have been washed away in the Supernal Realms. As he returns to his Sanctum he finds odd differences to his memories. A mage he had once banished as an oath-breaker greets him cheerfully as he passes through the city streets. He remembers seeing the man's face in his Lustrum. At the Sanctum, the full scale of his meddling is revealed; the youth has gone. In fact, he never existed.*

*There is a visitor waiting for him in his Sanctum. Shodashi has come to ask him about his experiences in the Supernal, and what he will do next. If he wishes to continue exploring the Mind Arcanum as a great work, then she will introduce him to the Siddha, but she acknowledges that his Threshold may drive him to the Bodhisattvas. The choice is his.*



## Imperial Workings

A mage who successfully passes through the Threshold Seeking earns the title “archmaster” and a number of new and changed powers that put her apart from other mages.

### *Walking the Road: Moving Between Worlds*

Transformed through the Mysteries, an archmage’s soul has become a refuge from the Fallen and Supernal

worlds. While she was a Traveler, entering the inner worlds took special effort and left her body vulnerable. As a Seeker, however, she transcends physical form and enters the world within her soul with a thought. She adds gateways leading from herself to other worlds when they prove useful, her astral or physical body forming whenever she leaves the Road. She can even pass beyond the end of the Road to enter the Supernal Realms. Growing in power, she learns how to expand the Road using the Imperial Practice of Dominions to build her Chantry: a personal pocket-world as real as the Fallen World.

## Archmaster Template

Archmasters follow the rules for mages found in **Mage: The Awakening** except as noted.

Archmages lack Ruling, Common or Inferior Arcana, but learn all Arcana at (new dots x 6) experience.

Archmasters do not need to pay a Mana point to cast an improvised spell. Any Mana costs noted in spell descriptions still apply, as does the cost to cast through a sympathetic connection.

Archmages are immune to having their souls removed or destroyed.

If an archmage experiences an effect that should return them to their plane of origin (for example, “dying” in the Astral Realms) they instead return to the Road.

Archmasters may maintain an ecology of lesser “sub-souls” created from their own, taking the form of self-powered Artifacts, creatures that share the archmage’s soul or the avatar-beings called Ochemata. They may cast spells through and sense

the surroundings of any soul stones or sub-souls as though they were present in the same way that mages may cast through or sense the actions of their familiars. For more information on sub-souls, see the Practice of Dominions (p. 38.)

Similarly, archmages can constantly sense the interior of their Golden Road (and any Chantry within it) and may cast spells targeted at the inside with no extra Arcanum dot requirements.

The ability to sense sub-souls, soul stones, Chantries and the Road (along with any remote-viewing spells) is suppressed whenever the archmage is in the Supernal Realms, immediately returning when the Seeker reenters the Fallen World.

Archmasters treat sympathetic connections of “unknown” as “described,” even without knowing the target’s real name.

Archmages use the following chart of maximum Arcana ratings by Gnosis. They do not require a teacher to learn any Arcana:

Gnosis	Arcana									
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
6	6	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	3	2
7	7	6	6	5	5	4	4	4	3	3
8	8	7	6	6	5	5	4	4	4	3
9	9	8	7	6	6	5	5	4	4	4
10	10	9	8	7	6	6	5	5	4	4

The Threshold, once broken, yields easily. For a character who is already an archmage, achieving the 6th dot in subsequent Arcana requires a Quintessence and alterations to the archmaster’s Cintamani to incorporate the new Arcanum, but the Abyssal and Supernal trials of the Threshold are not repeated.

### *Changed Trait: Arcane Experience*

Archmasters may use Arcane Experience to raise the Gnosis trait as normal, but by spending it in other ways they can achieve the following effects:

An archmaster may spend one Arcane Experience to use the Imperial Spell Factor tables for the primary spell factor of an extended-action spell of the common Practices, as long as he has achieved archmastery in the primary Arcanum used.

An archmaster may spend one Arcane Experience to completely refill her Mana pool up to the maximum granted by her Gnosis. Doing so reveals the archmage’s nimbus as though she had fulfilled her Virtue condition to refill Willpower.

While the limited Astral Paths of Travelers are private, the Golden Road can be entered by trespassers or invited guests. The gateways an archmaster builds to return to far-flung corners of the universe can be used if not protected, and remain even after the archmage has died. Travelers find what they think is a natural gateway to a strange corner of the Tellurian, a deep area of the Shadow or an isolated region of the Astral Realms and explore inside, not realizing that they are treading inside a being that was once like them.

### *The Path before the Road*

As described on Page 284 of **Mage: The Awakening**, a mage can enter the inner world within their own soul by meditating in a 5-dot Hallow or Demense. The mage focuses on the Supernal energies in the place of power and imagines himself on a journey which the orders call the Astral Path. The scenery and circumstances of the journey are entirely up to the mage and can change between different attempts to enter the Astral, serving as a metaphor and frame of reference that allows his consciousness to process the experience.

As successes on the meditation roll accumulate, the mage experiences an obstacle or barrier in his journey that requires effort to move beyond. This is the Astral Barrier, and pushing through the difficulty is his mind's way of framing the spending of Mana. Continuing the imagined journey from the barrier, the mage will eventually experience first a "reversal" or change of direction in his path and then an abrupt end to the path as the way forward is cut off by an impassable divide.

Just before the reversal, the mage can choose to leave the path and head toward a location that is interpreted into the imagined journey as being tempting, personal to the mage, and secret. Entering the symbolized doorway leads to the mage's Oneiros, starting in the region devoted to the concept of "arrival." After the reversal there is a second opportunity to leave the Path, this time giving the impression of the presence of many people. The second exit leads to the Temenos, the mage arriving in the Temenos concept-realm corresponding to whatever he imagined himself entering to get there.

The severed end of the Path represents the Abyss, but the mage can't access it. Instead, there is a third exit right at the end that leads to the Omphalos, the Astral Realm symbolizing High Speech that serves as the entrance to the Dreamtime.

### *The Golden Road*

An archmage's Astral Path has changed. She has walked beyond the end of the Path through the Abyss to the Supernal, claimed part of that place for herself and returned. As she traces her steps back the first time following success in the Threshold Seeking, the Path is consumed and rebuilt by the Supernal power in her wake and pinned into place by the Mysteries she has understood.

With a connection to the Supernal within herself, the archmage has no need to meditate at a Hallow or Demense.

Entering the Road is as simple as success on an instant Wits + Composure roll. The archmage can enter her Road from any realm within the Fallen World — that is, the material world, Shadow, Hedge, Abyss, Underworld, Lower Depths, the Roads or Chantries of other archmages or any other place on the same side of the Abyss. She completely vanishes from wherever she was, leaving behind only an after-image of her resonance that may be discerned for her Gnosis in days. The act of entering the Road triggers the Unseen Senses of mages and any other beings with a sense for Supernal magic who witness the archmage leaving.

The Golden Road lacks the shrouding in metaphor of the Path, appearing as a shining pathway of Supernal energy (called *Pneuma*) stretching through a darkened landscape that flickers with the aura colors of the archmage's emotional state and flashes with her nimbus whenever she casts a spell. The symbols of any Quintessences the archmage has used in her career loom from either side of the Road, trophies and reminders of past Imperial spells. There is no reversal, Astral Barrier, or cut-off, but the three gateways to the Oneiros, Temenos, and Dreamtime remain. Without their disguises, they take the form of doorways representing how the archmage feels about "myself," "others," and "the world."

### *Existence and Navigation*

Archmasters can survive indefinitely within their own Roads without aging or requiring sustenance, but can only cast spells that target their own patterns, the Road itself, or anyone else inside. Occupants regain Willpower by resting and heal wounds as normal. Anyone other than the archmage entering the Road arrives as an Astral Projection under the same action restrictions as the archmage — without a Chantry there is no physical existence inside, no state of Twilight, and no Shadow.

To navigate along the Road to a particular gateway requires four successes on one extended meditation action per step in the following progression:

- Material World
- Oneiros
- Temenos
- Dreamtime
- Abyss
- Supernal Realms

### **Entering the Material**

Where the Astral Barrier would be, the Road ends with an image of the archmage herself — reflecting pools, mirrors, statues and doorways containing mirror images have been recorded by archmages exploring the Roads of others. By spending one point of Mana and stepping into the image of herself, the archmage enters the material world. Her body appears at her choice of the nearest Demense or 5-dot Hallow to her point of departure (if she last left from the material world), the location of any of her sub-souls or soul stones, the Seed of any Chantry built in her Road or, in the absence of any other valid option, the Demense or Hallow to which she has the strongest sympathetic connection.

This route into the material world is only available to the archmaster. Outsiders in the Road must use an Iris (see below) instead.

### Entering the Astral

The archmage (and only the archmage) may pass freely through any of the three Astral gateways. She does not pay Mana or form a physical body, treating it like any Astral journey undertaken by a mage.

### Entering the Abyss

As the Golden Road passes through the Abyss, the half-seen terrain takes on a threatening cast and the symbols of past Quintessences are replaced by representations of Paradoxes the archmage has suffered. There is no natural gateway to the Abyss, but the Archmaster can form one by creating an Iris here.

### Entering the Supernal

Past the Abyss at the end of the Road is the Godhead, the symbol of the Quintessence used in the Threshold Seeking. The Road appears to stretch off beyond the Godhead into infinity, but anyone attempting to continue along it feels a powerful compulsion to turn back. A character attempting to force past this compulsion to enter the Supernal Realms must sacrifice a Willpower dot and arrives in the Cintamani linked to the Road used. Just as in the Threshold Seeking, the Supernal obliterates unprotected natives of the Fallen World that enter unless they are capable of forming a Lustrum.

Supernal beings and archmages that synchronize their Lustrum to a foreign Cintamani may enter the Road connected to it by spending a Willpower dot, although the archmage owning the Road will sense the intrusion and may block it with a successful reflexive Resolve + Composure action.

### *Iris*

Archmasters have interests that take them all over the Tellurian, exploring strange realms and far-flung regions of the universe to gather Quintessence and furthering their agendas. The Fallen World's many realms and planes of existence are not as cleanly separated as the neat cosmological diagrams shown to neophyte mages imply; doorways, verges and gates

lead from realm to realm if one knows where to look and how to open them. A doorway to the Underworld exists in every graveyard, sites of atrocities in the Shadow lead to Abaddon, and persistent rumor speaks of gates between the Shadow and the Astral Realms. Archmasters call these gateways *Iris*es and catalogue the secret keys to gain access in the lore of the ententes or use spells to pick the metaphysical locks. Seekers aren't restricted to using *Iris*es that already exist. If an archmage finds herself with a need to regularly return to a location, she can add an *Iris* leading there from her Road.

To form an *Iris*, the archmage must first build up a Known or better sympathetic connection to the destination and then return to the Road. The archmage's player must then accumulate 20 successes on an extended Presence + Gnosis roll with a dice penalty according to the degree of sympathy (p. 114, **Mage: The Awakening**). The player decides the placement of the *Iris* on the Road, declaring how many successes "along" from the material world gate the *Iris* is. An archmage can destroy any *Iris* entering her own Road at will. *Iris*es close if the degree of sympathy drops past Known.

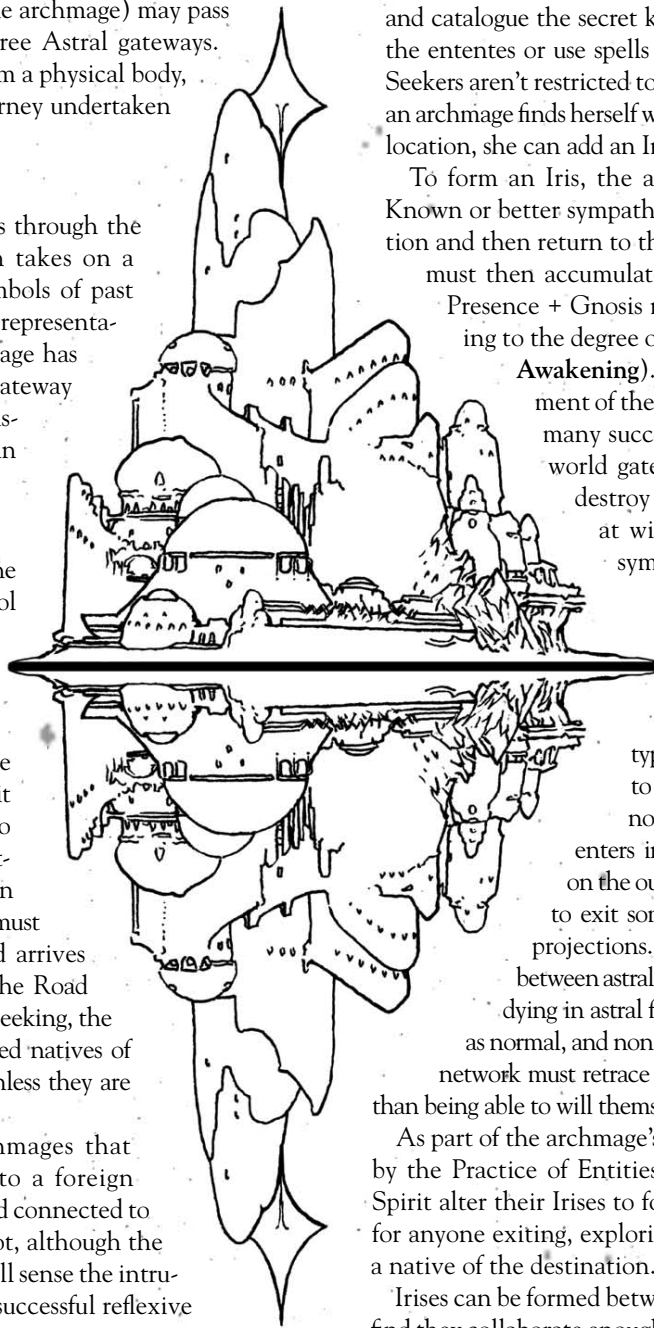
A basic *Iris* manifests as a form of the creator's nimbus that anyone — even a Sleeper — can perceive. Any being may pass through this *Iris*, so Seekers typically modify it with potent spells to guard their Roads. If the *Iris* does not lead to a Chantry, the outsider enters in astral form, leaving their body on the outside. If they then use another *Iris* to exit somewhere else, they remain astral projections. This process confuses the link between astral projection and body — characters dying in astral form do not return to their bodies as normal, and non-Seekers using an archmaster's *Iris* network must retrace their steps to return home rather than being able to will themselves to wake up.

As part of the archmage's Pattern, *Iris*es can be modified by the Practice of Entities. Some archmasters of Life or Spirit alter their *Iris*es to form a living or ephemeral body for anyone exiting, exploring the Tellurian in the guise of a native of the destination.

*Iris*es can be formed between Roads if the two archmages find they collaborate enough to make the effort worthwhile, but such arrangements don't tend to persist beyond the project that required them, as both Seekers must be willing to keep the *Iris*.

### *Chantries*

With the eighth degree of an Arcanum, archmages become capable of building physical worlds within their Roads called Chantries. Forming a Chantry is not an inherent ability but requires an Imperial Spell.





## Time Travel

Mages who study the Time Arcanum dream of freeing themselves from the straight line of causality.

With the seventh degree of the Arcanum true time travel is finally available. The archmage creates an Iris to the location he wishes to appear in, and uses an Imperial Spell of the Practice of Entities (subject to temporal sympathy) to move the Iris exit to the destination time.

Any ideas time travelling archmages had about the sanctity of cause and effect are quickly disproved. The time traveler is quite capable of altering history, although just as with the "Shifting Sands" spell, anything that happens to the traveler can't be undone even if the event is retroactively prevented. An archmage foolish enough to prevent his own birth (the so-called "grandfather paradox") will return to a present that doesn't remember him, but won't fade from existence.

The archmage must find a suitable location in any realm within the Fallen World that resonates sympathetically with his soul — determining the proper place is the Quintessence for the spell. After forming an Iris to the place, the Seeker casts the spell to reflect the location through the Iris into the Road.

A new Chantry is a duplicate of the location copied (called the "Seed") going out to an extent determined by the area spell factor of the spell. Characters moving beyond the area find themselves wrapping back into the Chantry except at one point on the boundary, which allows access to the rest of the Road. Archmages can build Irises to connect to the inside of the Chantry rather than the Road. Outsiders using an Iris (including the one to the Seed) to enter the Chantry arrive physically, only abandoning their bodies if they move on into the Road.

Every Chantry counts as a Demesne of the Realm to which the archmage's Road leads. In addition, spells of the Arcanum used to build the Chantry are cast with a 2 dice bonus. Archmasters may make further modifications to their Chantries by casting spells targeting it, but spell control over a Chantry can't be relinquished. The Chantry itself is not subject to Disbelief inflicted by Sleeper visitors, but spell effects witnessed by those visitors still are, so most archmages restrict entry to the Awakened or Sleepwalkers.

An archmaster may cast spells targeted at the inside of her own Chantry even from outside with no extra requirement, but casting out or other mages casting in either direction must use sympathetic range and Conjunctional Space 2 to target the spell through the Seed Iris. The dice penalty to target a Chantry is determined by the caster's sympathy to the archmage.

Additionally, unless other magic is used to allow a spell to cross worlds, spells can only be targeted at or from the plane

the Seed Iris is in. (For example, to cast a spell from the physical world into a Chantry that is rooted in the Shadow would require Spirit 3).

## *Wendings*

The Golden Road survives even after an archmage's death or Ascension. The natural gates to the Fallen World close, and the way to the Supernal only remains in the Roads of the Ascended — the Roads of the dead break off, ending in the Abyss. Such Roads would be inaccessible, except that some Irises (particularly those of strong sympathetic connection) remain open.

The Road of a dead or Ascended archmage is called a "Wending" and is prized by explorers and archmages despite the dangers. The Road is unstable and may collapse under the strain of intruders, dumping them into the Abyss. Inhabitants such as orphaned Ochemata or any Chantry population may still be present and rival Seekers may have claimed the Wending as territory. Even so, the draw of a shortcut to unknown reaches of the Tellurian an archmage once considered important enough to Iris attracts interest from those who identify the Wending for what it is.

Archmages can absorb Chantries built in Wendings into their own Roads with the Practice of Entities, and some ententes (particularly Tetrarchs) make an organized tradition of bequeathing Chantries to their juniors. The Ministerial Tyrannates of the Seers of the Throne have been handed down from Minister to Minister for centuries, until they are now vast internal worlds filled with Ochemata and other inhabitants that predate the incumbent.

## *The Supernal Realms*

The Supernal Realms are not places as mortals think of them, but a near-infinite collection of platonic truths, each informing an aspect of Fallen reality. Anything — including mages and archmages — exposed to the raw power of the Supernal is either obliterated or absorbed, with the ententes debating the difference among themselves since time immemorial. As the origin for the Arcana, the Realms lack the frames of reference needed for a living mind to make sense of them — there are no set rules of Time and Space, for example, as both Arcana are produced in the Supernal, so even the process of "going somewhere" is impossible without some form of filtering.

Fortunately, mages of high Gnosis are adept at interpreting the Supernal into a form they can understand. When an archmage enters the Supernal, they form a Lustrum to process the experience of the Supernal into something they can comprehend. Just as Travelers imagine themselves on a journey in order to comprehend a journey into the Astral, the Lustrum filters the Supernal down into a single truth or related set of truths which appear to the archmaster as symbols she can understand.

Lustrums do not interact with one another — two archmages both exploring the same truth in the Supernal may have left the Fallen World at exactly the same time,

but they will not encounter one another and the realm will appear different to each of them.

Within the Lustrum, the Supernal Realm being explored is experienced as a setting appropriate for the truth being symbolized, which can be as large or small as it needs to be. Natives of the Realms may be “set dressing” or truths of their own — the larger Supernal natives are indistinguishable from the Realms they inhabit. Lustrums manifest to suit the traveler’s destiny and personality. Geography and the passage of time flow according to the logic of the Lustrum, not the standards of the Phenomenal World. Beings, places and objects arise according to a realm’s mythic correspondences and Arcana. Pandemonium is filled with demonic vices and mazes; the Aether possesses angels and citadels of flawless design — mathematical Form given function.

The Lustrum is formed by a successful Resolve + Gnosis roll, and protects the occupant for one chapter per success. Each move in Imperium (see the Appendix) uses up one chapter of time. If the successes run out, an archmage within their own Cintamani may attempt a reflexive Wits + Composure roll; success allows them to escape back to their Road. Failure, or being caught outside the Cintamani when the Lustrum fails, destroys the character.

### Navigation

An archmage entering the Supernal through the Road always arrives in their own Cintamani, the symbols making up their archmastery collected in the Threshold Seeking. Archmasters refer to “navigation” through the Supernal, but in reality exploring the higher realms is a matter of changing one’s perspective, not location. The symbols making up the Lustrum may be changed (in effect moving the archmage to a new scene) by spending another Willpower dot and rerolling Resolve + Gnosis with a dice penalty equal to the number of successes already spent.

On leaving the safety of his Cintamani, a Seeker is on dangerous ground. Navigating to another Seeker’s Cintamani requires an intimate sympathetic connection to the other archmage, a soul-stone made by the host, or an Imperial spell designed to allow access. Most other “locations” in the Supernal require the Seeker to defeat a challenge similar to that overcome in the Threshold Seeking, but there are no clear-cut rules. Some Supernal entities of high (6+) rank can protect a Fallen World native by forming a Lustrum themselves, lasting for the being’s rank in chapters. Almost all natives capable of such protection require payment.

Archmages wishing to meet in the Supernal may synchronize their Lustrums, one Seeker deliberately interpreting the Supernal in the same way as the other. To do so, the player of the archmage moving must succeed at the navigation roll with a dice penalty based on the degree of sympathy to the target archmage. A synchronized Lustrum lasts as long as the highest number of successes gained by the archmasters in the group, and navigates as a single entity (with the player of the archmage the others navigated to making the rolls) unless a member breaks off by navigating their own Lustrum away.

### Mapping the Heavens

The subjective nature of the Lustrum prevents the Supernal from being fully understood. Travelers describe the Supernal as five separate but related worlds. Many archmages keep up the habit out of convenience, but depending on point of view the Supernal is either one continuous world or a near-infinite number of worlds each made up of a single truth-symbol. A particular region may be said to be within one of the five worlds if its symbols are obviously related to a Path or an Arcana, but there are many edge-cases that archmages attempting to map the Supernal disagree about regarding placement. The Hunter In Green, a realm representing the relationship between a predator and its prey, can be comfortably said to be part of the Primal Wild, but is a realm representing the truth of entropy — that things can be destroyed but never restored exactly as they are — part of Arcadia, Stygia or the Aether?

The various regions of the Supernal are described in Chapter Two. Some of the beings mages can encounter there in Chapter Three.

### Aponeia

The superficial similarity between the Supernal Realms and the Astral can lead to false confidence, but there is reason for Seekers to be cautious when beyond the Abyss. The Fallen World is created by the truths the Seeker is encountering. She is altering those truths simply by being present — moreover, just as a mage in the Shadow becomes Ephemera, one exploring the Supernal becomes the truth of herself and her explorations are changing her. Staying too long leads to the Fallen World being different when the Seeker returns. These errors are minor at first, but rapidly escalate. Damage and large-scale changes to a Supernal Realm or to the Seeker lead to severe warps in Fallen reality. Archmages call these changes *Aponeia*. Responsible Seekers try to limit the damage they do, but no matter how careful an archmaster is, she has already inflicted at least one major Aponeia on the Tellurian — the changes to her life resulting from the Threshold Seeking.

One form of Aponeia is especially feared: being killed in the Supernal leaves the universe without a symbol-truth of the person killed, and the Fallen World adjusts accordingly. Those killed beyond the Abyss are erased so completely that they never existed in the first place.

## *Archmastery and the Common Practices*

An archmaster is a powerhouse of spellcasting ability, able to perform feats other mages can only dream of. Their mightiest spells require the use of Quintessences and hours-long rituals, but even without a Mystery to hand an archmaster is no slouch. When casting spells of the common Practices, an Invisible Master may either cast using his Path and greater understanding of the Arcana or choose to use his Road to greatly enhance the spell.

The spells listed in **Mage** often contain guidelines for casting at higher levels of proficiency than required to first learn the spell. These apply to archmasters just as much as they apply to other mages. Archmasters can apply those laws even to spells that aren't generally known to follow them when casting using Arcana the Seeker has six or more dots in. An archmage casting at a higher level of proficiency can:

- Cast an extended spell as an instant action.
- Use sympathetic range for spells that normally can't use it. (For example, casting the Prime 5 spell "Siphon Mana" at sympathetic range.)
- Target something other than himself.
- Use advanced spell factors.
- Combine master-level spells. (For example, casting the Mind 5 spells "Possession" and "Psychic Domination" as a single spell.)

If a spell's description or the guidelines for Creative Thaumaturgy in **Mage** indicate that a refined version of a spell can be cast with archmastery (for example, transferring the features from a mythical life form), those effects are available.

When this greater level of proficiency is not sufficient, the archmage may *enhance* a spell of an Arcanum he has archmastery in by casting the spell through his Golden Road. Every spell cast in this way requires one Arcane Experience to be spent, but the spell then uses the Imperial version of the primary spell factor. Spells enhanced like this cannot be cast as instant actions, even those that would normally be instant when cast by a master or by an archmaster not enhancing the spell. In addition, enhanced spells are always vulgar.

## Imperial Spell Factors

These spell factors are used for the primary factor of enhanced spells and all factors in uses of the Imperial Practices.

### Potency

Potency	Target Number
2	Basic success
4	+1 success
6	+2 successes
8	+3 successes
10	+4 successes

Add an additional success to the target number per 2 points of Potency.

### Target

Number of Targets	Target Number
One	Basic success
Four	+1 success
16	+2 successes
64	+3 successes
256	+4 successes

Add an additional success to the target number per x2 targets.

### Size

Size of Largest Target	Target Number
40 or less	Basic success
41 to 60	+1 success
61 to 80	+2 successes
81 to 100	+3 successes

Add an additional success to the target number for every 20 Size.

### Area-Affecting

Radius	Defined Volume	Target Number
1 yard radius	5 cubic yards	Basic success
8 yard radius	40 cu. yards	+1 success
64 yard radius	320 cu. yards	+2 successes
512 yard radius	1 cu. mile	+3 successes
2 mile radius	10 cu. miles	+4 successes

Add an additional success to the target number for every x2 radius or volume.

### Duration

Transitory Duration	Target Number
2 turns	Basic success
4 turns	+1 success
6 turns	+2 successes
10 turns	+3 successes
20 turns	+4 successes

Add an additional success to the target number for every extra +10 turns.

### Prolonged

Duration	Target Number
24 hours	Basic success
One week	+1 success
One month	+2 successes
Indefinite*	+3 successes
Living Indefinite	+4 successes

\* The spell is permanent until cancelled or dispelled. Spells on living targets can be made Indefinite, but require +4 successes.

## Imperial Thaumaturgy

Beyond the common Practices are their Imperial equivalents — Dynamics, Entities, Excision, Dominions, and Transfiguration.

Spells of the Imperial practices are impossible to cast as instant actions, requiring extended rituals. Instead of the sacraments used for ritual castings of the common Practices (p. 112, **Mage: The Awakening**), each Imperial spell re-



quires a Quintessence. The very highest Imperial Practices require the archmage to truly strain her limits; they have an additional cost in Arcane Experience and Mana.

Arcanum	Arcane Experience Mana		Practice
	Cost	Cost	
6	0	2	Dynamics
7	2	4	Excision, Embodiment
8	5	6	Dominions
9	10	8	Transfiguration

Imperial spells cannot be countered. They cannot be dispelled except by archmasters using the practice of Excision with either the Arcanum used in the casting or Prime. Dispellation requires a Quintessence like any other Imperial spell.

Imperial spells cannot be formed into rotes but are always cast as improvised spells. As the Quintessence for an Imperial spell is always different even in two very similar spells, it's impossible to cast one the multiple times needed to formulate a rote.

Imperial spells sometimes require Conjunctional Arcana, but they cannot be cast as part of a Combined spell.

Imperial spells follow the guidelines on Creative Thaumaturgy in **Mage** regarding choosing a primary spell factor and the resistance or contesting of any target.

Imperial spells can be cast using sympathetic range (with Conjunctional Space), using temporal sympathy or as a triggered spell (with Time) or given a conditional duration (with Fate) but as with the earlier Practices, the archmaster must have at least one dot higher in the Arcanum used than the spell requires.

## Paradox

Imperial spells are always vulgar in the physical world or the Shadow, though they remain covert in the Astral Realms, Underworld, and other further-flung regions of the universe where Paradox has no sway. Paradoxes caused by their use are also stronger and much more difficult to contain. Enhancing a common Practice by spending Arcane Experience adds 1 to the Paradox dice pool, while using an Imperial Practice adds 2. Absorbing a backlash from an Imperial or enhanced spell requires a successful Gnosis roll. The resistant wounds that result are lethal rather than bashing.

If a Paradox does occur, the table on page 123 of **Mage** is used as normal. Havoc and Anomaly Paradoxes are unchanged, though the scope of Imperial magic makes them more severe. Bedlam, Branding and Manifestation Paradoxes are based on the Arcanum dots of the spell used, so the tables on pp. 268–273 of **Mage** require the following expansions:

## Risking the Pax

In general, an archmaster casting spells of the first ten Practices at advanced levels never breaks the Pax Arcanum. Using the Golden Road to enhance a spell of those Practices rarely breaks the Pax, and only then when used to interfere in another archmaster's interests.

Use of the Imperial Practices in the material world always breaks the Pax. Using them in other realms often breaks the Pax when used against another archmage. Using them in one's own Road or Chantry very rarely breaks the Pax, and only when used to oppose a fellow Seeker.

## Bedlam

Arcanum Dots	Paradox Effect
6–7	Viral derangement
8–9	Manifest derangement

**Viral Derangement:** The archmaster's Bedlam infects his spells, spreading to nearby Travelers. The character receives a severe derangement for the duration of the Bedlam. Any mage scrutinizing one of the archmage's spells or sensing his nimbus must make a reflexive Gnosis roll and achieve successes equal to the Potency of the spell (or a single success for the nimbus). Failure results in the mage also suffering from the derangement for the remaining duration of the Paradox.

**Manifest Derangement:** The archmaster's Bedlam reaches into her Road. As Viral derangement above, but the derangement also affects all of the archmage's sub-souls and anyone entering the Road or Chantry. Spells cast by sub-souls transmit Bedlam just as the archmage's own spells do.

## Branding

Arcanum Dots	Brand
6–7	Uncloaked
8–9	Imprisoned

**Uncloaked:** The archmaster's ability to create a body and enter the Fallen World has been twisted. He cannot manifest in human form, instead appearing as an insubstantial manifestation covered in his nimbus, which is even visible to Sleepers. He suffers a 5 dice penalty to all Social rolls except Intimidation checks, and cannot make Physical rolls.

**Imprisoned:** The archmaster's Road has been infected by the Abyss, forcing her back inside and becoming a prison based on her Vice, trapping and torturing her for the duration. Worse, her spell control over any sub-souls is suppressed along with the ability to sense or cast through them while the Paradox is in effect.

## Manifestation

### Arcanum Dots

### Entity

6-7

The archmaster has inadvertently allowed a godlike Abyssal entity access to the Golden Road — rank 6 or higher, with a brood of lesser creatures in attendance. If the archmaster has a Chantry, the entities manifest inside and attempts to wrest control of it, slaying any sub-souls they can find until the archmaster drives them off or agrees to a one-sided bargain to end the assault. If not, they manifest in the next realm the archmaster enters and begin acting against her interests in the same way.

8-9

The archmaster's Road has been severed from the Supernal. He immediately vanishes from his location and is plunged into the Abyss, facing an entity of rank 8. Beings of this rank do not have game stats, but a suggested system for handling them can be found in Chapter Three. Only by defeating or bargaining with the entity can the archmaster attempt to reconnect to the Cintamani by repeating the Abyssal Trial of the Threshold Seeking — an archmaster who fails to make it past the entity or who runs out of Arcane Experience while repairing the Road is killed, becoming a Qliphoth.

## Quintessence

No two Imperial spells are exactly alike. Even if the conditions are similar, the act of casting changes the caster's Golden Road. Even Imperial spells that seem identical to one another require different Quintessences.

When designing an Imperial Spell, an archmaster intuits an idea of what the appropriate Quintessence would be based on his knowledge of the Arcanum. At the Storyteller's discretion, an extended Intelligence + Arcanum roll with a target number of successes equal to the Arcanum dots of the spell can be used to research further clues.

A Quintessence can be an object, place, person, organization, event or phenomenon. Quintessences do not obey any strict patterns, but archmasters have divined some loose guidelines:

- The Quintessence for a spell symbolizes how the spell feels to the archmaster casting it. It is the Mystery that allows the Road to be used, not a simple "spell component."

- Quintessence for a spell usually serves as a metaphor or symbolic reference to the effect or target of the spell, especially if the spell is cast at sympathetic range.
- Quintessences often "balance" the effect sought, not in moral terms but in the symbolic language of the Supernal. Returning someone to life must be paid for with death. Forging a wonder often requires the destruction of another.
- A Quintessence is a unique Mystery — anything easily come by to an archmage's resources is unsuitable. Impossible situations and items are often used.
- A Quintessence may be manufactured or caused by magic. In fact, much of an archmaster's time in the Fallen World is spent arranging for future needs.
- The Quintessence is not usually destroyed when the spell is cast, though many are temporary in nature.
- The Quintessence is often colored by the archmage's own attitudes, especially her entente loyalties and Noumenon. Although these broad categories aren't used for all Imperial spells, the ententes have trends in the Quintessences they use just as the orders teach different magical tools and use thematic sacraments for common Practices:

**Alienated** tend toward Quintessence linked to the Old Gods — their Agamas, Astras and Mandiras most obviously, but also items and places linked to the different supernatural denizens of the Fallen World and sometimes even those beings themselves.

**Aswadim** are drawn to Quintessences that reject the laws of the Fallen World — impossible items and creatures that reject creation's rules, changed things left behind in the wake of Abyssal intruders, and the creations of human hubris.

**Bodhisattvas** stereotypically use the most esoteric Quintessences — impossibly virtuous actions, lessons learned by experiencing something in the Fallen World, and the achievements of others.

**Exemplars** are most likely to use items and places linked to the history or symbolism of the orders — the grimoires of famous mages, sites of Awakenings, and especially Sariras left behind after Ascension.

**Siddha** seek out the movements of the Arcana themselves — natural Demenses, the gifts of the Aeons, sites in the Astral Realms that bear the scars of Atlantean magic, and ancient Artifacts and Talismans from before the Fall. They are the most likely archmasters to "chain" Imperial spells, using a Quintessence to cast the spell needed to create the Quintessence they actually need.

**Tetrarchs** look for Quintessences representing the subjugation of the Fallen World — literal and metaphorical prisons, wasted potential, riches that will never be used, and symbols of control.

*Examples:*

- *The Bodhisattva Archimedes is preparing to cast a Mind spell that will spread from the initial target to anyone she speaks to, giving them dreams of their ideal future and the inspiration to*

grasp their own destiny. He thinks of the spell as being like a flash of inspiration that flickers from person to person and goes hunting through the Temenos for a realm featuring the association of lightning with sudden ideas. Placing an Iris in just the right place, he captures the astral thunderbolt and brings it into his Golden Road, preserving it for study as his Quintessence.

- The Siddha Samuel requires the assistance of the Heirarch of San Francisco, a contact and former mentor of his from before his Threshold who knows the archmage for what he is. The Heirarch names his price: he is nearing retirement and lacks a successor so wants Samuel to make one. After much thought and research, the archmage decides to alter history to arrange for a promising young mage who left the city and wasted her career to have unshakeable devotion to the Consilium by causing the Heirarch to have saved her life just after she Awakened. The spell is associated in Samuel's mind with obligation, both his own resentment at the request and the future leadership of the target. He hunts down a crown once presented to a child by one of the True Fae and hopes that he is doing the right thing.
- The Tetrarch Janus has been given a mission by the Nemesis, the chief Exarch of Spirit. He is tasked with binding a powerful spiritual entity called an idigam, which is rampaging across the Shadow and threatens to cross the Gauntlet. Discovering that it was once bound to the moon, he forges chains from the still-living Essence of moon-spirits, the Quintessence for rendering the creature unable to use its numina.

A character only gains the Arcane Experience for encountering the Quintessence if the spell fails. The Experience is gained when the archmage visualizes the Imago and spent at the completion of the spell. Spells so potent they require additional Arcane Experience to be used only cost the balance when successful. If an archmaster decides that she has no need to cast a spell for which she has been saving a Quintessence, she can study it for abstract value — the Quintessence can't be used to cast an Imperial spell by that mage any more, but she does then receive the raw Arcane Experience value of whatever it was.

*Example: The Exemplar Apollo is preparing to create a Chantry and has located a ruined Sanctum that was the birthplace of his particular faction of the Mysterium. He has ten Arcane Experience unspent. The Storyteller decides that the discovery of the Sanctum is worth two Arcane Experience.*

*If he successfully casts the Dominions spell, he gains no Arcane Experience for the discovery of the ancient Sanctum (as it is immediately spent), and pays the five Arcane Experience cost for an 8-dot spell.*

*If he fails to cast the spell or is interrupted during the casting and forced to abandon it, he gains two Arcane Experience and must seek a new Quintessence to try again.*

*If he decides not to cast after all, he may either choose to gain two Arcane Experience or save the Quintessence for a future spell it would match.*

A Quintessence is unique to a specific Imago, but that doesn't mean it isn't useful after the fact. Quintessences that are creatures or people may be recruited as servants. Others

are potent Artifacts in their own right. Those that remain can be trophies, curiosities, form the physical shell for Artifacts, or sometimes even be traded to other archmages.

## *The Imperial Practices*

Every spell is a story. Every use of the Imperial Practices is unique, the meeting of will, quintessential understanding, and the soul of the archmaster bringing the spell forth. Archmages routinely scrutinize their own spells and those of their peers, believing that every use of a Seeker's Road reveals Mysteries about her soul.

The spell descriptions that follow are not a definitive list, but only a few examples of what the Imperial Practices can offer.

### *Six Dots: The Practice of Dynamics*

This Practice allows archmages to create phenomena that change according to conditions — chain reactions that follow basic principles in a fractal manner without the caster's conscious direction or complex "programmed" effects. After entering the Supernal and witnessing how the symbols there move and change, an archmaster can place "placeholders" within an Imago such that the resulting spell rewrites and updates itself according to circumstance. Dynamics can create spells that vary in effect depending on the person encountering them, spells that can repair their potency when degraded, spells that react to conditions, expanding viral effects that change Imago as they spread, and spells that would be beyond the archmaster's ability to conceptualize the Imago for but use Dynamic properties to include all the permutations of a single cause or effect. Dynamic spells are often only loosely controlled by their casters, if at all. They go beyond the simple triggers available with conjunctive Fate. An archmaster casting a Dynamic spell can determine general principles and leave the spell to itself by relinquishing spell control.

Examples of Dynamic Spells include:

**All:** Bypassing Mage Armor or other defensive magics by automatically probing for weak points.

### **The World Turned**

Some Imperial spells are capable of altering the entire Fallen World in a single effect. When archmages walk in that world, they are vulnerable to these changes. If an effect rewrites all of Fallen reality (as some Imperial spells are capable of doing) then the changes will only be perceptible to Archmasters who are in their Roads or the Supernal Realms at the time, and only once they later return to the Fallen. Tracking down the culprit is then a matter of investigating the alterations to spot the archmaster responsible.



**Death:** Destruction of Mana whenever a spell is cast in an area. Spells that alter all ghostly anchors meeting the conditions specified. Altering the rivers of the Underworld.

**Fate:** Complex, updating Destinies that change to meet new circumstances or have Bans that subvert efforts to avoid them. Spells that provide the necessary protection for whatever dangers the target is about to face.

**Forces:** Control of subatomic forces and nuclear decay by fusion, or fission, both to cause elemental decay and to halt it. Creation of antimatter (particles which annihilate their equivalents, releasing energy). Creation of continent-sized weather patterns and ecological effects. Intelligent computer viruses that elude detection.

**Life:** Spells that are transmitted in a viral, evolving fashion. Resistant wounds or diseases that can't be healed. Healing resistant wounds. Control of evolution and devolution in populations, selecting for or against the desired outcome.

**Matter:** The creation of "Apeiron," a substance that has whatever properties it requires according to what it is used for.

**Mind:** Viral memes that alter personalities, opinions, or memories and spread to anyone a subject communicates with. Spells that react to conscious thought, allowing an archmaster to grant spell control to another mage.

**Prime:** Phantasms that vary in appearance by onlooker. Antimagic Zones that dispel or counter any lesser Practice cast in the area of effect. Spells that alter the resonance of any Mana or Tass in an area to best suit the uses to which they are put.

**Space:** Doorways that lead to different places for different people. Self-repairing wards. Bans that do not require every excluded thing to be spelled out, but which operate on the intuitive wishes of the caster.

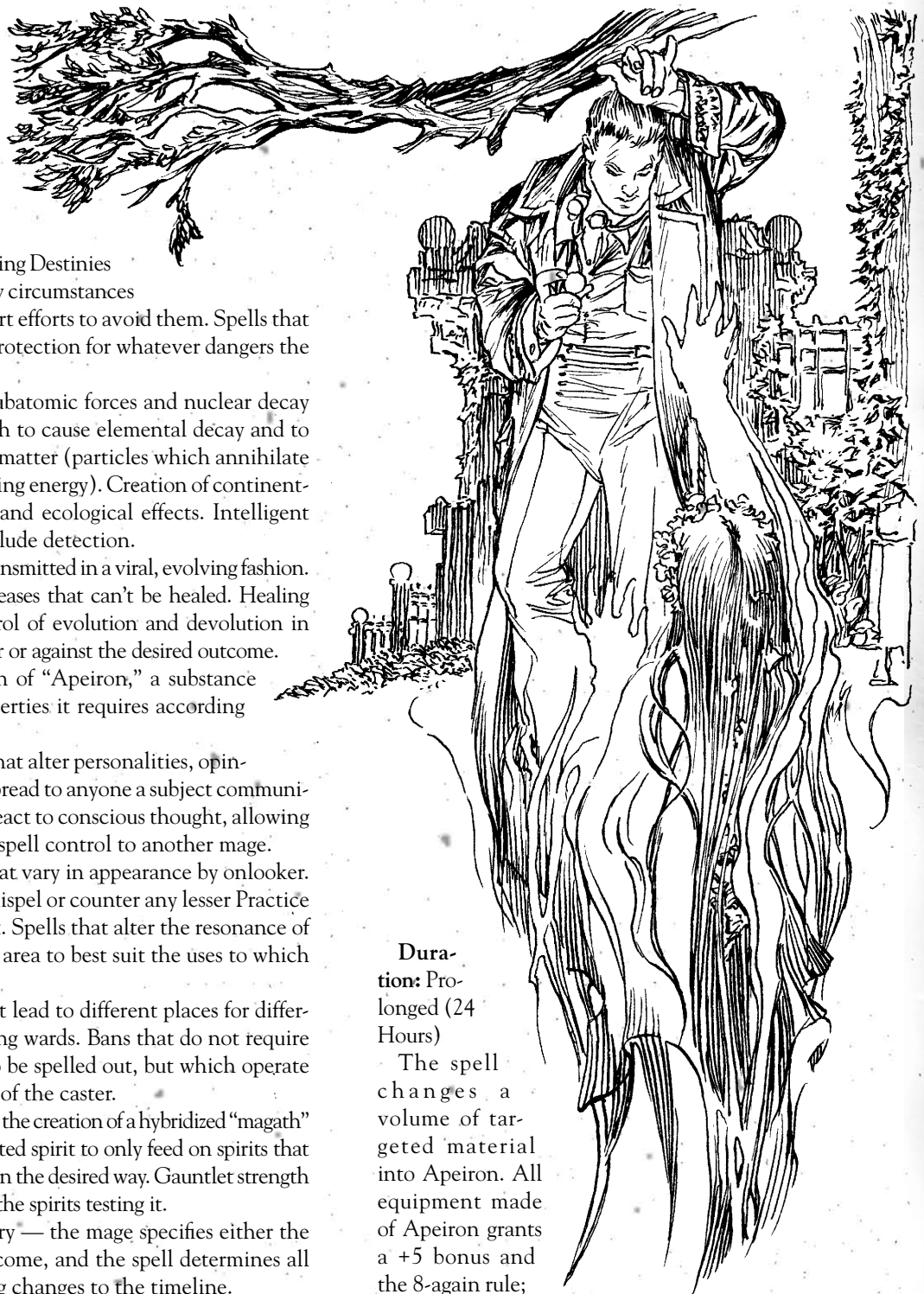
**Spirit:** Spells that force the creation of a hybridized "magath" spirit by allowing a targeted spirit to only feed on spirits that would cause it to evolve in the desired way. Gauntlet strength that varies according to the spirits testing it.

**Time:** Altering history — the mage specifies either the root change or the outcome, and the spell determines all the required or resulting changes to the timeline.

Three specific examples:

### *Apeiron (Matter) ●●●●●●●*

Apeiron is the Grey Lead of Stygia: Matter in its purest form that has both all possible properties and none. By leaving the properties of the material created to flex and change as needed, an archmaster of Matter can build impossible structures that should not be able to support themselves, devastating weapons, and perfect, any-use tools.



**Duration:** Prolonged (24 Hours)

The spell changes a volume of targeted material into Apeiron. All equipment made of Apeiron grants a +5 bonus and the 8-again rule; it has whatever hardness, conductivity, mass, durability, and structure is needed for whatever it is made into. Apeiron may be shaped by hand but becomes rigid when needed. Weapons made of Apeiron gain armor-piercing if they are used on targets with nonmagical armor.

Possible Quintessences for Apeiron include actual Stygian lead brought back from the Supernal Realms, the dream of

an impossible structure, the soul of a true craftsman, or the first example of a particular weapon or tool ever made.

### *Nuclear Cascade (Forces ●●●●●●)*

The Free Council Exemplar Newton was the first archmage to successfully cause a nuclear explosion by manipulating the complex domino effects of elements changing through fission, under careful test conditions in his Chantry during the winter of 1953. Other archmasters of Forces have performed similar research, discovering how to halt such reactions as well as invoke them — a Chernobyl-scale nuclear disaster in 1980s France was reportedly stopped by an unknown Bodhisattva who turned the fuel in the meltdown to solid lead. To date, no Seeker has created a nuclear blast in the material world or Shadow, as far as anyone knows. If it has happened, another archmage has reversed the feat.

**Duration:** Transitory

The archmaster can control nuclear reactions — he can halt or hasten the decay of radioactive material, or cause nuclear fusion or fission in otherwise normal matter. Radioactive decay causes radiation to flood the immediate area. Consult the rules for radiation poisoning (p. 178, **Mage**), assuming an initial potency equal to the potency of the spell. If the spell causes a nuclear explosion, everything within the area of effect is instantly destroyed. Every living being in twice the area of effect suffers radiation poisoning and lethal wounds equal to the spell's potency. The force of a nuclear explosion is too strong for any protective spell other than a use of the Practice of Excision, removing the subject's ability to be harmed by heat and radiation.

Quintessences for Nuclear Cascade depend on whether the spell is used to start or stop the decay of elements. Spent fuel rods, watches that stopped in nuclear explosions, ghosts of fallout victims, alternate timelines in which nuclear exchanges took place, a platinum core from a successful cold fusion reactor, lead that is somehow still radioactive, and small quantities of antimatter might all be appropriate Mysteries.

### *Alternate Timeline (Time ●●●●●●)*

Mages as inexperienced as Disciples can alter the past using "Shifting Sands," reshaping Time to suit their needs. The required ability to form an Imago describing the changes to be made, however, restricts the scale of manipulation. The Practice of Dynamics allows an archmaster of Time to bypass the limits of her ability to conceptualize change; she must only state the event in the past or the desired result and the spell will do the rest.

**Duration:** Lasting

The caster states either a specific change to history that should be made or demands a set outcome. Temporal sympathy to the target applies; if the target is a living being, the spell is contested by the target's Gnosis + Stamina. If the spell is successful, history realigns to the desired outcome. If an event in the past was altered, the spell works through the aftereffects of that change all the way to the present.

If the caster instead specified an outcome, the spell works backwards, making the smallest necessary changes to history for the desired result to come about. Wherever possible, the spell will change the details of a person's life rather than wipe them from history entirely. To erase someone in this way is a Wisdom 2 sin equal to murdering them with magic, while changing a person's past without their consent counts as binding them; a sin at Wisdom 6.

Although the Practice of Dynamics can handle the innumerable smaller changes to history needed to achieve the Imago, spells at this level of proficiency can't resurrect someone who would have died in any scenario, such as those who would be beyond their lifespan if brought back now. For that, the archmaster must use the Practice of Excision.

Quintessences for Alternate Timeline reflect the emotions bound up in the change to be made to history, balancing the alterations to be made — undoing a loved one's corruption by the Scesti and resulting fall to become a murderer might require the tears of children bereaved by magic to counter the loss of grief felt by the betrayed, while changing the victor of a presidential race might require the archmaster to sacrifice someone's destiny to hold high political office. The spell will never undo the Quintessence used to power itself — the children will remain bereaved and the politician will remain insignificant in any new timeline the spell creates.

### *Seven Dots: The Practice of Entities*

This Practice allows archmages to grant supernatural abilities to a target, incorporating the nature of an Arcanum into the target's pattern. These are not simple permanent spell effects. Once rewritten, the target is altered forever and the abilities will be passed down by any means of propagation the subject has. For example, a spirit granted the ability to manifest as a Prime-based Phantasm can transfer that power onto any spirit that consumes it. A human being given magical powers creates a new dynasty of Proximi. Powers granted to self-aware beings may, at the archmaster's design, be able to be improved with effort and experience.

When used to infuse the Arcanum into an object, the Practice allows an archmaster to create an Artifact or set the "rules" for a material; one use of the Practice is well-known to Traveler archaeomancers exploring Atlantean sites and Alienated searching for the prisons of the Bound. These structures often contain building materials called adamas, which are magically-resistant and solid to beings in Twilight.

As well as granting active abilities, the Practice can be used to change how something in the purview of an Arcanum interacts with the target. Most aims along these lines can be achieved with lesser understanding of the Arcana — while it is possible to rewrite a person's pattern with this Practice to render them immune to all disease, most archmasters would achieve the same end with less risk to the Pax by using a lesser spell made indefinite. As a rule of thumb, Entities spells are required to break or change the rules by which a target operates (while Excision spells are used to ignore them).

Spells of the Practice of Entities are Lasting by default and so do not count against spell tolerance, but some applications are temporary by design when the caster wishes them to wear off. The Arcanum needed for an Entities spell is the Arcanum governing the ability to be granted or the interaction of patterns to be changed.

Cast on items or locations, Entities allows for the creation of Artifacts and regions where the changed Supernal laws hold sway — Demesnes can be created without the use of soul stones and the laws governing the nature of the Astral, Shadow or Underworld can be altered to suit the archmaster. Cast on the archmaster herself, Entities allows for modification of the Road and Irises to have Arcanum-based properties.

The Practice is not limited to targeting aspects of the Fallen World. Spells (whether their caster has relinquished them or not) are valid targets for Entities spells of the correct Arcana. In this way, archmages can rewrite Traveler's wards, alter their creations, place their own stamps on Imbued items, and render spells of allies permanent.

Use of the Practice on living beings is handled as a modification to the target's template, or the creation of a new template that is then applied. Templates come in several varieties:

**Evolved Templates:** These are evolutions of a being's core powers, such as Legacies, bloodlines and Entitlements.

**Lesser Templates:** These are supernatural beings that lack a central "power" trait, such as ghouls, wolf-blooded or Proximi.

**Greater Templates:** These are supernatural beings with a power trait, such as vampires, werewolves or mages themselves.

This practice covers creating or changing supernatural abilities in a target — removing them entirely is covered by the Practice of Excision.

All supernatural beings with greater templates and some with lesser templates have sponsors in the Ascension War who actively prevent archmages from meddling with their agents. These entities will sometimes, if sought out and bargained with, permit an archmaster to transform a human *into* one of their charges, but strongly resist attempts to alter the powers of their creation. For example, rumor has it that archmages of Death have inflicted the curse of vampirism in the past, but no one has cured that curse except in legend and no one has ever undone the First Change of a werewolf.

In addition, in order to affect a greater template, the archmage must understand it. Quintessences for such spells require deep research into the supernatural beings concerned if the creation isn't going to be a magical imitation — many archmages have created "shapeshifter" creatures that aren't spirit/human hybrids like "true" werewolves, as doing so doesn't anger the Shadow gods.

Faced with the problems of intruding in these domains, most archmasters restrict themselves to creating entirely new supernatural races or Proximi lineages by working Entities spells into normal patterns. The Tetrachs in particular

have made great successes in breeding lines of supernatural servants for the Seers of the Throne.

Some templates require archmastery in more than one Arcanum to alter them; changing a target from one power to another requires both. Manipulation of the mage template requires seven dots in both Ruling Arcana of the Path. Changing a mage's Path requires all four Arcana, and so can only be attempted at Gnosis 10. Altering the archmage template requires eight dots in any Arcana the target has archmastery in, as the spell must manipulate the Road itself. It is possible to use this Practice to force an Awakening in a Sleeper by granting them the appropriate Path, but despite granting the Awakening being a dream of many Travelers, by the time they become Seekers the archmages capable of the feat know better than to force enlightenment except in special circumstances. Doing so is a Wisdom 1 sin, draws the attention of the Exarchs, and is almost certain to produce a Banisher.

Examples of Entities Spells include:

**Any:** Claim an unoccupied Chantry, incorporating it into the caster's soul. "Adoption" of orphaned sub-souls using the Arcanum used in their creation. Create an Artifact that casts spells of the Arcanum. Create a Demesne of the Arcanum. Create or alter Legacies with attainments based on the Arcanum. Create Proximi with spells of the Arcanum as powers. Alter whether the targeted Arcanum is Ruling, Common or Inferior for a targeted mage. Alter how many spells of the Arcanum a mage may maintain spell control over, or how they affect spell tolerance. Alter the spell factors, target and other details of a spell of the Arcanum.

**Death:** Alter ghoul, vampire or Sin-Eater templates, Disciplines, bloodlines, Keys, manifestations and krewes. Invent new ghostly numina. Alter the sins in a Morality trait or change a target's rating in a Morality trait. Create a new soul for a target that has lost their own. Alter the Laws of a region of the Underworld.

**Fate:** Alter changeling Templates, contracts and entitlements. Alter the powers and capabilities of the True Fae. Grant Destinies to places or objects.

**Forces:** Alter the fire or electricity rules within an area. Alter gravity. Make radioactive elements decay in reverse.

**Life:** Alter the werewolf template (with Conjunctural Spirit, altering Gifts requires only Spirit). Change the healing rates of the target or when they receive wound penalties. Impose living forms on those using an Iris.

**Matter:** Re-order the progression of states of matter, so that liquids freeze at higher temperatures and solids vaporize. Create adamas by enhancing the properties of a material. Create tools that perfectly perform the action for which they were designed.

**Mind:** Control and redesign Astral Realms. Allow beings access to the Astral Realms. Change the conditions by which a target regains willpower, or the Experience costs for the target.

**Space:** Alter the laws of sympathy, changing the definitions of degrees of sympathy to or from the target. Grant the ability to Teleport or change how distance applies to the



target: Create pocket-realms by changing the relationship between a location and space.

**Prime:** Create adamans in the form of an advanced enchantment. Change the conditions by which a target regains Mana, the size of his Mana pool, or how many points he can spend a turn.

**Spirit:** Alter a Spirit's ban and numina. Alter werewolf templates (with Conjunctional Life), Gifts and lodges. Alter the properties of the Gauntlet or Shadow. Dictate how the target may spend or regain Essence, or grant the ability to gain and spend that trait. Invent and grant new spiritual numina.

**Time:** Alter the laws of temporal sympathy. Alter the temporal "position" of an Iris, allowing for time travel. Change a being's rate of aging or permanently slow a target's perception of time.

### *Soulwalker (Mind ●●●●●●●●)*

The inability of non-mages to enter the Astral is a frustration to Astrally focused archmasters with unusual allies or those ententes attempting to coax human beings to enlightenment, but archmasters of Mind can remove that limitation.

**Duration:** Lasting

The spell grants the target the ability of mages to meditate into the Astral Realms. The recipient may store up to five points of Mana in his pattern, but is reliant on mages using the Prime Arcanum to refill his reserves and may only spend it to enter the Astral.

Possible Quintessences for Soulwalker include entering the Onerios of the target to find a significant symbol of their soul; or a person, place or being that links the target to humanity (such as their only friend) or that represents the lost humanity of a supernatural recipient (such as a changeling's fetch, or the site of a vampire's Embrace).

### *The Practice of Excision*

Counterpart to the Practice of Entities is that of Excision. Where Entities allows for supernatural powers based on the Arcanum to be bestowed or altered and interactions between the target and the Arcanum to be changed, Excision spells are clinical and often devastating removals of a pattern's properties. Any interaction between a target and the Arcanum, a power, or part of a Template under the Arcanum's purview can be cut away. Excisions are usually Lasting unless they result in effects that would cause Disbelief or the archmaster casting the spell wishes it to wear off, in which case they are Prolonged. Removing part of a being's pattern is a Wisdom 2 sin. Any use of Excision on an entity (rather than an object or location) is resisted. If the spell is not fatal, then as with Entities spells the changes will be passed along to any offspring (literal and figurative) of the target.

Removing powers or templates of established supernatural creatures requires the same Arcana as granting or changing them with Entities, and will provoke those creatures' spon-

sors in the Ascension War. It is theoretically possible to undo an Awakening with a Conjunctional Excision of the victim's Ruling Arcana, but the Pax restricts such spells to the very rarest, universe-threatening circumstances, such as a Banisher attempting the Threshold Seeking. Removing another Seeker's archmastery would require nine dots in the Arcanum and has never been successful — the last attempt saw the culprit quickly killed by a coalition of all ententes and the timeline in which his spell took place was reversed and destroyed.

Far more common is the use of Excision to slice away specific abilities of foes, weaknesses of select retainers and allies, or to undo developments in personal power that a retainer regrets, such as removing a rashly-chosen Legacy from a mage. Other uses of Excision suggest punishment — denying the use of an Arcanum for a time or removing a being's Willpower.

Rash use of Excision is instantly fatal to the subject, as the majority of interactions between a living being and the Arcana are necessary for survival. Immunizing a target from electricity, for example, sounds like a good idea but lethally suppresses the electrochemical reactions needed for life. Many potential uses are better achieved using simpler Practices — protecting a vampire from sunlight or rendering an object invisible by excising its interaction with light are both ends best sought by subtler means.

Examples of Excision spells include:

**All:** Removal of a Legacy with attainments based on the Arcanum. Removal of a supernatural ability governed by the Arcanum (such as Mind to remove a vampire's ability to use the Dominate Discipline). Dispelling an Imperial Spell cast using the Arcanum. Removing a mage's ability to use the Arcanum. Destruction of an Artifact based on the Arcanum.

**Death:** Immortality through removing the capacity to die or the aging process. Removing aspects of a vampire or Sin-Eater's template or a ghost's powers. Instant destruction of a soul. Removing dots of a being's Morality trait.

**Fate:** Removing aspects of a Changeling's template or a True Fae's powers. Removing the Bane from a destiny.

**Forces:** Creation of superconductors or superresistors by excising the interaction between an object and electricity. Creating a location with no weather.

**Life:** Immortality through removing the aging process. Removing the need to eat or breath. Removing aspects of a werewolf's template (with Conjunctional Spirit).

**Matter:** Rendering an object indestructible by removing its capacity to be damaged.

**Mind:** Removing a mage's ability to form an Imago. Removing Willpower or the ability to spend it. Removing the ability to gain experience.

**Prime:** Dispelling any Imperial spell. Rendering a mage unable to spend or regain Mana.

**Space:** Removing the interaction between a target and the laws of sympathy. Binding a target to a location forever by removing their ability to move to another one. Sealing a location away from the rest of the world by removing how it interacts with its surroundings.

**Spirit:** Removing aspects of a werewolf's template (with Conjunctional Life) or a spirit's powers. Destroying the Gauntlet. Removing a spirit's ban.

**Time:** Returning a person or object to a state it was in at some point in the past. Rendering something unchanging and indestructible by removing its interaction with Time. Removing the interaction between a target and the laws of temporal sympathy.

Two specific examples:

### *Imperial Dispellation (Prime or targeted spells Arcanum ●●●●●●●●)*

The archmaster may dispel Imperial spells.

**Duration:** Lasting

As with other forms of Dispellation, successes on the casting roll remove points of Potency from the targeted spell, completely removing it if it reaches zero Potency. Lasting spells cannot be dispelled by this method, but can usually be reversed in other ways. For example, a Practice of Excision can be undone by a Practice of Entities granting the removed qualities.

Quintessences for Imperial Dispellation are representative of the spell being targeted and the change to the world removing that spell would bring about. For example, dispelling a Prolonged Excision that prevents the subject from ever feeling a certain emotion would require something symbolizing the very essence of the emotion lost to that person.

### *True Name (Space ●●●●●●●●)*

The archmaster may remove the capacity of the spell's recipient to be targeted by sympathetic magic.

**Duration:** Lasting

The target of True Name counts as "unknown" to any sympathetic-range spells, even if the caster of those spells knows her real name. The ability of archmages and some other beings to regard "unknown" as "described" still applies, but the degree of sympathy cannot be raised higher than that by any means.

The "True Name" of this spell's name comes from an exclusion the archmaster builds into the spell — a thought, emotion or concept that may be included in the Imago of a sympathetic spell to still allow the recipient of the True Name to be targeted. The archmaster casting True Name automatically learns the necessary Imago, while other mages (including the recipient, if she is not the archmage) must learn it as though it were a rote costing 10 experience. Anyone who knows the True Name can teach it.

The Quintessence for a True Name is the True Name itself — a word in the High Speech representing a supernal symbol that sums up the target's identity. Discovering what that symbol should be requires deep investigation of the target. If the target is a mage, then discovering their signature on the Watchtower would be appropriate, but other recipients have less obvious places to look.

### *Eight Dots: The Practice of Dominions*

Having advanced beyond archmastery of Supernal symbols as they are reflected in the world, the archmasters of the eighth degree learn how to make new worlds of their own. By reflecting the Arcanum into the Golden Road, an archmaster can create Chantries, create self-sustaining ecosystems of spells to fill them, spawn Ochemata and other autonomous sub-souls to manage them, send those sub-souls into the Fallen World as her agents, and even create self-willed Artifacts by installing their own Gnosis into the creation. With eight dots, an archmaster can use the Practice of Dominions on her own soul. Nine dots in an Arcanum are required to create sub-souls from another being, and even then the target must be an archmaster themselves.

Sub-souls resemble the inner beings called forth with goetic magic, but are always bound by the Arcanum used to create them and are reflective of the whole soul rather than a portion of it — a being created by a Dominions spell is a smaller part of the entire archmaster manifesting through the Arcanum but complete in itself, while a goetic demon of wrath is made up only of that vice.

Spells cast with Dominions are usually Prolonged. Although Chantries are normally created as indefinite constructs, wise archmasters do not relinquish spell control over their creations or create Ochemata with indefinite duration for fear of being usurped.

A Dominions spell grants Gnosis equal to the spell potency, up to that of the archmaster, along with the associated Mana and Paradox pools for that Gnosis and any Arcana dots and rites the archmaster has and wishes to bestow. To grant Arcana ratings of 6 or higher requires the Dominions spell to be cast using the Arcanum granted, so Ochemata normally possess any common Practices their creator has, along with the Arcanum used in their creation, at six or seven dots. Creating a sub-soul that has two Imperial Arcana requires the caster to have both at eight dots, a feat only possible for the very strongest archmages. Ochemata and Talismans may cast Imperial Spells of their own if they have been given Arcana of six or more dots, but do so using the archmaster's Golden Road — any Arcane Experience used by one of an archmaster's sub-souls is taken from the archmage, and the Road incorporates any Quintessences used by sub-souls as though the archmage had used them.

Quintessences for Dominions spells reflect their inward focus. To spawn a sub-soul, an archmaster requires a Quintessence that symbolizes his inner nature reflected in the Arcanum. To build a Chantry, an archmage needs to find a place that feels so much like home it could almost be within her soul — and the spell then makes that literally true. Many archmasters go back to the scenes of their Threshold Seeking or careers as Travelers when contemplating spells of this Practice, looking for self-knowledge in the echoes of their own passing.

Examples of Dominions spells include:

**Any:** Create a Chantry rooted in the material world. Create an Ochema that lacks the Imperial Practices or possesses archmastery of the Arcanum used. Create a portal to the Supernal Realm that has the Arcanum used as a Ruling Arcanum.

**Death:** Absorb the souls of the dying into oneself, making them part of a Chantry. Absorb another mage's soul stone. Create a Chantry rooted in the Underworld.

**Fate:** Create an ananke (p. 330, **Mage**).

**Life:** Create a living being that has a sub-soul of the archmaster instead of one of its own.

**Matter:** Imbue an Artifact with a Gnosis trait of its own, called a *Talisman* by archmasters.

**Mind:** Create a Chantry rooted in the Astral Realms.

**Prime:** Create an "overseer," a spell which uses its own Gnosis and Arcana to repair the archmaster's spells when they are dispelled. Absorb a Hallow into a Chantry, providing a supply of Mana to the beings inside.

**Space:** Overlap a location with a Chantry, adding an additional Seed and causing the Chantry to become a combination of the multiple areas.

**Spirit:** Create a Chantry rooted in the Shadow, or build a "Shadow" (complete with Gauntlet) of the archmaster's design inside the Chantry itself.

**Time:** Create an ananke. Create a Chantry rooted in a specific Time, so that entry is barred to beings not capable of time travel.

An example:

### *Proxy (Life ●●●●●●●●)*

The archmage may create living beings that possess his sub-souls instead of souls of their own. Proxies are useful as agents when subtlety is required or when a full Ochema would attract too much attention, although some archmasters fill their Chantries with whole menageries of themselves.

**Duration:** Lasting

A Proxy has a mind and body of its own, but is mystically part of the archmaster. As such, its soul cannot be removed or destroyed and the archmage may see or cast spells through them, but human Proxies can't Awaken or leave ghosts when killed. If a Proxy is somehow made to enter the Astral Realms, he appears in the Golden Road instead of an Astral Path of his own.

The Quintessence for a Proxy links the archmaster to the creature or person being created — a magical event

that they share on an object symbolizing their bond. Some archmasters give birth to their Proxies in the Primal Wild, changing gender if necessary, or carefully arrange for the Proxy's conception in another way.

### *Nine Dots: The Practice of Transfiguration*

The most advanced and dedicated archmasters gain access to the ninth degree and the Practice of Transfiguration, which only contains one spell. By reversing the relationship between her enlightened soul and the Arcanum that is now so well-incorporated into it, the archmaster becomes the Arcanum, or more accurately, the Arcanum becomes the archmaster. Almost no one has ever cast Transfiguration outside of a Chantry, as the sheer scale of effects requiring it make it wiser to seek them through entering the Supernal and sponsoring those changes there. Archmasters who have reached the ninth degree content themselves with casting the Practice of Dominions at range or on others instead.

### *Transfiguration (Any ●●●●●●●●●)*

The archmaster gains complete control over anything under the Arcanum's purview.

**Duration:** Transitory

Unlike most spells, the duration of Transfiguration cannot be changed from "Transitory," although magical effects the user creates while under the spell's influence may be of any duration desired. While the spell is active, the mage may perform any feat relating to the Arcanum as long as the target is within sensory range, the exceptions being granting another being Transfiguration or extending the duration of the spell. Any character resisting may roll Stamina + Gnosis, stopping the specific effect targeting them if they exceed the potency of the spell in successes. If the spell is still active, the archmage may attempt to affect them again in subsequent turns.

The Quintessence for Transfiguration is as difficult to find as that for the Threshold Seeking, adjusted for the archmage's far greater means; quests deep into the Supernal to seek the Oracles or Exarchs, the ruins of a destroyed Watchtower, and the blood of the most potent Supernal natives have all been used in the past.

Some archmasters hypothesize a final, tenth degree of Arcana proficiency that allows Transfiguration to be cast at greater durations, which the Siddha call the Practice of Assumption and equate to Ascension.





# CHAPTER TWO: THE INVISIBLE ROAD

*And when I comprehended the speech which was made unto me, I understood that in me was the knowledge of all creatures, both things which are in the heavens and things which are beneath the heavens; and I saw that all the writings and wisdom of this present age were vain and futile, and that no man was perfect.*

—Preamble to the Greater Key of Solomon

Existence is dust.

It dances in the light and current that provides context for its existence. More substantial beings need only wave a hand to block the light, disrupt the current, and destroy its shape. But there's little comfort to be had in being a lord of dust, to find love and home in its scattered notes.

Confronted with this truth, some archmages strive to make the universe as solid, whole and *real* as their radiant souls. Some enjoy their superiority and build kingdoms devoted to clutching power. They devote themselves to human salvation, ancient gods, balance, the death of everything, or goals beyond the ken of sane, unenlightened minds.

## *The Ascension War*

In pursuit of these desires, archmasters formed the rough alliances Mysterium scholars call ententes, and their agendas clashed in the Ascension War. The conflict's name implies that archmasters want to lift humanity from the Lie and merely differ on details, like philosophers locked in debate. But when Invisible Masters unleash sublime magic and stratagems born of transhuman minds, it's not necessarily because they care about the half-Asleep denizens of the Fallen plane. In fact, it is not uncommon for archmages to scarcely consider their inferiors at all.

## *Imperium*

In the Ascension War, ententes force the universe to obey their philosophies. Siddhas perfect the balance of Arcana. Aswadim unleash the Abyssal on conventional reality. Tetrarchs refine the status quo to make Awakening ever more difficult.

If this grand shaping simply required victors to conquer the Supernal Realms, archmages might ignore the rest of existence, but only the Exarchs ever won by storming the heavens — and their victory was a flawed one. Modern archmasters understand that they must wrestle the Fallen Realms into accord with their visions first. Only then will acts of Imperium — the command of Supernal power from its source — permanently alter the Tellurian.

Archmages manipulate the Fallen (or as they call it, the Phenomenal) World to an increment of readiness, follow their Roads to the Supernal Realms, and enact the Imperium Rites, which bind their visions to the truths of the Supernal. They then return to the Phenomenal World, examine their handwork and prepare the next stage. This cycle can encompass centuries of prophecy and fulfillment, as the Seeker sends agents, battles gods and dares the soul-searing Supernal Realms to inscribe the results on reality's roots.

Why do they do it? Moral duty. Philosophical certainty. Power lust. The lowest and highest motives drive them, but most do it to seek Ascension. Of the all the lore surround-

ing the Final Mystery, the most reliable advises a Seeker to bring the cosmos in accord with his Road. Only then will his understanding of the cosmos become a Supernal symbol, and only then can he physically merge with that vision and attain immortality in the Realms of Truth.

The difference between Imperium and sorcery lies in its significance. The Practices classify the ways in which a mage imposes her will. The result utilizes Supernal precepts but is no more natural than a steam engine or a love song. Heat, water, sound, and desire are written into the order of things, but the human artifacts that use them are not.

## *The Transformed World*

After Supernal Imperium, the Phenomenal World changes and its history, legends, cultures and peoples have always been other than they were. Imperium imposes its changes throughout time.

The Seeker's new world reflects her success but it isn't under her total control. It is in the nature of the Tellurian to fill the gaps. If an archmage eradicates a nation, history rewrites itself around its absence, including details beyond her ken. When multiple Seekers change the universe, it either accedes to the most powerful claim or crafts a compromise. Seekers may return to the Supernal again and again to correct the unintended consequences of Imperium.

Once understood, Imperium is a revelation that forever changes a Seeker's outlook on the universe. Before archmastery she might have assumed that ultimate power lay embedded in an objective secret history, that Atlantis' ruins hid beneath the waves in a definite location, aged grimoires always contained the same spells, and the Exarchs seized power in the distant past — not a present erased by their triumph. Everything might be true, if the Invisible Masters permit it.

## *The Narcissistic Universe*

Pessimists say that Seekers don't change the Tellurian, but rather their interaction with it. They postulate that Imperium creates entities and histories for the archmage alone, seamlessly translating phenomena between the archmaster and objective universe. With every Imperium the Seeker sinks further into a kind of permanent Mystery Play. Archmages familiar with recent science also propose that Imperium transports the mage into one of an infinite number of alternate universes, until she finds the world of her Ascension.

Among the archmasters, "real" and "unreal" are value judgments, not statements of fact. Perhaps every Imperium creates an alluring, solipsistic dream. Perhaps *all* magic is such, but mages still feel its power and that feeling cannot be false.

## *The Pax Arcanum*

Less a defined code than a pragmatic understanding, the Pax Arcanum relies on archmasters to enforce it. Although they exhibit more agreement on this than anything else, they still waver on edge cases. Ambitious archmages con-

stantly test its boundaries. Sometimes they succeed, like the Tetrarchs who rule the Seers of the Throne on thinnest technicalities. Archmasters typically tolerate the granting of True Names, advanced spells from lesser Practices, and Imperial spells that provide some personal benefit.

While archmages tolerate subtle, minor meddling, seriously interfering with the Sleeping world is grounds for punishment — and in defending an informal principle, Seekers tend to dispense mob justice. Archmasters may act more freely in other realms, but the Pax forbids changes to a realm's essential nature or actions that indirectly cause catastrophes in the Fallen World. It is not for the Invisible Masters to bar the flow of souls to the Underworld or thin the Shadow's Gauntlet so that spirits freely cross. Finally, the Pax Arcanum forbids any action that pits the mass of Awakened against other sublime powers. Other supernatural forces may not possess the same degree of ambition as archmages but they are powerful, nonetheless.

Although Imperium Rites include the most radical changes mages are capable of making to the Tellurian, the Ascension War hinges on an important custom: *The Pax Arcanum does not apply to Imperium*. The Pax exists to prevent archmasters from shattering the Tellurian in open war, beyond the ability of any Seeker to guide through Imperium. Archmages justify this exception by noting that Imperial Practices change how the Phenomenal World manifests, but only Imperium truly changes the basic nature of things. "Unenlightened" individuals may see little difference between things like wiping out a nation and causing it to never exist, but that thin difference is enough for a Seeker to justify Imperium Rites for the sake of her Ascension.

### **Deterrence**

When an archmage violates the Pax Arcanum, other archmages are bound to punish him and mitigate his offense. Seekers are supposed to act as one community, but in practice personal and entente loyalties influence the response. Archmasters permit themselves to use Imperial spells for this purpose. If one Seeker raises an army of machine-creatures to conquer the world, another could slay them all with redirected asteroids and summoned demigods. A subtler solution is always preferable, but proportional responses are allowed, though discouraged. Clever archmages use opportunities for retribution to advance their own agendas, but egregious examples can themselves be considered violations of the Pax. It all depends on how convincingly a Seeker can argue that she *needed* to do it.

### **Subtle Government**

The Pax used to strictly forbid archmages from holding official power in the material realm, but the Tetrarchs gradually wore down that custom for the sake of their Ministries. Currently, archmages may not use Imperial Practices for the direct benefit (or punishment) of their followers. The archmage is supposed to behave like a Master at the most. The exact parameters of the Pax are unclear here, relying on the sentiments of archmasters who might enforce it. The Pentacle discharges mages from office when they an-

nounce their intentions to seek the Threshold or display an archmaster's power, but not all successful Seekers reveal their quest. A few quietly return to Consilium culture and even claim the Hierarch's seat (Silver Ladder archmasters are notorious for this). This act endangers local mages and the Seeker's order — a powerful rival may declare a Pax violation on some flimsy pretext — so it is a taboo act in any established Consilium.

### Property and Territory

While the Ascension War is at heart a struggle to transform the cosmos into the ideal vehicle for the victor's Ascension, archmages also come to blows over ordinary matters such as romantic rivalries, treasured objects, and significant places. Custom discourages senseless conflicts. Seekers should fight for Ascension, not base desires, and archmages will band together to correct their truculent brethren. Nevertheless, an archmaster may lay claim to any place, person, or Traveler not claimed by a rival Seeker, provided the fallout of that claim would not inevitably lead to a breach of the Pax.

An archmaster who knowingly infringes upon another's claim — altering a lover's mind, for example, or erecting Bans upon a mountain retreat — commits an act of aggression. If a Seeker unknowingly does so, no offense has been committed. Archmages are expected to make reasonable efforts to mark their protectorates (a variety of spells may be used for this purpose) and check for claims by others. The offended party is excused from any act of retribution that does not violate the Pax. If a claim is unclear, archmages settle it as their Traveler brethren do. They haven't forgotten how to duel.

### Ententes

Each entente represents a loose understanding that archmages with similar goals shouldn't waste energy fighting. Save for one exception, they are not true factions with set rites and customs. Only Tetrarchs possess an elaborate organization, and even their archmages may spend long periods isolated from their comrades.

Aside from the Tetrarchs, ententes neither recruit nor formally initiate members. Aaliyah has long guided new archmages to ententes based on their inclinations and she has proven to be trustworthy. The ententes' informal natures lead to conflict when an archmaster supports agendas that cut across their ideological lines. A Seeker who refuses to declare for any entente earns distrust — if she won't join, perhaps she plans to violate the Pax Arcanum.

The vanishingly small supply of archmages limits each entente's numbers, but a given member may control cults, nations or domains in the Invisible Realms. Seekers typically relay entente communications through intermediaries, obscuring them with riddles, codes and strange allusions. Face to face meetings are rare. When archmages gather in number, the results shake the pillars of Creation.

## The Alienated

### Priests of the True Gods

Before Atlantis and humanity's prideful, corrupting touch, the Supernal gods ruled all. Unspoiled by human ambition, their reign was neither kind nor cruel, following the ultimate patterns from which the gods themselves were spawned. The Exarchs cast many gods from the Supernal and remade the universe in the image of their avarice. Some of them survived in the Realms Above, but their influence over the World Below was diminished by the Fall. Others retreated to the Shadow, Underworld and other realms Invisible, or stayed bound to the mundane realm by ancient spells.

The Alienated correct this injustice by serving the Old Ones — even weakened gods whose power they now surpass. The gods are the final shard of the old, true Tellurian, so it is not the intensity of their power the Alienated revere, but the original Mystery they represent. Some of the Old Ones are known to mages as the *Bound* (p. 340, **Mage: The Awakening**) but others walk the worlds freely. They all hunger for pure Supernal energy and often accept the archmage's service and Mana.

Silver Ladder archmasters almost never join this entente. Its ideology of submission is anathema. Guardians of the Veil feature prominently in legends. To them, the Alienated ethos encourages humanity to approach the Mysteries humbly. Of the known Paths, the Obrimos, Thyrsus and Acanthus all contain the concept of allegiance to greater powers. Moros find it hard to worship any changeable being that might sicken and die, and Mastigos find gods and demons enough within themselves.

**Agenda:** Alienated archmages want to restore the Supernal gods to supremacy so that they would replace the Exarchs as lords of the Supernal. Humanity must approach the Supernal in humility to its natural masters. Under mortal dominion, the Supernal casts flawed shadows, creating the Lie and allowing the Abyss to fester. The Lie turns souls against themselves, makes them enforce their own Sleep.

When Sleepers rediscover the Old Ones, they cannot help but strengthen the Truth. The gods are of the Supernal, so recognition and reverence naturally attune human souls to the higher worlds. Given the right intensity of worship or the perfect rite, the Alienated can return their patrons to glory — and the Gods will give their priests the gift of Ascension.

**Ethos:** Humanity can only find liberation in a true state of nature. To achieve this, it must relinquish dominion to the Old Ones. Only the gods can reconcile Fallen and Supernal power. This was their original purpose and only they can fulfill it again. Despite the belief, Alienated archmasters don't always serve the gods' apparent whims. In their crippled states, the gods mimic human imperfections, making them capable of incredible evil. The archmage searches for a common Truth to being human and divine desires in accord.

## Legends of the Alienated

- The Anabaptist is a Guardian of the Veil who believes the Hieromagus — a savior the order believes will restore Atlantis — will be born of an Old One and a mortal woman. Oral traditions say that he encourages human-deity pairings to produce a divine soul in mortal flesh, but his plots have only produced mad demigods and false messiahs. Some have escaped and created conspiracies devoted to the downfall of their “uncle’s” order.

- According to the Mysterium’s *Vermillion Record*, most Acanthus Alienated are slaves of Arcadia’s Old Ones. They trick them into service, hollow out their souls, and use the remnants as to strengthen some unfathomable agenda, acquiring sweet Awakened souls to sup on.

- The Libertine Basileus claims that Europe’s leading religion used to be the cult of Sol Invictus. In 1777, the archmage Hyperion Ascended in union with the God Mithras. This erased much of the deity’s history, so that the world now believes Christianity, not the Unconquered Church, spread throughout the West. Basileus points to the common sign of the cross, and the apparent contradiction of a Roman ritual official (the *Pontifex Maximus*) controlling an Abrahamic sect.

**Strategy:** The archmaster seeks out Old Ones, entities that were born in the Supernal Realms. She enters the service of a single god or pantheon as a high priest or loyal advisor.

Starved of rightful Supernal power, the gods *hunger*. While Alienated could simply reap souls to feed their patrons, this is actually the least efficient method. Founding a religion is challenging, but channels human spiritual power in a more refined, potent fashion. It might also be possible to secretly change the world into an occult engine for a Fallen God: a Mystery Play that returns it to power. The ententes believe at least one such “God Machine” already exists.

An Alienated hopes to Ascend when his patron reclaims its Supernal station. The archmage either becomes a deified servant or unites his soul with the god. This accompanies a mighty transformation in the Fallen World. Creation realigns to serve its prince. The re-risen gods have yet to displace Exarchs or tear the Watchtowers from the heavens, but the Alienated need only build success upon success and prepare for joyous Armageddon.

## Aswadim

Princes of the Abyss

Aswadim (“Dark Ones”) walk deep within their desires, letting them bloom to the point where everything human is all but extinguished. They accept paradoxical urgings: to be king and slave, to live forever, but reside in death. An Aswad

might explain that he desires freedom — the liberty that comes when all law and meaning has been extinguished. And there is only one truly lawless, free realm: the Abyss.

Aswadim believe the so-called “Prison of Forms” traps the will in endless patterns and codes. The way of the Abyss is honest and responsible. In the Void, a mage’s will is the only law — but it is a law one must obey absolutely.

Weak souls allow themselves to be consumed by utter freedom. They conceive of it as an external entity to bargain with and are soon entangled in the contradictions of their undisciplined, personified passions. Aswadim no longer truck with the Abyss as an external source of power. They *are* the Abyss: a pathless domain of limitless possibility within them, surging to assault the frontier of Being.

Scelesti might become Aswadim, but few attain the necessary power. They fall to enemy magi, errant summoning rites, and the other ravages of service. A Seeker might enter the entente after a distinguished career in the Pentacle (and occasionally, the Seers of the Throne). Upon the Threshold Seeking, they feel compelled to study the most forbidden secrets. Silver Ladder mages populate stories of power-hungry mages willing to break the Abyssal taboo — and the order seems almost proud of that.

**Agenda:** Before the Supernal existed, primordial, paradoxical desires seared the Tellurian. Did they come from God? Was God nothing but Desire? No matter; every want imposed a Law. When contradictory Laws clashed — as they do in even Awakened hearts — they created Paradoxes: beautiful, clashing truths, places and entities that balanced on the edge of collapse.

Agreeable Laws clustered and accumulated in stable realms: the embryonic Supernal. The ephemeral Lords of Paradox, who were always being created, destroyed and changed, withered in these islands of logic. But to grow, the Supernal needed the power of change — to encounter Paradoxes, conquer them, and lay new realms on their bones. That’s why the Abyss lurks in every soul. The so-called Sleeping Curse is the soul’s way to reconcile its limitless nature with the restriction of Form. The Exarchs just made the process *easier* by keeping souls ignorant of the power possible by studying Supernal Forms, but even this is another form of enslavement.

The Aswadim would open the glory of the Abyss, of freestanding Paradox and clashing desires, to conquer the Realms of Form. Limited souls oppose them, speaking of madness and unspeakable things that might be loosed, so Dark Ones prepare the way quietly with cults and blasphemous sciences that infect the minds of students. When their servants are ready, the real work begins: to bring Verges and entities from the Void to consume first the Phenomenal, then the Supernal Realms.

**Ethos:** Reason, occult principles, even sanity itself limit the soul’s full potential. The Dark One approaches the Abyss as a sage bereft of the final answers who realizes he must change his very essence to attain them. But an archmaster’s being is more than his body and mind. Creation is an exten-



## Legends of the Aswadim

• "They won. This world is a facade. The Prince's world, the 100,000 Leaves — they're *real*. We're a fading afterimage of what was. We already live in the Abyss!"

• The Libertine Nike boasted that she switched from the Acanthus Path to a "Watchtower of the Liquid Sword." She says she needed to enter the Abyss, where the "Impossible Watchtowers" drift, guarded by Aswadim. She won't say what she did to earn their favor. If anyone lends the story credence, it's the two Guardians of the Veil and a Mysterium Censor who've tried to kill her.

• The Old Man, Aeon of the Abyss, mediates meetings between Aswadim and other mages. Participants are never permitted inside the Old Man's hut but they may converse by the fire, under a flag of truce. The Old Man guarantees safe passage without prejudice, setting reasonable conditions. Aswadim debate philosophy with mages of all ability, or just share the sense-memory of an excellent pot of tea. They say certain archmasters use these meetings to bargain away part of the universe to the Dark Ones every century, too: a tax paid to preserve the Pax Arcanum

sion of his innermost self, and its limitations are his own. Thus, a Dark One becomes an evangelist for the Abyss.

Dark Ones experiment with the sense of self by degrading themselves before an Abyssal entity, but they've gone beyond mere enslavement — they switch allegiances or abandon Abyssal patrons as their souls move them. Travelers and Sleepers require a more stable path to liberation. Bloody altars and blasphemous litanies exist for *their* sake, as they have yet to abandon the social patterns that wed them to the Prison of Form. Even though most will break before they attain Abyssal liberation, one freed soul is worth a billion crippled shades.

**Strategy:** Their war is against logic and the cohesion that binds minds, Patterns, spirits and fates. They spawn Abyssal cults and inscribe rites capable of bringing the Outermost Ones heaving and twitching into the material plane, but these methods are so *obvious* compared to infecting entire cultures with the Void.

The quick path to mad enlightenment will always be the province of an elect; societies need to be taught that madness is banal and paradoxes are only political problems. To abhor violence, but applaud and crave it; to demand responsibility, yet crave anonymity; to love nature, and yet poison it: the human soul has a piece of the Abyss in it, an appetite for contradiction. An unrefined soul denies the truth of its desires and that these might array themselves against everything "natural." That's the Sleeping Curse.

The Aswadim promote hypocrisy and incoherence in target cultures to push their souls beyond mere Sleep. They idealize a "Nightmare Curse," where victims either Awaken to the Abyss straightaway, or spread the potential to do so as carriers of toxic memes.

A nation under Aswadim stewardship soaks in collective pain, but suffering is only a *side effect*; Dark Ones aren't sadists. Too rigid to bend to the truth, we break.

## Bodhisattvas

### We Are All Oracles

To Bodhisattvas, the Ascension War is a rescue mission; they won't Ascend until they save us all. Bodhisattvas believe they're doing the work of the Oracles by helping Sleepers to Awaken, climb a Path, and Seek final Ascension — or if they're so moved, to become Bodhisattvas themselves, delaying enlightenment until they rescue a measure of souls.

Bodhisattvas might reject liberation to save others, but they don't always disapprove of more self-centered paths. Theirs is the most diplomatic entente, as they support any route to Ascension that causes neither suffering nor spiritual

## Legends of the Bodhisattvas

• At some point, every Libertine *enfant terrible* says the Exarchs and Oracles are one and the same. It sounds cynical *and* mystical, so Free Council Assemblies would eat it up if it wasn't a hoary cliché. One variant is of interest, however. In 1914, the Libertine priest Severian said the Exarchs were *dead* Oracles.

The Oracles are long-lived but mortal; when they perish they pass into Nirvana, beyond all realms, but their desires rot and howl in the Supernal. These ghosts represent forgotten Watchtowers and toy with the Fallen World for the same reasons ordinary ghosts repeat certain actions, or seek out mortal emotions.

• The Bodhisattvas create Banishers when their omens tell them that a certain person *must* Awaken to further the cause of universal Ascension no matter how unprepared they are, or as living "lessons" for other mages. Every Banisher is either created this way or infected by Bodhisattva-made lineage: a project by the "Compassionate Ones" to promote spiritual development through fear.

• The real universe died with Atlantis. Sleepers are automata in a simulation-cosmos with five real inhabitants. The Watchtowers possess the only real souls in the world. Every mage is an incarnation of one of the Oracles, multiplied through billions of simultaneous cycles of rebirth. The Exarchs hold billions of other souls in stasis, in a God-Machine the incarnated call the Supernal. If the five recognized themselves they could free others and Awaken the world.

stagnation in others. These ideals attract Silver Ladder and Free Council mages, as well as members of the Obrimos and Mastigos Paths: sorcerers who play with minds, passions, morality, great societies, and dream of Heaven and Hell.

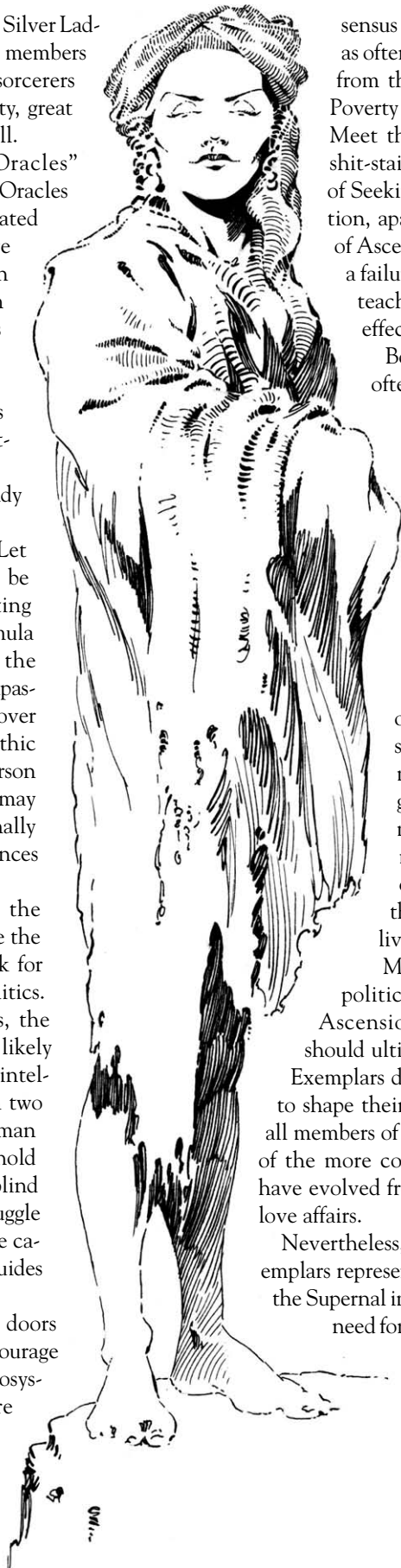
To say the entente “serves the Oracles” oversimplifies its premise. Perhaps the Oracles were Atlantean kings, but if they created the Watchtowers, do these not share their essences? If so, isn't every mage an Oracle once she writes her name upon an Oracle's soul? And if the Watchtowers radiate the only light of the true world, then all shadows belong to it — all Sleepers, all things. Everything mirrors the great liberators. Everyone is a forgetful Oracle.

They need to remember they've already won.

**Agenda:** Let all Sleepers Awaken. Let the Awakened Ascend. Let Ascension be compassion. That's the simple, daunting quest of all Bodhisattvas. Yet that formula contains permutations to challenge the ordinary meaning of compassion. A Compassionate One caresses one student like a lover and tortures another like one of the mythic Furies — if it works, it's moral. Every person seeks a door to understanding only she may open. The Oracles' Seekers can't personally guide everyone, so they increase the chances people have to find their own way.

**Ethos:** Every sentient being seeks the truth. Rats tear through trash to resolve the truth of hunger. Men and women look for meaning in sex, drugs, religion and politics. The more intelligence a creature has, the more complex his search, and the more likely he is to entangle himself in some safe, intellectual trap. Bodhisattvas step through two of the three great spiritual tests of human existence — Awakening and the Threshold of Archmastery — so they know the blind alleys one might wander down in the struggle to become a greater sorcerer or someone capable of genuine love. A true teacher guides her student to the lessons he needs.

**Strategy:** Determined to open the doors of Ascension to all, Bodhisattvas encourage diversity. The more colorful a social ecosystem, the more opportunities there are to see through the Lie. Some of these archmages promote tolerance, reasoning that cultures open to all are more likely to serve a community's diverse spiritual needs, but there's no con-



sensus on the matter. Sages rise up from chains as often as they stand upon thrones. Separation from the Supernal is the root of all suffering. Poverty and bigotry are ephemera by comparison. Meet the Oracles covered in cloth of gold or shit-stained rags — anything that drives the fire of Seeking is appropriate. Only wanton destruction, apathy and direct opposition to the cause of Ascension deserve enmity. Violent struggle is a failure mode, exercised when every option to teach fails or when violence itself is the only effective teacher.

Bodhisattvas return to worldly life more often than other archmages. They disguise their achievements and quietly change the lives around them. An archmaster from this entente takes an apprentice with a mighty destiny, or whispers “Look over there!” at just the right time to set the trap for Awakening.

## Exemplars

### Sages of the Orders

Sleepers and mages below the Threshold settle for excellence, but archmages should be *perfect*. For Exemplars, it's a moral imperative. No order can achieve greatness without a goal, and no goal is more powerful than one clothed in human minds and flesh. Part of her order's chain of being, an Exemplar channels the Ascended archetypes of her sect into living ideals for Traveler comrades.

Members of the entente indulge in low politics — lust and logistics are part of the Ascension War, too — but these maneuvers should ultimately promote the order's virtues. But Exemplars define those virtues, so it's easy for them to shape their orders to serve personal interests. Not all members of the entente resist the temptation; some of the more convoluted aspects of order history may have evolved from Exemplar vendettas, obsessions and love affairs.

Nevertheless, the orders are more than even their Exemplars represent. They predate the Fall and partake of the Supernal imprint for human civilization. Even if the need for warriors, scholars, schemers, leaders and rebels isn't innate to the human psyche, it was imposed by the Awakened City's truck with the heavens. Hailing from all nations, Exemplars understand that the orders' core templates contain as many variations as there are languages in the world. Few Exemplars are cultural supremacists. Archmastery

requires a broad enough vision that dissuades all but the most stubborn bigots. Exemplars study their orders' primal essence in search of insights: secret techniques, rites, and other resources from the Atlantean era.

Every order possesses Exemplars and no Path especially favors them. Naturally, the entente's politics mirror those of the orders themselves. Each Exemplar strikes a balance between his order's interests and the Pentacle's bonds. The entente's a bit more honest than any earthly Consilium, however, as members have more experience with every order's secret policies. They all know the Guardians of the Veil want an Awakened messiah and that the Mysterium believes magic is alive. That doesn't mean there *aren't* secrets, but they're bound to the desires of individual members, not their orders — though where one begins and the other ends aren't always easy to know.

**Agenda and Strategy:** Exemplars want to make their orders stronger, better able to pursue their respective missions. One important element is the creation of rites. Exemplars design and disseminate them. Their choices influence the orders' capabilities, and thus, their place in the Pentacle. Exemplars maintain the Pentacle as a whole, but the entente distinguishes itself from others in the way its aims and actions break down into those of its members' orders.

*Adamantine Arrow:* Adamantine Exemplars perfect their knowledge of conflict. They become ideal warriors and peacemakers both for their own spiritual edification and to pass that lore on to the order's martial artists and strategists. Their Exemplars are split between those who want to push the world through a series of "just wars" (improving the order's influence in the process) and archmages who encourage a sublime appreciation of struggle without physical violence.

*Free Council:* Libertines promote freedom of expression. Without it, Sleepers can't question the Lie they live in and mages fixate on useless traditions and patterns. As archmages, Libertines usually acquire more respect for the other orders. After all, there's no rebellion without orthodoxy, and rebellion is more than a means to an end. Antinomianism and the revolutionary spirit are conditions of the soul. Exemplars open the minds of others and give themselves a capricious magical style, beyond attachments to custom and form.

*Guardians of the Veil:* The Hieromagus is no secret to archmages, but the way in which he or she might come about remains a mystery. Guardian Exemplars experiment on Sleepers to learn how occult symbols, traditions and ancestry create the greatest mages. Guardians also protect the Tellurian from major Abyssal intrusions and manipulate magical traditions to make them difficult initiatory experiences. They especially look for rites and artifacts that allow Sleepers to perform magical feats in order to capture and destroy them.

*Mysterium:* In the quest to comprehend living magic, Mysterium Exemplars study the Realms Invisible, strange magical phenomena, and Awakening itself. Arch-mystagoues

## Legends of the Exemplars

- Despite prominence in many legends, the Atlantean royal family or "Blood of the Dragon," has been lost. The Silver Ladder descends from viziers and priests, the Adamantine Arrow from warrior retainers, but there are no true princes. Where did they go? The Oracles are supposed to have been Atlantean nobles, so perhaps the "Blood" is the essence of Awakening, but some Exemplars believe the royal heritage is dormant in certain individuals. If they claimed their birthright, they might be to mages as mages are to Sleepers. Perhaps the Hieromagus will arise from that hidden line — or perhaps it's gone because its legacy has been erased by the Abyss, and the Dragon's offspring rule the Void.

- 96 legendary omens are said to appear before the Exemplars reject the Pax Arcanum and force an apocalyptic conclusion to the Ascension War. The Mysterium possesses a number of (contradictory) texts that allegedly detail each sign. Some versions list triggers that indicate the Pentacle has won some lasting edge over the enemy, giving it the confidence to wage open war. Others require 96 signs of desperation, or are filled with riddles and obscure symbols.

- By example and influence, each Exemplar directs hundreds of Awakened wills to . . . what? It is said Exemplarship is the greatest ritual of all. The archmage is its spellcaster and sacrifice, building power to tilt the Ascension War in one direction or to make himself equal to the Exarchs.

often cooperate with Siddha to learn more about a specific Arcanum. While all Exemplars create rites, Mysterium Exemplars far exceed their counterparts in number and complexity. They record these in grimoires and teach them to Masters, but even then, recipients must give something in return for the knowledge they receive: knowledge in return, Quintessence, or services.

*Silver Ladder:* Théarchs take the most direct role in shaping their order. Exemplars bend the Pax Arcanum to the point of snapping. This, they say, is necessary to counter the Seer Tetrarchy. Besides, they are the orders' grand viziers, rightful directors who *must* step from the shadows to provide critical guidance. In spite of this, the Silver Ladder's Exemplars have yet to unite the Awakened or even bring them firmly under Ladder rule, though these are constant objectives.

**Ethos:** Ideally, the Exemplars' morals are those of their orders. They promote these values in Awakened and Sleeper cultures. They should be Paragons of their orders' moral codes and signature skills. An Exemplar might pursue some strange interpretation of her order, spawning a revolution, or incite an age of corruption.

## The Siddha

### The Arcana Themselves

In sorcery, there is no division between power and intellect. Worlds do not move according to will; worlds *are* enlightened will made manifest. Consciousness permeates all energies. The roots of power are the Ten Arcana — everything else is a flawed reflection. The Arcana are modes of thought, so they need thinkers. Guardians. Thus, the Siddha take responsibility for reality's fundament.

Each of the so-called Accomplished Ones specializes in a single Arcanum. They study its spells, spontaneous expressions, and subtler metaphysics. The barrier between a mage and her beloved tenth of existence dissolves, so that a Spirit Siddha is not just an arch-shaman, but a living Spirit Road and ephemeral prince. An Accomplished of Forces becomes coiled thunder and a swarm of atoms waiting to break.

Siddha seek Ascension within their Arcana, not the wars of men, women and gods. They defend magic's integrity against numerous threats, from Abyssal erosion to some catastrophic imbalance. An ideal Siddha doesn't care if the Oracles, Exemplars or True Gods win the Ascension War, or even if the world cracks beneath some final battle. If Armageddon came, they'd only ask for a catastrophe that doesn't tilt the Tellurian toward one Arcanum in particular. But every Siddha has her own opinion of what constitutes true balance, and each believes her favored Arcanum deserves more prominence.

The Siddha frequently converse with Aeons: the great Astral manifestations of the Arcana (p. 61). Like Siddha, the Aeons cultivate their Arcana as political and philosophical entities. Lesser-mages come to them as beggars, but Siddha see them as teachers who naturally enjoy the transcendental state the Accomplished desire. As ideals and aspects of the Arcana, the Aeons are sacrosanct and require protection from the rare and mighty plots that could harm them. The only exception is the One Other, Aeon of the Abyss, who neither need nor wants protectors.

**Agenda:** The Siddha are dedicated to preserving the Tellurian — at least as defined as a form of existence created by the interaction of ten Arcana. They are mostly neutral in the Ascension War, opposing only the Aswadim. No other faction seeks to destroy the Siddha's protectorate, but all mages can threaten the Arcana though selfish, ignorant actions. Powerful artifacts, prophecies, or simple overuse of certain forms of magic can create unacceptable biases. For example, the constant use of Spirit magic in a region makes it easier for spirits to slip between worlds and for ephemera to warp the world of flesh. Minor biases hardly merit an archmaster's attention, but large trends or pivotal instances will summon Siddha from their meditations to investigate and correct the issue. Each Siddha favors his own Arcanum above the others and may battle colleagues to increase its preeminence.

**Ethos:** Siddha are indifferent to human life. The only valid emotions are the ecstasy of merging one's soul with a cosmic law, or the pain of sensing distortion in the celestial music.

## Legends of the Siddha

- It's natural to speculate that the Aeons were once Siddha, but some Siddha have become as powerful as an Aeon in its native Arcanum. Certain mystagogues believe Siddha arose to replace the Aeons. They say the Aeons have been dying since the Fall; their current splendor is a fraction of what they once possessed. The Aeons owe their survival to the Siddha, who care for them in senescence but plan to replace them.

- The Siddha have come to a secret arrangement with the Exarchs. They're allowed to maintain the Arcana as long as they preserve the Lie along with it. Were it not for the Accomplished, there would be no Sleeping Curse and simple forms of magic would be usable by everyone. The Abyss plays a part, but it only causes Sleep because the Siddha intentionally hid the Arcana from Sleepers' eyes. In some versions of this myth, the Siddha are full servants of the Exarchs and are enslaved at a certain degree of initiation — the entente is a front for the Throne.

- The first Siddha were ten sorcerers who led their clans to the Ocean Spire: the "Dragons" of Atlantean myth. Each Dragon Awakened through mastery of a mundane craft and by understanding that her masterwork unveiled universal principles. The artifacts made by these culture heroes — the Dragon's Fire, the Medicine Stone, the Bright Alloy Knife, and others — unlock supreme prowess in their linked Arcana.

Critics say the Siddha are selfish beings who are only interested in their own bliss, but an Accomplished One would say that by giving up the illusion that human life is meaningful and cleaving to unchallengeable truth, the archmage sacrifices herself for a higher duty. Cults, kingdoms and even sapient species may fall, but if the Arcana survive, there is always hope. The intelligence within them will call out to some primal spark of Being in even the simplest organism and, if necessary, endow it with the power to become something greater.

**Strategy:** Siddha prefer simple solutions. They'll steal an offending artifact, seal an inconvenient gate, or slay creatures that interfere with the natural Arcana. If the easiest way to protect the Life Arcanum from human corruption to kill a billion people, they'll do it — but other archmages have ensured this has never been the easiest way. Even so, some of the Accomplished argue the virtues of a less numerous species with fewer Awakened to make a mess of things. Accomplished Ones also rely on contrasting forces to attain harmony through accommodation or opposition. A Death Siddha would bring the peace of the slain more easily and quickly, but knows Life's champion will oppose him. Adamantine Arrow mages often find peace in this entente because this method fits their former philosophies.



Siddha have tremendous responsibilities, so many of them delegate duties that require lesser magic to earthly mages. They rarely reveal the true purpose of a mission, both to confound Abyssal enemies and because many mages lack the enlightenment to understand that risking life and limb for a magical principle is a just, holy act.

## Tetrarchs

### Rulers of the Lie

Below the Exarchs, the lords of the Throne are its Tetrarchs: archmages who direct Seers in their (actual or pretended) dominion of the world. They sit at the very edge of the Pax Arcanum, using their inhuman intellects and psychic might to advise and direct but never directly interfere in the course of the Lie. But the possibilities for *indirect* influence are endless, and Tetrarchs are more easily replaced than other archmages. If one breaks the Pax and is obliterated, the Exarchs guide a replacement to fill her vacant seat.

Tetrarchs are the most organized entente, with specific ranks and offices. The Tetrarchy concept is named two fourfold connotations. The first refers to *Archimandrites*: Tetrarchs who serve the four greatest Exarchs (the *Archigenitors*) and preside over their Ministries. They possess the more influence than the followers of lesser Exarchs, whose status waxes and wanes with their Ministries' earthly fortunes. They lead most Tetrarchies: ruling councils of Seers who hold sway over vast regions of the Fallen World. Archigenitors change from one era to the next, so serving one of the Great Four doesn't ensure a Tetrarch's position. But for mystical reasons that elude even archmages, there have always *been* four prime Exarchs — no more, no less.

The second meaning denotes the four degrees of Seer archmastery, short of the Minister's station. These supposedly correspond with a Tetrarch's power over the Imperial Arcana, but are just as often granted for political reasons. Lower down the Iron Pyramid, Seers obsess over whether a given office is a true part of the Exarchs' plan for the sect, not a diversion. A Tetrarch *creates* the truth of his office, making it essential as an argument for his Ascension. If he plays his part, yet *defines* it, he may become the next Minister, and that all but guarantees final Ascension. When Ministers perish, they are assumed to attain the right hand of their Exarchs straightaway, so when a Minister weakens, assassination is no crime.

**Agenda:** Tetrarchs aspire to merge with their patron Exarchs or Ascend to Exarchy themselves. A Tetrarch splits his efforts above and below, as one link between the grand conspiracy of mortal mages and their divine masters. By and large, his aims are those of his Ministry, writ to a scale commensurate with his influence and shaped by an extra dose of realpolitik. To achieve archmastery at all, a Tetrarch has to see past the obvious traps a hierarchy lays for the ambitious: rivals, propaganda, and an atmosphere that deadens even Awakened creativity. He might even help Pentacle

## Legends of the Tetrarchs

- Without Ministers and the ambitions of their Seers, the Exarchs would wither away and die. In fact, they already have, many times. The Exarchs' souls are still too human to survive the Supernal Realms, so they groom Ministers to replace them. The strong survive Supernal power the longest, but no Exarch survives longer than a few centuries. If they die without successors, the Old Ones will storm the Supernal and annihilate the Lie of reason, faith, and hope that keeps humanity alive.

- Another human race sleeps beneath the Earth. Designed by the Exarchs, they're tough, obedient, and animated by small, predictable souls that can never Awaken — but upon being commanded in the High Speech, they transform into magically enhanced killing machines. The Seers send small groups to the surface where they not only breed true, but pass their traits on to any offspring born of themselves and true humans.

- The only reason they haven't replaced the original species is that some Tetrarchs have defied the plan, triggering a secret war among the Ministries.

- Every Tetrarchy possesses a hidden fifth councilor: an Aswadim representing the Gate, a secret Exarch of the Abyss. This individual usually poses as a lowly servant and relays messages to the Gate through omens or telepathy.

mages when it suits him, even if the Atlantean remnant is still his overall enemy.

**Ethos:** High servants of the Throne know the Exarchs' grace is not enough to guarantee Ascension. A Tetrarch needs to strengthen his soul with occult knowledge. The Exarchs lead him to key secrets, but he must also seize them from enemies. The Exarchs grant Ascension sparingly and only guarantee it to Ministers. They feel no little compassion for rivals or enemies. Sleepers are the viscera and metabolism of the Fallen World, life support systems and sources of pleasure for the Exarchs. If a Tetrarch Ascends he *will* experience a joy beyond any fleshly joy: the narcotic of absolute power.

**Strategy:** The more political power a Tetrarch wields, the more difficult it is for him to seek Ascension outside of Ministry service. This motivates a Tetrarch to hobble his rivals' progress. He needs to catch up before they outmaneuver him. Tetrarchs typically begin any maneuver with mundane tools: Sleeper cultures, armies, and naive conspiracies. If the situation demands it, he peppers his actions with Awakened agents and magical servitors. He only intervenes with personal power as a last resort, and almost never breaks the Pax Arcanum by unleashing an Imperial spell to further his earthly aims . . . but no other sect is so skilled at justifying exceptions to the archmages' law.

## The Tellurian

Mages call all that is, was or ever will be the Tellurian. Archmasters explore its hells, heavens and places indescribable to Sleepers, but even they do not know its totality. After walking the Golden Road, paths between worlds twist under their powers and sublime perceptions. New planes reveal themselves. Familiar realms manifest strange domains.

Travelers conceive a world system where realms array themselves above and below, but Seekers dwell on a Golden Road that might spiral through any plane. Material, psychic and ephemeral conditions are technical distinctions, easily changed by a spell or celestial Iris. The split between subject and object dissolves on the Road, for it encompasses the entire continuum of an archmage's existence: mind, body, and soul. Other realms become distant extensions of the self. In a way, the Seeker regards the Tellurian as Travelers treat the Astral Realm: a definite location which nevertheless lies within the soul.

## The Phenomenal World

The Phenomenal World signifies many terms used by archmasters to refer to what mages call the Fallen World. Upon visiting the Supernal and establishing the Golden Road, an archmage knows that the Supernal exalts symbols raised up from the so-called Fallen Realms — they are not as profane as most Travelers believe.

### Abaddon: The Lower Depths

Known to Travelers as the Lower Depths and identified with Hell in certain rites, Abaddon is the realm of *akathartoi*: the "Unclean." *Mysterium censorum* call them "true demons." They are not passion fragments from Pandemonium, but spirits of utter-



most evil. The Kingdom of Nightmares resembles Abaddon, but Pandemonium is a place of purification and self-acceptance, not debasement and hate without end. Some Seekers believe that the two were once closely bound by Irises and dark Windings: shadows of past Imperial maneuvers that might have been intended to turn the Kingdom of Nightmares into Hell itself.

Seekers may enter Abaddon through the Irises ("Gates to Hell") that wound accursed places or by convincing an *akathartos* at least Rank 6 to transport them. Archmasters journey there reluctantly, to pursue critical Quintessences or rescue captive souls. These quests are traumatic and threatening no matter the archmage's power.

The Great Unclean Ones of the realm may offer to give the archmaster whatever she seeks. An *akathartos* may grant Quintessences for spells whose highest Arcana are one dot less than its Rank, but the Quintessence only functions when the Seeker performs the requisite service.

## The Underworld

Irises called Avernian Gates lead to the Underworld. The Great Below doesn't claim every soul, but it takes many. Besides mortal ghosts, the Underworld also hosts *chthonians*, "never born" creatures, and *Geists*, who embody some archetypal principle of life and death. But the preeminent figures — and the most troublesome for Seekers — are the *kerberoi* who enforce the Underworld's primal codes. These "Old Laws" vary from one region to the next, but are mystically bound to their native lands.

Kerberoi despise Seekers, as they are among the few beings that might violate the Old Laws. The Alter Oath spell suffers a -10 penalty to attempts to change the Old Laws, but archmasters with transhuman traits can overcome it. Seekers can defeat typical *kerberoi* with raw sorcery, but the deepest dominions are ruled by Deathlords who at least match the archmasters' power. Antagonizing them violates the Pax Arcanum.

## The Shadow

Like the Underworld, the Shadow occupies a contentious space among

students of the Supernal. It appears to be a fragment of the Primal Wild — Spirit Linked to Life — but truly living things dwell in the mundane world. At first glance, the realm appears to be nothing but a counterpart to the world Sleepers see, but it contains hidden places and Old Gods within them.

In the Ascension War, the Shadow provides an opportunity to bind servants to the cause and use them to indirectly change the mundane world. Claiming an army of spirits risks the Pax Arcanum however, as it angers both the Old Gods of the Shadow and the half-spirit creatures that claim the realm as territory.

### *The Astral Realms*

The Temenos contains memes, mores, ideologies and ur-myths, all represented as spirit-like creatures and domains forged of collective dreams. When mages change these in a lasting fashion, they alter what people in the Fallen World believe. From a Seeker's perspective this is one of the most important aspects of the Astral, because a clever maneuver in the Astral Realms influences millions of Sleepers, preparing the world for Imperium.

To change beliefs, a mage must engage them in the Temenos, questing in their sub-realms. The Storyteller sets a dice pool appropriate to the character's actions. A literal battle against discrimination (the mage beats personifications of bigotry with his fists) could require an Intelligence + Brawl roll, while strengthening patriotism in a country could require a series of inspiring speeches and a Presence + Academics roll (with a bonus for a Specialty in the history of politics of the target country). The player uses this dice pool in an extended roll, applying a penalty (see the second table, following) based on the belief's intensity.

While Travelers and Seekers may both influence beliefs in this way, the latter are far, far better at it. An archmage not only enjoys superhuman dice pools, but may also affect more than 10 million people. Consult the tables below to determine the exact difficulty.

Minimum Gnosis		Target Number
Gnosis	Population	
1	100 or fewer	5
1	100 to 1,000	10
1	1,000 to 10,000	15
1	10,000 to 100,000	20
1	100,000 to 1 million	25
1	1 million to 10 million	30
6	10 million to 50 million	35
7	50 million to 250 million	40
8	250 million to 1.25 billion	45
9	Everyone in the world	50

Degree of Belief	Dice Penalty	Example
Casual	None	Preferred brand of socks; what to watch on TV when "nothing's on."
Mild	-1	Where to go for light entertainment, or who an apolitical person may vote for
Moderate	-2	Casual subculture membership, or tastes in music and fashion.
Significant	-3	Adoption of a hobby or fandom, degree of dedication to a pursuit such as college courses
Intense	-5	Patriotism, religiosity and personal heroes

Impatient archmasters resort to sorcery to create, destroy, and change ideas. Imperial spells inflict devastating attacks upon belief systems by affecting their corresponding domains and symbols. A Dynamic spell might mutate beliefs so quickly it drives a population insane, and an Excision spell could remove the capacity to feel *anything* about an idea.

Large scale actions might violate the Pax Arcanum, but the Astral is a familiar, potent resource, so temptation often defeats caution. Critical Astral domains host armies of psychic constructs built by the ententes: enslaved warrior codes, dreams of mechanized infantry and bound death gods. To preserve the Pax, these beings hide their allegiance until called to action.

### *The Supernal Realms*

Every Seeker enters the Supernal Realms, but cannot remain for long unless they Ascend — permanent Supernal existence is the very definition of Ascension as most archmages conceive of it. To forge the Cintamani into a symbol representing the mage is the goal: to attain it grants immortality, and perhaps godlike dominion over all realms.

Each Supernal Realm contains the undiluted energy of true Creation: a mystical torrent powerful enough to strip virtually any soul it of its independent identity. After the Awakening, no mage below the rank of archmaster may enter the Supernal Realms. If a lesser mage somehow finds himself in the Supernal, his soul is immediately claimed by the Realm. The mage dies or is transformed into a lesser Supernal entity under the control of the Storyteller. Rumors speak of mages' bodies returning with new inhabitants, such as Ochemata, or extensions of Old Ones. All other beings with supernatural power traits of 5 or less are irrevocably destroyed. Fortunately, the Seeker's Golden Road leads to her Cintamani, a Supernal sanctum representing her highest magical aspirations. See Chapter One for the rules for Golden Road and Supernal navigation.

## Dhatu

Ruled by one or more Old Ones, Dhatu are worlds vast and populated enough to portray their creators' divine characteristics. The ruling gods of a Dhatu are Ascended beings that cannot be swayed by any raw force an archmage is capable of mustering, though their servants may be of lesser rank. Old Ones possess vices, however, and these may be manipulated by extremely clever Seekers. An inhabitant's soul is only protected for as long as the ruling deity wishes.

Dhatu belonging to fallen Old Ones survive in the Supernal, and act as refuges against the raw Supernal as Lustrum for one scene per success on a Resolve + Gnosis roll. Although they lack rulers, they are almost never uninhabited; servitors of the realm remain and may treat intruders with anything from hostility to apathy, depending on the former ruler's nature.

## Exarchates

Exarchates resemble Dhatu, and in legend, were stolen from the Supernal gods, or built upon the wreckage of their palaces. Every Tetrarch's Cintamani is an extension of its master's Exarchate. They often appear to be gargantuan palaces, graven with runes that would be impossible to inscribe in the Phenomenal World. No matter the manifestation, an Exarchate always appears to be out of harmony with its realm. In the Primal Wild, Supernal beasts near the Exarchate of the Raptor develop sores and deformities. At the gates of Mammon's palace, a plain of adamas transmutes into blackened, shattered silver.

Unless the Storyteller devises an exceptional method, no being other than a Tetrarch or Exarch Ochema may enter an Exarchate. Only Ministers speak directly to the Exarchs, and each occasion takes its toll on the Minister's Wisdom and sanity. Lesser Tetrarchs encounter Ochemata and other enslaved entities.

## Emanations

Countless Emanation Realms surround the Supernal. These planes channel diluted primal arcane energies across the Abyss. Although they lie on the other side of the Abyss they are not the Supernal Realms themselves, so mages may travel them without risking soul loss. Most of them possess other hazards, however, from torrents of elemental fire to legions of rapacious spirits, so caution is still necessary. If a mage is willing to dare these hazards, the Emanations also provide an alternate route across the Abyss, and into associated realms via natural Irises.

Each Emanation embodies certain archetypes and powers derived from a Supernal Realm, as well as a favored Arcanum. No spell from that Arcanum is considered vulgar within the realm, and spells that use it as a primary Arcanum enjoy a +2 bonus to spellcasting rolls, or +4 bonus if the spell matches the Emanation's elemental theme.

Emanations contain beings archmages call *Paragons*, who

embody an aspect of the ruling archetype. Most paragons resemble spirits, but Emanations are usually fully material places. Some inhabitants have the traits of fleshly beings — even ordinary humans.

Archmasters have visited numerous Emanations; none have discovered them all. The known realms include:

**Erebus (Stygia, Death — Archetype of Shadow):** Shades and living pools of darkness inhabit the shifting black sands and obsidian fissures of Erebus. Weak gray light shines through ashen clouds. Sentient darkness sometimes moves to snuff travelers' light sources. The larger and darker a shadow is, the more intelligent it is. Many profess to have once been living men and women and exhibit aggressive, uninhibited personalities and a thirst for the traveler's "inner light." Erebus contains Irises leading to the Underworld and shadowy dreams in the Astral Realms.

**Yggdrasil (The Primal Wild, Spirit — Archetype of Sacrifice):** The great tree possesses endless branches, but visitors can find their way for a price. The wood dragons, ravens and other spirits of the realm know secrets gleaned from the Shadow and Primal Wild, brought to Yggdrasil by hidden Irises. They act as guides or reveal secrets in exchange for a measure of pain and loss.

**Gehinnom (Pandemonium, Mind — Archetype of Sin):** The realm is a great mountain riddled with caves. At its peak near Pandemonium, Gehinnom's sinners revel in their punishments, lessons designed to purify the mind. Where the Irises are pits to Abaddon, however, the punishments devolve into raw atrocities. The inhabitants are divided between demonic spirits (which may be akathartoi or goetic demons) and millions of human-like sinners. Visitors encounter close friends, famous people, or even themselves.

**Singularity (Arcadia, Time — Archetype of Progress):** An endless city crawls south down its nameless river, adding new districts to symbolize the dreams of human progress. In the desolate north you can find the kingdom of Prester John. The densely populated southern districts contain strict caliphates, towers ruled by cyborg Libertarians, and other would-be utopias. Careful travelers sometimes discover clues about the past and future of the mundane world in objects, places and conversations between its inhabitants. They usually appear human and possessed of a shallow, fanatical idealism. They work furiously; each society is *almost* perfect. Irises to the Temenos may be found here.

**Tapana (Aether, Forces — Archetype of Fire):** Lethal to the unprepared, the realm of fire contains jinn, salamanders and every other living archetype of fire. Seven suns rise over the realm's oceans of burning oil. Irises lead to mundane volcanoes and fiery regions in the Shadow and Astral Dreamtime.

## The Abyss

Any Seeker may enter the Abyss through the Golden Road. Other methods also exist; and some Abyssal entities teach them to interested mages. While every mage vaults through the Void during Awakening, the unique nature of the event shields them from its full force. After Awakening, lesser mages



## The Empyrean

Confronted with a mutable Supernal, archmasters postulate that there must be an eternal, immutable causal plane beyond it: a Heaven, Nirvana, or Principle that fuels the Supernal with raw, undifferentiated meaning. Conservatives say that such a theory is unnecessary, given that the Supernal cannot be accurately perceived by any means short of Ascension, and may be truly pure under some veil of illusion. It is even said that some paths to Ascension bypass the Supernal and being mages in accord with this true World Above — an idea Seekers invested in the Golden Road treat with disdain or curiosity.

possess no protection from the un-realms. Anything can happen and the Traveler has little say in the matter.

Similarly, the Golden Road protects Seekers, but only on its narrow route across the Void. They cannot encounter much beyond their own Paradoxes (though they do not suffer their effects after the Abyssal Trial). A Seeker may step off the Golden Road into the greater Abyss at considerable risk. All spells cast in the wider Abyss are vulgar and Paradoxes are more intense; add three to all Paradox dice pools. Archmasters may travel without being overwhelmed by the Abyss as Travelers are, but only for a number of chapters equal to their players' successes on a Wisdom roll. When time runs out, the Abyss might consume them immediately or imprison them within an Abyssal domain.

The Abyss can't be mapped or measured. It sometimes appears as a shifting land, filled with warped, broken versions of places, people and objects the archmaster recognizes, but might manifest as anything else: an endless plain of black glass, perhaps, or a field of shifting stars, filled with floating, rune-covered wreckage.

Mundane natural laws don't operate consistently; a thrown rock might endlessly accelerate or just hover in place, sucking heat out of the area. During the "grace period" represented by the player's Wisdom roll, the archmage's soul guards her from immediately lethal or soul-destroying changes, but if a spark lights a fire made of venomous worms, they might still poison him if he gets too close. Acamoth and other lesser entities approach the Seeker to offer services as guides in exchange for Wisdom-destroying acts.

Within the Abyss, powerful beings create domains with self-contained laws and ecosystems. These are predictable and somewhat easier to survive in, but ultimately exhibit the Abyss' anti-reality. Orgasms cause deformities, or past events may enter the present when spoken of.

The Abyss destroys reason, hope and being — but it encompasses all of existence. Every mote of Supernal power passes through the Abyss, which assembles it into infinite configurations. As a lawless place, it is unbound by consistency. Anyone or anything can be found in one domain or another: working geocentric universes, lost grimoires and old friends long gone — but in each case, they thrive because in some sense they are not supposed to exist. As innocent as they appear, the inherent paradoxes of their being reveal themselves in physical or magical corruption.



# CHAPTER THREE: THE SUPERNAL ENSEMBLE

*Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.*

—Abraham Lincoln

The Ascension War is not a conflict of faceless orders and Ministries. The Invisible Masters struggle with Supernal gods cast from the heavens, representations of the Arcana, Ochemata of the Exarchs, and other, stranger things, but those conflicts are never impersonal. Without large, organized groups, archmasters have no way of pigeonholing their peers into allies or antagonists. Every Seeker must decide for herself which are which.

## *Godlike Entities*

Spirits, Astral entities, Supernal natives, the inhabitants of the Underworld, and other, stranger beings all use the rules for spirits (pp. 317–322, **Mage: The Awakening**), but archmasters deal with entities of such power that they would be classed as Princes, Dukes or Kings on the spiritual hierarchy.

In the manner of an archmage creating an Ochema, Spirits of rank 6 and above can create sub-selves called Royal Avatars to interact with lesser beings, which have the personality of the entire being but are only rank 5. Archmages can summon the true entity to force an appearance, but it is wiser to go to their homes and ask politely.

As described on page 317 of **Mage**, spirits of Rank 6 and above do not have conventional traits. Assume that a god-

like spirit has trait maximums of 15 but achieves additional, automatic successes on any roll equal to its Rank in anything relating to its purview or its Rank — 5 for anything else. Add Rank to any passive calculations such as Defense or resisting certain spells. Godlike spirits have ever-renewing supplies of Essence, having a maximum of 25 x Rank and regaining their Rank per turn. Such beings have too many Numina to list. Instead, their Influence has grown to the point that they are able to improvise Numina in the manner of a mage improvising a spell, using the following guidelines.

Level	Influence
6	The spirit may use any power covered by spells from the common Practices of any Arcanum, as long as the power relates to its area of influence. Convert Mana costs to Essence and add the standard one Essence for using an Influence. Extended spells must still be “cast” over time, each “roll” taking half an hour.
7	The spirit may use powers from the Practices of Dynamics, Excision and Entities as long as they relate to its area of influence. Extended spells of the common Practices may be duplicated as instant action Numina. Convert Arcane Experience and Mana costs to Essence.

8 The spirit may achieve anything related to its area of influence, as though it were under the effect of the Practice of Transfiguration.

9 The spirit may use Numina based on the Imperial Practices as instant actions.

Some beings that use the spirit rules — Ochemata, Supernal natives and the Aeons in particular — have powers that more closely resemble magic. Instead of Influences, these beings have true Arcana ratings and use Mana instead of Essence. Supernal gods and the Aeons are capable of casting Imperial Spells as instant actions without Arcane Experience or Quintessence costs, while Ochemata still cast in the same manner as the archmage who created them.

### *Ochemata*

Created with the Practice of Dominions, Ochemata are self-willed sub-souls of an archmaster.

A “basic” Ochema is disembodied and in Twilight in its natural form. It appears as the symbology of the Quintessence used to create it mixed with the archmaster’s nimbus. It has traits of a Spirit of Rank equal to its Gnosis, but without any Numina or advanced Influences. It has Willpower equal to the caster and Mana instead of Essence. To manifest, it must use the Arcana it has been granted by the spell creating it and can take on any form up to Size 20. Ochemata may walk between worlds using their caster’s Road in the same manner as the archmage, but may not enter the Abyss.

The Ochemata of Ascended beings are painful to look upon — Travelers in their presence feel their Unseen Senses amplified to the point of debilitation unless the Ochema uses magic to cloak the effect. Ochemata created by non-Ascended archmages lack this quality.

### *Archmasters*

There are just under a hundred living, non-Ascended archmasters in the Tapestry, slightly more than half of whom are interested in interacting with one another. With so few peers, an archmaster may easily meet every member of her entente and many rivals beside.

The following six Archmasters — one from each entente — are all looking for allies in the Ascension War. Seeker or Traveler characters may find themselves assisting or opposing their agendas.

### *Alienated: Achamán*

**Quote:** *Power has no notion of compassion or justice, no purpose beyond power itself. But it wasn’t always like that; it doesn’t have to always be that way.*

**Background:** Many Obrimos find that the Aether resonates with notions of righteousness and holiness, reinforcing their own tendency to think of themselves as righteous. Upon achieving archmastery, those few Obrimos

## Supernal Perfection

Certain beings are living Supernal symbols. The perfection of the Realms is reflected in all that they do, even what to lesser beings would be mundane challenges.

In game terms, the Ochemata of Ascended beings (including the Exarchs), those Ascended mages or archmages themselves and Supernal gods (Supernal entities of Rank 6 or above) possess the rote quality (pp. 134–135, **World of Darkness**) on all Skill and Attribute rolls.

who break the Threshold find that the Aether is lacking any moral dimension beyond what they bring to it. The Obrimos are Justice, but there is no definition in the Supernal of what is just.

Achamán believes that there once was. As a Traveler, he was always drawn to the moral associations of his Path, becoming the Silver Ladder Councilor for his native Canary Islands and serving on Convocations throughout West Africa settling disputes peacefully. After breaking the Threshold, he found the reality of the Aether a bitter disappointment, but has seized on a plan to bring the morality he finds missing to the Supernal. Audiences with gods have led him to believe that the missing element was banished by the Exarchs — a god, now imprisoned somewhere in the Fallen World, that represents the wise use of power. He is determined to find it, wherever it is, and return it to the higher realms.

**Description:** A Canarian man in his late 60s, Achamán has the healthy look of a man who exercised regularly earlier in life. He still habitually wears his old Magister’s robes with the symbols of the Silver Ladder removed. His nimbus manifests as a strong feeling of security, as though the onlooker were protected by an unseen higher power. He does not have a Chantry.

**Storytelling Hints:** Achamán was disappointed by the Supernal, but has not yet given up hope of making the realms truly “higher.” He has abandoned his order partly from that disappointment — the Supernal was not the dream of perfection he was told — but also because the Pax Arcanum demands he refrain from helping Travelers solve their differences by sitting in a position of authority over them, which is what his entire magical career was focused around. By making the conscious decision to set himself apart from the order, he helps himself to keep to the Pax.

Achamán knows that his quest is not in his area of expertise and is actively seeking allies among Seekers — archaeomancers and investigators of Atlantean ruins are top of his list, as are fellow Alienated that have collected legends of the Bound. Somewhere, imprisoned in some ancient vault, is the god he seeks.

Gnosis 7, Forces 6



## *Avadim: Theumiel*

**Quote:** For people used to imposing our desires on the world, we're awfully used to accepting things. Why should the Shadow be the way it is? Because the truths in the Primal Wild say so? There is an alternative, if you are brave enough to see it.

**Background:** Theumiel was a Thyrsus and the last mage his cabal would expect to be corrupted by the Abyss. He spent his magical career studying the ecologies of spirits in the Shadow, cataloguing the Knights and Barons of the spirit courts in their ever-changing dance of cannibalistic evolution. The constant struggle of the Shadow took a heavy toll; several members of the cabal were killed in the frenzy caused by the death of a minor god and the rest disbanded shortly after. Theumiel obsessed over the memory for years, until the survivors of the cabal were drawn into the Mystery Play in his Threshold. He built his Cintamani from parts of the Primal Wild that reflected nature's uncaring, unflinching violence... and snapped.

His first attempt to change the nature of the Shadow was a failure, undone by a Siddha under the terms of the Pax Arcanum. Those Seekers that have heard of Theumiel assume he has backed off from his obsession. In fact, he has simply decided that altering the laws of the Primal Wild is too great a task with the opposition it would gather. Instead, he intends to supplant those laws entirely with those from another place. If the Abyss is the realm of everything that is not true, he reasons, it must contain what he needs.

**Description:** A balding, whipcord-thin man with deep-set eyes, Theumiel looks malnourished but keeps his body stronger than it looks with Life magic. He is pale from too long spent in the Shadow and does not have a Chantry. His nimbus gives the impression that shadows around him are hungry, predatory, and restrained: feral things that would devour their sources but for the will of the archmage.

**Storytelling Hints:** As Theumiel puts it, the lies of the Abyss are sometimes preferable to the truth. He is searching for a nature of spirits that is closer to what he wants — a Shadow of stable courts, with spirits of all ranks taking in Essence equally rather than continuing to consume one another. His methods involve summoning Abyssal Intruders that pervert the Shadow or replace spirits out of

the Abyss and setting them loose on areas of the Shadow, observing the results as they spread. He is always interested in mages who have encountered Spirit-based intruders, and in opposing those Exarchs that reinforce the Darwinian status quo.

Gnosis 8, Spirit 7

## *Bodhisattva: Aaliyah*

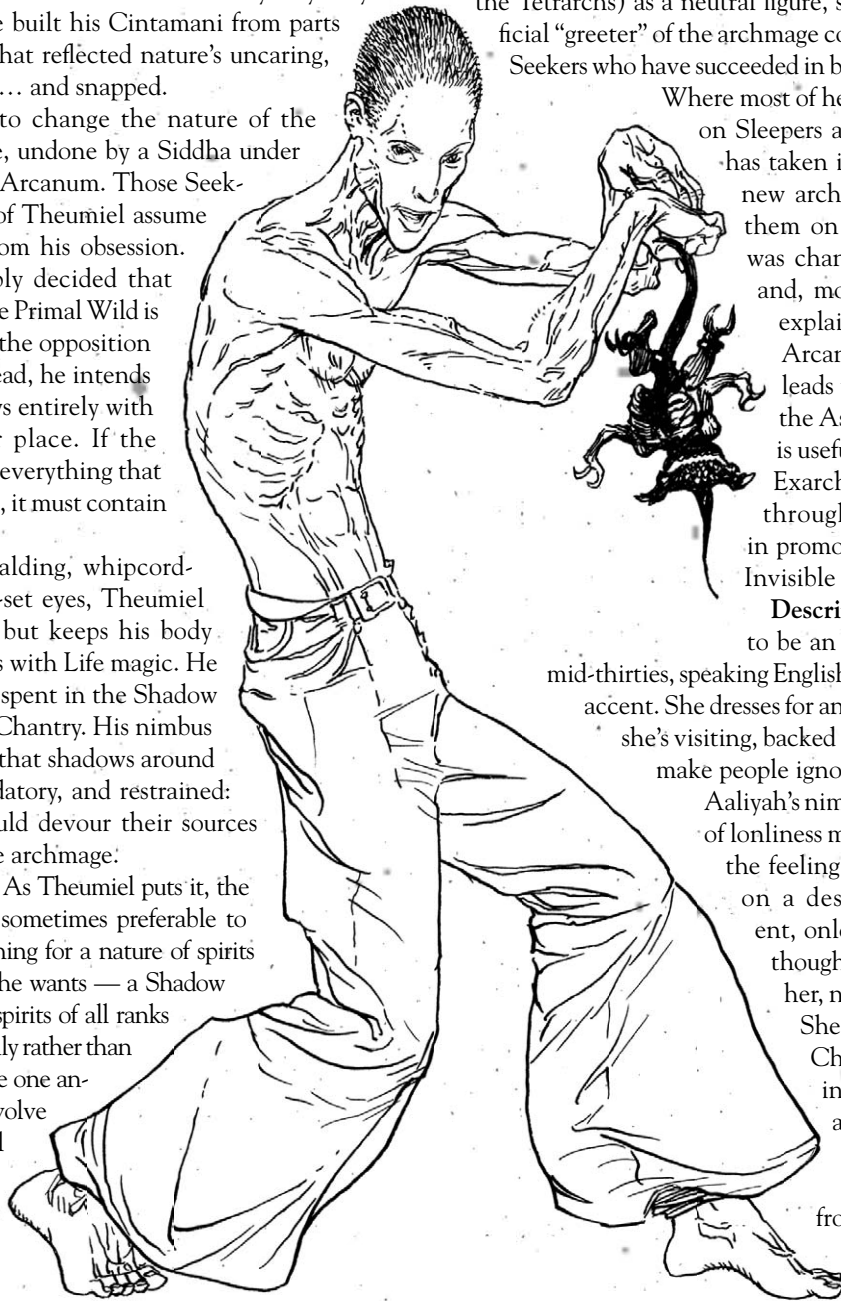
**Quote:** Welcome and congratulations. You succeeded in your quest. Now, there are some things you need to know.

**Background:** Every society, even one as small as the Seekers, has members who go against the accepted way of doing things. The Bodhisattva archmaster of Mind and Space known as Aaliyah is the exception to the isolationism of Seekers, working tirelessly to forge ties between rival and mutually-hostile groups. Tolerated by all ententes (even the Tetrarchs) as a neutral figure, she serves as the unofficial "greeter" of the archmage community to returning Seekers who have succeeded in breaking the Threshold.

Where most of her entente concentrate on Sleepers and Travelers, Aaliyah has taken it upon herself to help new archmages adjust, console them on the loss of whatever was changed by their Seeking and, most importantly of all, explain the terms of the Pax Arcanum. It is this role that leads to her envied status in the Ascension War; Aaliyah is useful to all sides, even the Exarchs and their servants, through the work she does in promoting peace among the Invisible Masters.

**Description:** Aaliyah appears to be an Arabic woman in her mid-thirties, speaking English with a faint Jordanian accent. She dresses for anonymity in the culture she's visiting, backed up with Mind magic to make people ignore her.

Aaliyah's nimbus is a profound sense of loneliness mixed with intimacy — the feeling of meeting a stranger on a deserted train. If present, onlookers focus on her as though they were alone with her, no matter the situation. She entertains visitors in a Chantry seeded by a ruined caravansara, under a dark-purple sky with no moon but more stars than are visible from Earth.





**Storytelling Hints:** If no entente has already claimed a new archmaster and informed her that they will make the approach themselves (she assumes that the Tetrarchs will always do so), Aaliyah is the first archmage a new Invisible Master meets. In the meeting, she starts by answering any questions the archmage has and then moves on to the subject of the Pax Arcanum. If, afterward, she believes the new Seeker to have goals compatible for a particular entente, she will contact a member of that group to ask them to look in on the newcomer.

Aaliyah prefers not to say why she is so devoted to promoting peace among the archmasters, as she knows her motives would distract from the state of grace her methods afford her. Most rumors (from Invisible Masters who look down on the Bodhisattva philosophy) speculate

that she lost a mentor or suffered personally in a breach of the Pax. Aaliyah tells new archmages that ask that she lost something, same as everyone else, but nothing more; other archmages aren't enemies to her, but she only trusts her allies with her background. Before her Threshold, Aaliyah was a member of an experimental Consilium system that tried to include the interests of Scelesti and Seers before being torn apart by the Seers it invited to participate. When she heard of the Pax for the first time, she knew that maintaining it would be her life's work — more, that once all conflict between the archmages had ceased, the Pax could be extended to Travelers too.

Gnosis 8, Space 8, Mind 7

*Exemplar: Xaphan*

**Quote:** Tell me, *enfente*, what brings you to me? Tell me what you regret, what you wish had gone differently, and the mysteries may yet provide.

**Background:** In Assemblies all over America, when the subject turns to the limits of Time magic, the name "Xaphan" is

whispered. An Exemplar of the Free Council, Xaphan will risk the Pax for members of his order in exchange for Quintessence, but his agenda is not one of simple altruism. Xaphan suffered a Paradox while experimenting with the Practice of Dominions; he now encourages Travelers to ask him for miracles in order to use them as agents and increase the number of Quintessences he is exposed to. One day, he hopes to find the means to repair the damage he's done to himself.

Xaphan suffered a Havoc Paradox while attempting to summon his own past self into the present to form the basis of an Ochema. His timeline shattered and collected into the "present." Now at least five versions of Xaphan exist, each trapped at a different age, inhabiting his Chantry. As time since the Paradox has gone on, Xaphan has begun to lose his grip on which of his selves is the original thanks to great swathes of personal history being invalidated by the summoning into the present.

**Description:** All versions of Xaphan are Hispanic males with golden-brown eyes and feathery black hair, dressed simply in loose cotton clothes. He ranges in age from fifteen to ninety, but usually hides his condition by only allowing visitors to see one version of himself. His nimbus, common to all versions, is a strong sense of almost *déjà vu* — onlookers don't get the impression that they have undertaken the same actions before, but rather the unsettling notion that they have experienced events before in subtly different ways.

Xaphan's Chantry, which he calls "Nowhere," resembles a deserted Spanish-Colonial town inhabited only by strange peacock-like birds. It is seeded from a settlement on the Río Grande, the doorway hidden by being shifted a constant five minutes into the future. Mages capable of casting Temporal Stutter who know where and when to aim can enter. Xaphan encourages visitors by leaving hints of the entry method in Libertine Lorehouses throughout the southern United States and Mexico.

**Storytelling Hints:** Xaphan is desperate to put his personal history back together. Thanks to his summoning gone wrong, the Fallen World's history only includes him up to the age of fifteen. He has used his knowledge of America's Assemblies — which now don't remember him — to carefully plant rumors of his existence along with a reputation for consenting to undo mistakes. If a Traveler does bring him a Quintessence that could be used to undo Xaphan's Paradox instead, that individual will find themselves swiftly betrayed, compensated, and left without whatever tragedy struck them undone.

Gnosis 8, Time 8, Fate 6

*Siddha: Kadmon*

**Quote:** Life is not a single state. We Seekers all know this — it is a process of interaction. It is not enough to create an organism, but one must create that organisms' environment as well. In the beginning was the Word, after all.

**Background:** Kadmon the Gardener is known among Seekers as one of the foremost experts in the Life Arcanum,

among the most powerful non-Ascended beings in the Tapestry. Reclusive even for an Invisible Master, he emerges from his Chantry to gather Quintessence and specimens. Long since immortal, he has been putting his plan for the Ascension War in motion for just under a hundred years.

Kadmon intends to breed the Quiescence out of humanity.

As the archmage sees it, an organism takes on the qualities of its environment. Humans are magically blind because they are born and live in the Fallen World, exposed to the corrosive influence of the Exarchs and the lies of the Abyss. In order to raise a new humanity, then, a new world is needed. One built within his Chantry.

**Description:** Kadmon's physical form, enhanced by Imperial magic, is a short, powerful man of mixed Native American and Hispanic heritage. He is physically superhuman with strength, speed and fitness developed in line with his Gnosis; he regenerates wounds and does not age. Kadmon's nimbus is *fertility* — organisms around him appear ripe or glow with the first signs of pregnancy, and even inanimate objects seem poised ready to transform. His Chantry is a paradise, a jungle-garden made up of specimens taken from a hundred biomes and adjusted to survive together in perfect harmony. The Seed is a cloud forest in his native El Salvador.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Garden is nearly ready, just requiring a few finishing touches. Kadmon is currently working on developing his archmastery of Prime to the point that he can incorporate a Hallow into his Garden. Once that's done, he intends to introduce human life, guiding a society of humans that have never known the Fallen World in the hope that they will become Sleepwalkers. Unfortunately, he has come to the conclusion that creating humans magically won't be sufficient — there would still be some doubt as to whether his population were actually human. Reluctantly, he has decided to instead take volunteers who will have most of their memories erased; he doesn't expect the first generation to be successful, but with enough careful adjustment, their children and grandchildren might satisfy him.

Once that's done, however, his plans take a darker turn. When the children of the Garden come of age, Kadmon intends to test their resistance to Quiescence by sending them back to the Fallen World. Will they Awaken? And if he succeeds, will he attempt to replace the greater population of humanity with his fosterlings?

Gnosis 9, Life 9, Spirit 6, Prime 7

### *Tetrarch: Idola*

**Quote:** *You think you have secrets left to keep? I've seen you. And there's something you can do for me.*

**Background:** Climbing swiftly through the Iron Pyramid of the Seers thanks to determination, ruthlessness born of jealousy and the favor of the Exarchs, Idola blackmailed and assassinated her way to the penultimate station in the Ministry of Panopticon. Commanding all Panoptic Seers in the Eastern United States as their Tetrarch, Idola was

allowed to undergo the Threshold Seeking by The Eye, the Iron Seal of Space and the Ministry's patron.

Idola, though, is not satisfied. She chafes at her subservience to the Minister, resenting the periodic summons to the Ministerial Tyrannate. She has dozens of Pylons at her command, a storehouse of Artifacts created by her predecessors and permission to enter certain parts of Pandemonium, but she is still not mistress of her own destiny. She has begun ranging further and further from the Thrones in the Supernal, using her new command of magic to look for potential allies of convenience in the Fallen. Perhaps she will be content once the Minister has been unseated and she sits on the fourfold pillar. Perhaps.

**Description:** Idola is American, of Japanese heritage and is young enough as an archmaster to still look her physical age of 46. She wears designer clothing chosen for cues of interpersonal dominance — suits and formal gowns — and shaves her head to emphasize her bone structure and throw underlings off balance. Her nimbus gives the feeling that those sensing it are being watched, and the impression that anyone looking at the person feeling the nimbus is jealous of them.

She does not possess a Chantry, instead being assigned a cell within the Tyrannate of Panopticon when her duties to the Eye require Imperial magic without Paradox. The Tyrannate resembles a classical panopticon — cell-like rooms arranged opening out into the interior of a cylinder with a four-sided rotating pillar in the very centre, holding up the Minister's throne which is bathed in the light of the Eye's gaze from the Supernal Realms above. Idola's Sanctum contains a private Iris to the Tyrannate made by the Minister.

**Storytelling Hints:** Idola did not need to be told to look at other archmasters not as factions but as potential allies and rivals. She is a realist; she knows that she can't replace the Minister by herself and is looking for allies in her goals. Where she can't make a deal for a Quintessence or other service, she resorts to the tried and tested methods of blackmail. She rationalizes her deals with outsiders as being in the service of the Exarchs; surely, she thinks, the Eye knows what she intends and would stop her if he disapproved. Besides, knowing her potential future enemies as allies now gives her insight into their methods. Far from stopping her, the Eye has granted Idola an Artifact mask that uses the Practice of Entities to see through any representation of the human eye in the Fallen World without the need for sympathy or a scrying window. Idola uses it to maintain her grip on the Pylons reporting to her and to guard against treachery from the Tetrarchs of other Ministries she serves alongside.

Gnosis 7, Space 6

### *Ascended Archmasters*

Some rare archmasters do achieve the Final Key, Ascending to the Supernal Realms permanently. These Invisible Masters may not be able to visit the Fallen World bodily any more — many are said to be merged with their Cintamani or Chantry — but

they can still send Ochemata and other proxies to converse with archmages still Seeking, to whom they are a source of inspiration and a hope of eventual Ascension of their own.

### *The Corpus Author*

**Quote:** *Magic is alive.*

**Background:** In an entente filled with Magisters of the Silver Ladder, the most famous Exemplar in Pentacle history was a Mystagogue. In the 13th century, she overcame the prejudices of her society and the Quiescence to become a scholar and a mage. When she was a Master, she overcame the fractious, disorganized nature of the European Mysterium of the time to codify their core beliefs. When she broke the Threshold, she revolutionized her order. Every Mystagogue knows of her — initiates of the order read the *Corpus Mysteriorum*, the Grimoire and manifesto of the modern Mysterium that she penned, and speculate about the Author. To keep the Pax, she has erased most traces of her life from history. Even her Shadow Name has been abandoned in favor of the title her order has bestowed. Nine hundred years later, she continues to watch over them.

**Description:** When the Author sends an avatar to meet with other Exemplars of the Mysterium, she is disarmingly normal in outward appearance, adopting the physical form of a female scholar of the other's native culture. The underlying symbolism of her Ochema is of syncretism and study mixed with her nimbus; ever-changing fractal patterns, like High Speech runes that are constantly rewriting themselves and contain ever-smaller runes.

#### **Storytelling Hints:**

The Author still takes an interest in her order, but thanks to the Pax must now do so in secret. Her avatars plant grimoires and Artifacts for Mystagogues to find, and she enlists not-yet-Ascended Exemplars in countering efforts by the Exarchs to eliminate the Mysterium. She refuses to discuss Ascension — believing firmly that like the Awakening and Threshold, the Final Key is for mages to experience on their own — and consciously takes a back seat in the entente in favor of lending assistance and encouragement when she can. She achieved her goal in teaching the principles of dynamic magic to the Mysterium, enshrining the wisdom that magic is a living, changing force among the order's core philosophies. As an archmage to a Traveler, she now serves as inspiration and mentor to Seekers, one more step removed up the ladder.

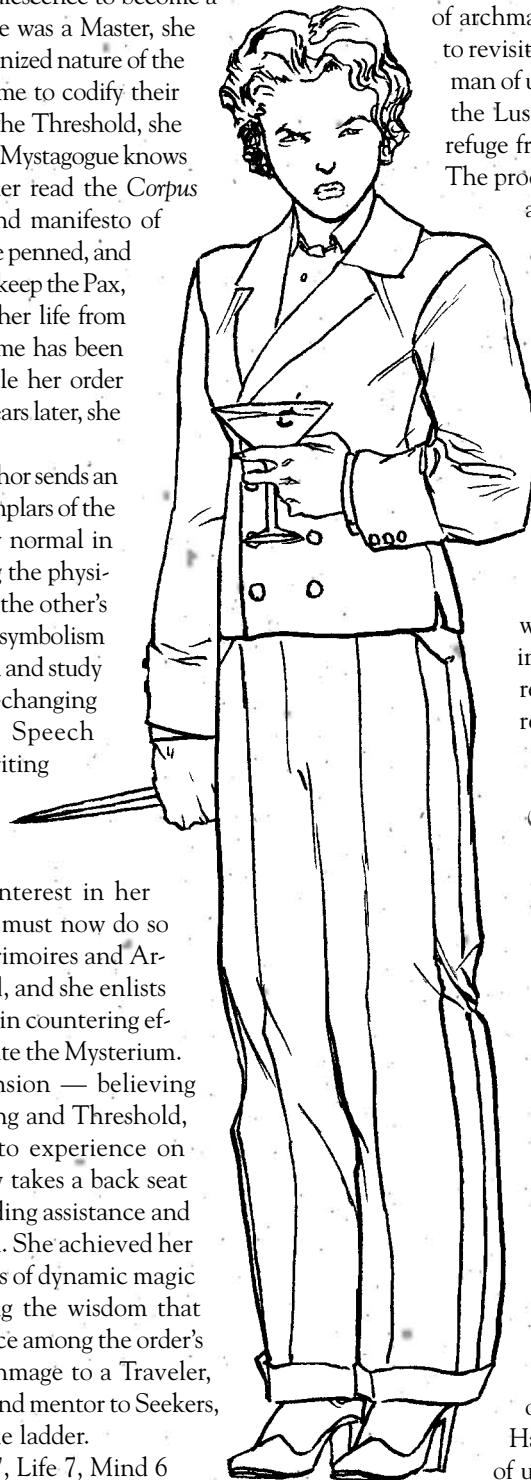
Gnosis 9, Prime 9, Forces 7, Life 7, Mind 6

### *The Oracles?*

No archmage has knowingly met the Oracles in the Supernal Realms. The Five Kings of Atlantis are conspicuous by their absence. Seekers have navigated to the Watchtowers in search of the Oracles, asked, pleaded, and demanded that the remaining gods tell them where they have gone, and hunted through the Supernal to no avail. The Oracles are gone and only their Watchtowers remain.

The Watchtowers have been examined by hundreds of archmages throughout history making pilgrimages to revisit their Awakening. Each appears to be a Talisman of unknown owner, merged with and generating the Lustrum in which it sits, so that it serves as a refuge from being absorbed by the Supernal Realm. The process by which they Awaken new mages from across the Abyss is unknown, but is taken by Siddha as evidence for the existence of the Practice of Assumption. Curiously, the Watchtowers *move*; they are never found in the same Lustrum twice, but have also never been seen mid-translocation.

As for the Oracles, the Bodhisattva known as Guanyin believes he has an answer to the riddle. If every action in the Supernal changes the Phenomenal World, and if the Exarchs by their vain presence have made a prison of the universe, then the truly compassionate course would be to remove oneself. The Oracles are in deep seclusion as they are wise enough to realize the folly of the Ascension War, only to return when all mages follow their example.



### *The Abyss*

The Abyss is not some empty void, but contains a multitude of broken worlds. Twisted, broken mockeries of reality made of lies spawn whole ecologies of lesser Abyssal entities, each a lie of itself but contributing to the whole. Travelers suffer Manifestation Paradoxes and assume that the intruders they allow access, terrible as they are, are the worst the Abyss has to offer. Seekers know better.

### *Greater Abyssal Entities*

The greatest Abyssal entities are entire worlds, made up of hundreds of lesser beings. Where lesser Abyssal intruders are individual aspects of reality gone wrong — languages that cause madness, corruptions of flesh, false laws of mathematics and twisted Hallows — a greater Abyssal is a conglomerate of untold numbers of its lesser cousins, a world



perverted by all the lesser intruders contained within it. The collective entities are Rank 8 or 9 spirits, but are almost always dealt at the abstract level due to lacking anything resembling a human consciousness. Lesser intruders may only be parts of the whole, but at least a minority of them can hold a conversation, however insane.

### *Qliphoth*

Tragic reminders of the risks of archmastery, the Qliphoth are a perversion of the Golden Road created when an aspirant is trapped in the Abyss during the Threshold, or when an archmage suffers the very worst form of Manifestation Paradox while attempting to create a sub-soul, destroying their Road in the process.

Outwardly, a Qliphoth might be mistaken for one of the Mad, or for a Sleeper possessed by a being from the Shadow. They stumble around the realms of the Fallen World, not truly seeing their surroundings but reacting to terrible threats that aren't there as though gripped in hallucination. Under Mage Sight they appear to be humanoid voids drawing all energies toward them, and give Travelers who scrutinize them a sick feeling like an incoming Paradox.

A Qliphoth has an internal world, just as an archmaster has a Road, but it is a thing of the Abyss. Just as lesser Abyssal entities infect their greater brethren, the Qliphoth's Road has become a breeding ground and incubator for intruders. The remnant of the mage that became the Qliphoth is trapped in a world resembling his location but twisted by every intruder infecting him while he suffers endless Paradoxes, is warped beyond recognition by Branding, and is driven insane by Bedlam. The intruders may reach out of the Qliphoth with their Numina as though they were present, but that isn't the main problem.

The main problem is that the Qliphoth's tortured internal world is infectious.

Mages and archmages causing Paradoxes within sensory range of a Qliphoth cannot accept resistant wounds, but they do not suffer the usual Paradox. Instead, their soul is brought into resonance with the Qliphoth, so that reality for them begins to be overlaid with the devastated world the Qliphoth experiences. Sleepers who invoke Disbelief within range are absorbed in the same way.

Any spell cast by someone absorbed by a Qliphoth automatically causes a Paradox that is applied to the Qliphoth itself as well as the caster — casters may choose to absorb paradoxes as wounds once they're already in, but the Qliphoth itself never will. Archmasters can't use Imperial Practices inside the Qliphoth but are free to escape to their Roads as normal, which breaks the creature's hold over them. Travelers and Sleepers are trapped unless the Qliphoth is killed or its soul destroyed. Unfortunately, like an archmaster, Qliphoth are immune to having their soul stolen and may be forced by the Intruders within them to move between the realms of the Fallen world like an archmaster walking the Road. They can only be properly killed by those infected. Rescuing infected

friends therefore becomes a task of allowing oneself to be infected, hunting down the twisted wretch at the heart of the Qliphoth while evading the Intruders and putting him out of his misery before the Paradoxes build up so much they threaten the life of the rescuer.

Like the Qliphoth itself, infected mages and Sleepers appear to be imagining the changes to reality they are experiencing. Mages who examine colleagues who have been absorbed find they appear to be suffering from Bedlam, giving the Qliphoth itself time to escape. No amount of distance between the Qliphoth and its victims will break the connection, though some archmages of Death theorize that destroying and rebuilding a victim's soul may be a cure.

### *The Aeons*

At the very edge of the Anima Mundi, where the Astral Realms meet the Abyss, sit the citadels of the Aeons. Part Supernal God, part conceptual entity, the Aeons represent magic in the Fallen World, ambassadors from the Supernal to the Phenomenal. Every spell cast within the bounds of the Abyss is their breath, and every mage their responsibility.

There are ten Aeons, but one encapsulates both Space and Mind while the tenth — the Old Man of the Hollow — speaks for the Abyss. Unlike the Supernal gods, the Aeons are formed by belief. Like any other Astral beings, they change over time to reflect the place of their concept in the world. Because their concepts are so fundamental, the Aeons' forms are classical, almost ancient, but epoch-defining changes to an Arcanum (such as those archmasters are capable of) affect the associated Aeon. Occasionally, archmages questing in far flung realms of the Fallen world encounter beings who claim to have once been Aeons before being supplanted. A vocal minority of the Arcanum-spirits pretend to an existence before they assumed their position, which they characterize as being imprisoned on the edge of the Abyss. They do not agree, however, on whether they were Supernal gods or Astral beings before taking up their posts.

The Siddha are especially appreciative of the Aeons as representations of magic, consulting them whenever possible, but as they exist (just) within Fallen reality, Travelers make pilgrimages to them too. Each Aeon is an Astral spirit of Rank 8, with their Arcanum instead of Influences. An Aeon is capable of instantly casting any spell of its Arcanum up to eight dots and is able to grant petitioners a measure of power in return for grueling tribute; the touch of an Aeon suppresses one Willpower dot until the boon is used but allows a single spell of the Arcanum to be cast at one dot higher proficiency than the mage possesses, or grants the use of a single Imperial Dispellation. Use of the boon to cast Imperial spells still requires Mana and Quintessence but not Arcane Experience, so Masters who receive it may only use it to cast spells with the Imperial Spell Factors unless an archmage informs them of a Quintessence for their spell.

## Medraut

**Quote:** *All kingdoms fall from within.*

**Background:** Medraut once had a different form and a different name. In the years following Rome's withdrawal from Britain, a Silver Ladder archmaster of Fate decided to forge a perfect human society by widescale manipulation of Destiny. It worked for a time, but fell as all destinies do to its Bane and was later removed from the timeline by furious Exarchs. The archmaster has long since Ascended, the kingdom he built now only a romantic legend, but Medraut — Mordred — has kept the name. The Aeon of Fate, Medraut was reshaped from his previous incarnation as the punishing and inhuman triple Furies into the image of the returning, avenging son, the downfall of good intentions caused by the corruption within.

**Description:** Medraut appears as a dark-haired man in rusted metal armor, sitting on a yew bench in a citadel carved from a colossal fallen tree.

**Storytelling Hints:** Medraut is one of the more approachable Aeons, and one who is found in places other than he is supposed to be — although he claims to be imprisoned in his citadel on the Astral's edge, he has been encountered throughout the Astral Realms and sometimes further. Some of the Aeons are hostile to willworkers or simply alien, but Medraut is the champion of those who sow the seeds of their own destruction and he is fond (some would say *too* fond for comfort) of the Awakened. There is, however, a long way between being approachable and being welcoming.

Medraut is personally off-putting and smug. He smiles and gives barbed lectures to visitors, implying he knows things about their future that will cause them pain but are their own fault. Although he professes his approval for the Guardians of the Veil, some of whom worship him in return as symbol of the end of all kings, Exemplars of the order are reluctant to trust him — to them, Medraut is too closely aligned to the Exarchs of Fate, who share his entropic vision of the Fallen World. Siddha point out that the Exarchs are, in their own way, Kings, as is Medraut himself in his own way. It would be in the Aeon's nature, after all, to plant the seed of his own destruction and replacement.

**Rank 8**

## The Exarchs

In their Cintamani Palaces sit the Exarchs on their stolen thrones, rulers of the Supernal Realms. That rule is not undisputed, but even the most optimistic archmaster with heavenly revolution on her mind will admit that the Exarchs are almost completely victorious. Entering their Palaces is suicide; the outer Exarchates are patrolled by Ochemata of lesser Exarchs and powerful enslaved gods. Even if an archmaster could breach their defenses, the

Ascended tyrants are too numerous and too powerful to be fought directly. The best an archmaster can hope for is to spoil their plans, hold on to the last inch of freedom, and pray that it's enough to forestall the final transformation of the world into the Black Iron Prison. Fortunately, the Exarchs are either unwilling or unable to leave their thrones, never being seen in person. Unfortunately, they command Tetrarchs and create Ochemata to aggressively promote their agenda throughout the Tapestry, goad rival archmasters into breaking the Pax so as to justify reprisal, assassinate rebellious gods, and keep the people of the Fallen World mired in miserable spiritual infancy.

The Exarchs have been Ascended for so long, and Atlantis is so far Fallen from reality as the Sleepers know it, that their identities have now been virtually erased. The symbols making up their Lustrums (and therefore the symbols they have become) are those of control and enslavement of the Fallen World. Each Exarch is partially merged with the Lustrum, more Supernal metaphor than human. Their original forms, names, beliefs and histories are gone, lost with the Fall — even their genders have been burned away.

Tetrarchs speak of endless ranks of Exarchs; those that climbed the star ladder in Atlantis and all those Tetrarchs who have Ascended since, organized into ten choirs united behind the ten Iron Seals. Each Seal is a mighty Exarch representing the control and subjugation of humanity through the action of an Arcanum, commanding lesser Exarchs who have more specific duties. The Ministries of the Seers of the Throne are devoted to the worship of individual Iron Seals; the Hegemony, for example, is ultimately commanded by The Unity, the chief Exarch of Mind.

Heretical Seers and brazen Aswadim speak of an eleventh Iron Seal: The Gate. The Gate was the Exarch who bargained with or summoned the Abyss into being, or prevented it from devastating the Supernal as it did the Fallen. Some associate her with the Old Man of the Hollow, or claim that he was the first Aswadim, abandoning her place ruling the Supernal to explore the limitless potentials of the Abyss.

Some Alienated claim that the Exarchs were never human at all, or that the Throne Cintamani are hollow edifices. Deniers of the Atlantean mythos, they point to the principle of "as below, so above" to theorize that humanity's collective subconscious desire for control and order has produced the phenomena known as "the Exarchs." Facing the Thrones in the Supernal is a waste of time; by successfully eliminating those poisonous ideologies from the Fallen world, the Supernal will be freed.

## The Shadow of the Chancellor

**Quote:** *Ask yourself this — what will you get in return?*

**Background:** The Chancellor is the Iron Seal of Matter, patron of Mammon, Pantechicon and a dozen or more smaller Ministries of Seers. She is the queen

of numbers and the king of measures. The Chancellor encourages human beings to think of their world and one another as commodities, teaches them to dehumanize those they hurt in the pursuit of profit, and tells them to murder one another for useless lumps of carbon or soft metal.

The Chancellor's Ochemata are hard at work in corners of the Tapestry Tetrarchs or lesser Seers would find hard to reach. Human society is now so pleasing to the Exarch that he doesn't need to control every boardroom or fiscal policy; a light touch by Seers here and there is all that is needed. She reserves her Ochemata for more urgent concerns, such as suppressing attempts by archmages to shift the culture away. This particular Ochema has been dispatched to counter a Bodhisattva who is attempting to promote the giving of aid to poorer regions of the world out of human compassion.

**Description:** The Ochema appears as a clash of symbols, the onlooker's personal conception of "wealth" mixed with power. The Ochemata of Exarchs always have a hint of control or enslavement in their appearance, contributed by their master's nimbus. When looking at the Shadow of the Chancellor, for example, an Obrimos might see an angel covered in golden scales, shackled by black iron manacles.

**Storytelling Hints:** To counter the archmage's efforts, the Ochema has been ordered to take control of the Temenos realm of charity and poison the concept in the human collective soul by linking it to notions of investment — the weak are only worth helping in return for something. To reinforce the cultural shift, it will then enter the material world, cause an international aid crisis and replace media figures in order to manipulate any international response, emphasizing prioritization of the contractors involved and the opportunity for corporations in the aid-giving states to take control of local companies. If it requires any assistance, it is ordered to commandeer any Mammon Seers needed. If the archmage persists in breaking the Pax, the Ochema is to track him down and assassinate the troublemaker.

Rank 6, Matter 6, Mind 6

## *The Old Ones*

The Supernal gods are the mightiest of the higher realms' native inhabitants, the equivalents of the mightiest beings of the Shadow and Astral. Lesser natives may be summoned by mages and are divided by which of a Realm's Ruling Arcana they are manifestations of, but the true gods defy such pigeonholing. Each is a living symbol of magic, a sentient aspect of the Arcana. Alienated and Siddha both deal with the gods extensively — the Alienated as allies and servants and the Siddha as students.

The Supernal Realms may have been tamed and made humanocentric by the Exarchs, but the Gods are

still inhuman in their outlook. They hold petitioners to strange standards of behavior and enforce forgotten laws with iron-clad determination. A visiting archmage must quickly determine the rules for an encounter before the god becomes angry. If successfully bargained with, however, they make for potent allies — those who remain in the Supernal Realms were strong or cunning enough to escape the Exarchs' titanomachy, while those who were cast out hunger for Mana and revenge.

Like many other high rank spirits, the Supernal gods are less individual creatures and more living, self aware *places*; smaller natives of the realms take distinct forms, but when a seeking archmage encounters a true god it manifests as the Lustrum the encounter takes place within.

## *The Hunter in Green*

**Quote:** *Small / Run / Prey / Now*

**Background:** The Hunter stalks the Supernal, unconcerned by the lives of humans. A living symbol of predatory nature, the Exarchs of the Primal Wild do not wish to bind it and risk damaging Sleepers' fear of the wild places, so the Hunter has its freedom as long as it ranges away from the Thrones. It is the glimpsed eyes in the undergrowth, the race memory that leads children to fear monsters under the bed or in the closet. Near you, where you can't see, a monster waits to pounce.

**Description:** The Hunter manifests as a Lustrum of the Primal Wild thick with undergrowth or other terrain from which a surprise attack can be launched. It has no physical form beyond the occasional glimpse of watching yellow eyes and the glint of light on claws too large and wicked to be part of any worldly animal. A feeling of supernatural dread accompanies the manifestation. The Beast-God can communicate, but does so by a telepathic hail of images and symbols relating to its purpose.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Hunter hunts anything that does not present itself as a fellow predator. It can be temporarily cowed (enough to escape to a different Lustrum) by confrontation: for example, a successful archmage convincing it that she is too dangerous to attack. Prey symbols are stalked until terrified and then consumed — this doesn't destroy Beasts whose nature is to represent Prey, but is fatal to mages interloping in the Primal Wild.

Rank 7

## *The Mother of Fire*

**Quote:** *I don't know why, but I've never felt full.*

**Background:** In ancient times, the Mother of Fire was a God of the Aether, symbol of fire's consuming nature and the burning blood of the earth. She demanded human sacrifice from the primitive civilizations on other shores and earned the enmity of the Dragon's Talons. The Atlantean mages forced her out of the Supernal, into one of her volcanoes, and sealed it off with powerful spells. To ensure she could not escape, they separated her consciousness from the greater

portion of her power and bound it into a human soul, to reincarnate helplessly down the years.

**Description:** The Mother of Fire appears to be a normal human at first glance; in her modern incarnation, she is a lawyer living and working in Berlin. Closer examination of her soul reveals a store of locked-off spiritual energy, as though she were possessed by a dormant spirit, and careful questioning will reveal that she has always felt as though there was a void inside her, thinking of herself as a missing piece of something much greater. She has an unusually fast metabolism, burning through food such that she doesn't gain weight easily but is constantly hungry. The hunger is related to her dormant powers and Thaumavoric nature. It can only be sated by Mana, which she has no ability of her own to absorb.

**Storytelling Hints:** The ancients sealed the Mother's Supernal power away within a dormant volcano, the only place to contain the raging Forces of her nature. Unlocking the spiritual potential of her modern incarnation leads to the return of her true memories as a Supernal god, but the Fallen World has been changed many times since she was Bound and she can no longer recall which volcano her proper form lies within.

If her binding is somehow tracked to Mauna Kea in Hawaii, it would be possible for an archmaster of Forces to reunite the two halves of her nature and break the bindings. Releasing a god of her power onto the Fallen World would be catastrophic, and not only for the Hawaiian Islands. The united god would initially be starving and only able to fill its hunger for Mana by consuming patterns with magma.

Rank 8

### *The Old Gods of Thistle*

**Quote:** *Do you wish to join our tale?*

**Background:** Before the Fall, the gods of Arcadia were capricious and powerful. Expressions of the progression of events in Time through story given limits by Fated oaths, they defined themselves by the oaths they swore — to other Gods, to concepts, to aspects of Fallen reality and to individuals. By the rights afforded to them in ancient promises, they entered the material world to search for audiences and actors in their mad plays.

Arcadia is now tamed, the modern Fae encountered by mages mostly expressions of the meaning of Time and Fate to humans, but somehow the Old Gods of Thistle keep coming. They are of Arcadia, the realm of Time, and mere inconveniences like their home no longer existing and the creation of the Abyss won't stop them from exercising their right to take playthings from the world. The nature of their origin is a hotly-contested front in the Ascension War — the Dhatu they hail from are variously in the distant past before the Fall, the far future after humanity has gone the way of the Dragons, an alternate timeline in which the Exarchs never conquered Arcadia or sometimes multiple options at once.

**Description:** The Old Gods of Thistle are living stories,

each a triple-form of a Lustrum in their strange version of the Supernal, a narrative taking place within that Lustrum and a "main character" in that narrative which can cross into Fallen reality to kidnap humans according to the god's whim. Archmages who attempt to stop them report that their method of travel into Arcadia resembles a communal version of an archmaster's road — a twisting labyrinth of thorns that crosses the Abyss and the laws of Time.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Arcadia that the Old Gods of Thistle inhabit is too far away from the human experience to be navigated to by an archmaster in the Supernal, if indeed it is even in the Arcadia the archmasters experience at all. The Old Gods have no knowledge of the Fall or of the Watchtower of Lunargent Thorn, and don't seem interested in taking mages as prey — only Sleepers will do. An archmaster who follows them through their labyrinth finds that it is damaging to the soul as it crosses the Abyss, but that he can return to his Road as normal. For beings of Arcadia, the Old Gods of Thistle have surprisingly little command of Time — narrative makes the core of their being, but it is through Fate that they express themselves. A canny archmaster can counter or cancel the oaths they rely on with Fate magic.

Rank 7

### *Other Beings*

The Fallen World contains planes other than the material; archmasters ignore the residents of those places at their peril. Just as with the Supernal gods and Greater Abyssals, the most potent inhabitants of the Shadow and Underworld are places and forces of "nature" rather than individuals, served by ranks of lesser entities.

### *Gods of Shadow*

The Shadow is mostly continuous with the material world, but there are deeper areas a dedicated explorer can find in which the geography of Earth falls away and the Gods of Shadow hold court. Only spirits of planet-wide phenomena can accumulate enough power to be truly called a god — the spirits of nations and oceans, thunder and drought are the smallest and least powerful gods (rank 6), while the animal totems — the spirits of entire species and the werewolf tribal totems — are rank 7. Luna and her brother Helios are rank 8, the most powerful Shadow spirits encountered. If it existed, the spirit of the entire Earth would be rank 9, but no archmage has encountered Gaia and lived to tell the tale.

### *Lords of the Underworld*

In the very deepest parts of the Underworld, there are no ghosts. Instead, these strange places are inhabited by the beings that archmages call the *Cthonians*, the never-living Gods of the Dead. Distinct from the Shades of Stygia as spirits are from the Beasts of the Primal Wild, Cthonians take the forms of decay, grief and horror. The least powerful



Cthonians are rank 1 to 6 beings with powers over Death. The greatest, known to scholars of the Underworld as the *Deathlords*, are Fallen Gods of Death, rank 7 or 8 entities each representing a different form of dying. Some Alienated and Siddha speculate that they may actually be gods from Stygia, exiled and Bound into the Underworld during the Fall.

### *Agents of the Principle*

There is a thought experiment posed by certain Bodhisattvas — if souls are trapped within the Fallen World by the Abyss, then how does the human population continue to steadily increase? What about when mages destroy souls?

The cosmology of the orders describes souls emerging from the Supernal, but this process has never been witnessed within the Lustrums visited by archmages.

On very rare occasions, strange entities superficially resembling Angels of the Aether but not responding to Prime or Forces magic have been witnessed at work in the Fallen World. When they can be convinced to speak, they claim to be the servants of something called “The Principle” and to be concerned with the creation of new human souls. The ententes have many theories of these beings’ origin, some Alienated regarding them as Aetheric counterparts to the Old Gods of Thistle and the Bodhisattvas claiming that they hail from a third reality “above” the Supernal. No one knows for sure.



# CHAPTER FOUR: ASCENSION

*This is how to contemplate our conditioned existence in this fleeting world: Like a tiny drop of dew, or a bubble floating in a stream; Like a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, Or a flickering lamp, an illusion, a phantom, or a dream.*

—The Diamond Sutra

Every Pentacle mage and Seer understands that Ascension involves permanently dwelling within the Supernal Realms. Beyond that, they dispute every detail. Archmages and more learned Travelers know the information below.

**Ascension grants the ability to permanently dwell within the Supernal World.** Seekers visit the Supernal for short periods of time, but they must return to the Fallen World to hold on to their souls and personal identities. The Ascended may inhabit the Supernal for as long as they wish. They become living symbols, natives of the highest planes of existence.

**Ascension affects mind, body and soul.** Every part of a mage Ascends. Some Ascensions appear to leave bodies but these are actually *Sariras*: discarded Resonance, condensed into physical form. *Sariras* may be identified by their unusual characteristics such as hearts of glass and pearl-like objects embedded in the flesh. Besides the body, Ascension withdraws aspects of the soul or mind that were divorced from the mage, including magically duplicated minds and soul stones.

**Ascension grants true immortality.** Only Ascension grants a form of immortality that can never be undone, including agelessness and invulnerability to harm. Ascended beings either suffer by their own free will, or like the True gods of old, were cast down by the Exarchs' combined might. Most Seekers believe the power to overthrow the gods was a property of the Celestial Ladder. Now that it has shattered, the Exarchs can no longer harm Ascended beings.

## Studying Ascensions

When a mage Ascends, remnants of her old life vanish or destiny attracts them to hidden places. In a manifestation of the Sleeping Curse, mundane observers forget about her, construct vague explanations for her absence, or feel a powerful aversion to her memory. They foggily explain she's moved away and accuse her of terrible crimes.

Although the Lie hides evidence that humans can escape it, it isn't thorough. Telling signs, objects and places remain. Awakened minds don't forget Ascensions, and it's still possible to track down evidence hidden by the Lie. Searching for Ascension's remnants reaps Arcane Experience and often uncovers rote spells and items of power.

**Ascension maintains self identity.** The Ascended sometimes send *Ochemata* and pursue interests in the Fallen World, proving that they maintain self-identity. They might possess the power to maintain many authentic selves, or merge with other souls, but they are ultimately still individuals with their own passions and motives. Seers of the Throne often teach that the Ascended dwell within the greater souls of the Exarchs, but that they're completely themselves, existing in harmony with their patrons.

**Ascension is amoral.** The Exarchs proved that moral behavior isn't a prerequisite for Ascension. Some mages build Wisdom because their personal path demands it, but evil also has a place in the Supernal.

## *The Ways of Ascension*

Tasting the Supernal at the apex of a Watchtower drives the desire to return in triumph, but a mage must navigate rumor and myth to find the path. Lesser mages believe that archmages know the way, and they're partly right. Archmasters discover the Golden Road Ascension: the only method they know well enough to pursue from the moment they cross the Threshold. Even so, few Seekers complete the Golden Road. An aspirant wages war against her peers for the right to turn the world into her vehicle for Ascension, but even if she conquers every enemy, the last itself is inherently difficult. It is one thing to move mountains, but quite another to command them to have always *been* moved.

The Golden Road may not be the only way to Ascend, but even archmages only learn of others through myths and secret treatises. Mysterium sages say that sublime knowledge conceals itself from the unworthy, so it may be in Ascension's nature to be the most elusive knowledge of all. Some Guardians of the Veil believe the Ascended deliberately hide the other Final Keys to prevent unworthy sorcerers from defiling the Supernal. Obviously, Ascension lore is a popular subject among the ententes, who pass on myths of the secret ways. Ancient sources speculate that Travelers can Ascend directly through some of these methods, but archmages are predisposed to treat these accounts with skepticism.

## *The Golden Road Ascension*

Ascension through the Golden Road is the only method of which the archmasters possess a sure knowledge. Most identify the Golden Road Ascension with the supreme command of magic. Thus, this path is not only appealing because of reliable knowledge, but because its rites promise ultimate power.

At the end of the Golden Road, an archmage's Cintamani contains its Final Gate. No force in the universe can open the Gate except a Key made from the archmaster's soul — and his soul must truly join Supernal and Fallen Worlds.

A suggested system for Golden Road Ascension can be found in Appendix: Imperium.

## *Joining the Soul to the Cosmos*

In his mind, the Seeker builds a Noumenon: an Imago that describes the union between his soul and the universe. This includes the Seeker's magical and cosmological theories, as well as the myths, sciences and other beliefs that influence his spellcasting.

After crafting the Imago, his efforts truly begin. The archmage shapes the Phenomenal Realms to conform to his

vision to a degree that may only be achieved by transmitting the changes from his Supernal Cintamani. He alters the light of truth; its Fallen shadows obey. The act of directly manipulating the Supernal this way is called Imperium.

## *Imperium*

An archmaster can't begin the Imperium Rites until he prepares the Fallen Realms to receive them. He undertakes a form of Mystery Play where the Tellurian shapes challenges for him to overcome. If he envisions himself as a living saint, he must test his morality. If he wants to impose a truth about the nature of Atlantis, he might have to seek out and destroy contradictory evidence. These quests are not themselves the accomplishments of Imperium, but create sympathetic channels that allow him to proceed. Archmages often employ agents to confront these challenges for them: Travelers and even Sleepers who rarely know their role in the shaping of worlds.

If these quests succeed, the archmage returns to his Cintamani and unleashes his vision through the Imperium Rite. Victorious or not, results might alter history, natural laws and the Phenomenal World's structure. If he accomplishes the Rite, these alterations suit his agenda and bring the Tellurian closer to his soul's truth. Unskillful and failed rites cause catastrophic damage to the Seeker and his universe. Unanticipated changes or apnoia weave strange history, contradictions and rifts, allowing the Abyss to seep in.

Most of the time, the Phenomenal World's inhabitants don't notice these changes, but archmages, Supernal natives and some powerful supernatural beings remember — and they might punish at anyone with the hubris to mutilate reality. Other mages and powerful entities can reverse or interfere with Imperium Rites as well, and may take revenge from the high field of the Supernal.

## *The Key and the Guardian at the Gate*

Once the Seeker completes the Imperium Rite, the Final Key appears in his Cintamani. It's as an object of strong emotional significance — a childhood toy, perhaps, or the first dedicated magical tool he ever made. He can reject the Key if he wishes, stay behind, and accept the universe he made in his image.

If he takes up the Key, the Guardian takes its station before the Final Gate. No Seeker knows what form the Guardian takes, as this stage can only end in death or Ascension. Ascended beings refuse to speak of it, only alluding to its existence, the complete power it possesses over the archmage, and the fact that it demands an ordeal.

Victory opens the Final Gate. The Seeker Ascends.

## *Assumption*

Assumption is the legendary final Practice of the Arcana. Siddha believe it is equivalent to Ascension, and includes the capacity to enthrone oneself in an Arcanum's associated



Supernal Realm. They point to the Arcanum alignments of the great Exarchs as evidence, and posit that they used the Practice to steal their palaces.

To learn Assumption, the archmage must attain the tenth dot of its Arcanum. But adherents of the theory of Ascension through Assumption do not believe merely knowing it is sufficient; the Seeker must cast its spell, and to do that, he earns its Quintessence.

If a Transfiguration Quintessence is as difficult to win as the Imperial Mysteries themselves, the Assumption Quintessence must be harder still. Although the Assumption aspirant doesn't use Imperium Rites to Ascend through the Golden Road, aspirants to Assumption may use it to force reality to create the Quintessence (If you use the Imperium rules in the appendix, this requires the Exaltation of a five dot Omen). Arcane Experience and Mana costs are left for the Storyteller to determine.

Theoretically, it is possible to use the Assumption spell for a purpose other than Ascension, but the effects are as legendary as the concept of Assumption Ascension itself. One school of thought believes that after each casting, the Tellurian adapts to Assumption to make the version the Seeker knows impossible: He must relearn it to cast it again. Another theory says that using Assumption on the Phenomenal World is so Paradoxical that it banishes the caster from reality.

## Divine Union

While most Alienated pursue the Golden Road Ascension, members of the entente believe that a True god enthroned in the Supernal should be able to Ascend loyal followers. Alienated usually concentrate on guiding deities who fell from the Supernal instead, but recognize that the ones who remain above turn cultists away from the Lie of human-centered understanding. In theory, only the most elementary connection to the Supernal should be necessary, so mages of all ability might enjoy this path to Ascension.

The god doesn't demand conventional worship. An Alienated Seeker may found a temple to bring a Fallen god to power through Sleeper belief, but deities who've regained their true power have no need for veneration. Instead of faith, the mage requires a direct channel to the god's Dhatu, so that he may bring his soul into harmony with his patron's. At its apex, the mage becomes the god and vice versa, retaining his own personality as its avatar.

Alienated recognize three possible channels. The first is part of the deity's regalia: an Artifact called an *Astra*. The second is an *Agama*: a grimoire that teaches spells that powered by the deity. The third is a Verge bound to the God's Supernal Dhatu, called a *Mandira*. Like all Supernal Phenomena, divine channels have a tendency to hide themselves in the Phenomenal World. Accounts disagree as to whether Divine Union aspirants need just one channel or must collect more as they achieve harmony with the God.

Once he opens the channel, the mage engages in regular communication with his patron and aligns his behavior to fit the divine archetype. When he completes this process, he Ascends.

The other ententes discourage belief in Divine Union. It's a perfect ruse by which an Abyssal entity or some other toxic spirit might steal a mage's soul. Archmasters have encountered many sorcerers who dealt with gods incautiously. The Old Gods of the Thistle have been known to devour Awakened souls, and use their hollow remnants the way a deep sea fish uses tendrils as a glowing lures. Even when the method might be genuine, some Seekers dislike the idea of mortals putting themselves in divine thrall.

## Exarchial Grace

Seer of the Throne doctrine asserts that true Ascension is granted by the Exarchs alone, and that the gift can be given to a loyal Seer of any rank. Tetrarch archmasters usually believe it... after a fashion. They pursue Golden Road Ascension on the rationale that the Exarchs do not grant Ascension as much as approve it — and that they help Seers who help themselves. Conventional beliefs hold that rising to the rank of Minister allows a mage to Ascend upon death: a proposition Tetrarchs publicly support, but privately dispute. Some Ministers leave Sariras behind, but others depart ordinary corpses. In this case, propaganda claims that the Minister's Exarch creates a new body in the Supernal Realms.

## Final Attainment

Various Legacies speak of a fourth and Final Attainment. A mage who attains it becomes an *Epitome* of her Legacy. More often than not, even the Legacy's founder fails to manifest the fourth Attainment but according to some sorcerers, discovering it makes Ascension possible.

Ascension through the Final Attainment is a notable path in that it apparently doesn't require archmastery. If it follows the patterns Legacies use, it should be available to Masters — but not all Masters.

Legacy scholars possess a rough understanding of the theoretical prerequisites, which in game terms would be a Gnosis of 9 and five dots in the Legacy's primary Arcanum. They disagree as to whether the Final Attainment is common to the Legacy or unique to the individual, but most believe that Gnosis and magical ability alone won't grant it. One further achievement is necessary. Again, the final requirement may be universal or personal. Perfected Adepts whisper that a warrior called the Dragon Manifest hunts anyone searching for its Final Attainment, and Walkers in Mist speak of defeating a living darkness deep within their Mists.

Legends say that the Final Attainment alone does not guarantee Ascension, but makes it possible. The Epitome undertakes a quest to prove herself the living archetype of her Legacy. Only then may she unite with its Supernal principle.

While many of them are Legacy members and even creators, the paltry powers Legacies grant compared to the Imperial Mysteries prevent most archmages from studying them seriously. Exemplars are an exception; some research order-specific Legacies.

### *Kenoma: the Abyssal Ascension*

Aswadim Ascension utilizes the Supernal Realms and on the Golden Road much as other mages do. The Dark Ones do not seek the Supernal Realms, however, but wish to utterly sever themselves from its Truth: a process often called *Kenoma*, or “Emptiness.” Merely traveling to the Abyss is not enough for them; the Void would only destroy or enslave them.

Aswadim Cintamanis are beachheads in the invasion of law and form. Instead of changing the Phenomenal Realm to bring it into harmony with their souls, they destroy the parts of it which bind them to its patterns and sentimental attachments, or injure Creation so severely that it expels the insult into the Abyss.

*Kenoma* workings threaten the Phenomenal Realm by their very nature, so other ententes are quick to respond.

### *Mitrata Ascension*

The Bodhisattva entente embraces extreme idealists who believe that they shouldn’t Ascend until every sapient being (and sometimes *any* being capable of perception and emotion) attains the Final Key as well as members who say it’s virtuous enough to help a finite number progress and that Ascension should be permitted once a Seeker earns a certain amount of virtue. They call archmages who hold the latter view *Mitrati* (singular: *Mitrata*) or “Friends.” A number of Exemplars also follow the *Mitrata* path.

The *Mitrata* aspirant helps other mages move closer to Ascension. Some attempt to Awaken Sleepers as well, believing that when one mage helps another progress along the path, the student’s accomplishments empower the teacher. The greater the advancement, the more merit accrues, until it creates a spiritual “critical mass.” The Fallen World can no longer contain the *Mitrata*’s virtue, so she Ascends.

Sacred texts list and enumerate the value of virtuous works. Awakening a Sleeper produces some merit; inspiring a mage to cross the Threshold generates more. Inspiring another mage’s Ascension is the greatest achievement of all, enough to trigger the *Mitrata*’s Ascension as well.

Like all legendary paths to Ascension, the Storyteller determines whether or not *Mitrata* Ascension

is possible and how it works in play. Some Mitrata use the Imperial Practice of Entities to force Awakenings, but as the Introduction notes, this Wisdom 1 sin never succeeds without a Sleeper's consent and it often produces Banishers.

Most adherents believe that only archmasters Ascend through the Mitrata method. Travelers lack the basic enlightenment necessary to help others. This fact is in as much dispute as anything else about the path, however. Some mages of lesser accomplishment might possess precocious knowledge and vault to Ascension through good work without skill in the Arcana.

## *The Supernal Work*

Mages in every faction and level of accomplishment have heard of Supernal Works: spells that utilize obscure loopholes in the laws on the Tellurian to Ascend their casters. The prospect of bypassing the danger and effort of the Threshold is a persistent temptation to all mages; even Seers of the Throne investigate rumors of a Supernal Work. Though they claim to do it to serve the Throne and destroy a threat, they hunger for a true Ascension spell to propel them ahead of rivals. Archmasters deride rumors of Supernal Works, but investigate them — they're as interested in shortcuts as anyone else.

Supernal Works figure prominently in Ascension folklore. Many famous magical objects are said to be remnants of one Ascension spell or another. The *Corpus Mysteriorum* is supposedly an example; they say the Corpus Author won Ascension by inscribing that grimoire. (Mysterium mages call the theory an insult that implies the Author tricked the universe into Ascending her.) A mage called Aldous supposedly Ascended by using a spell that grafted other souls to his own.

The most convincing accounts imply that every Supernal Work is unique and only Ascends its discoverer. These are not the most *popular* stories, however. Intrigued by the idea that Ascension could be a repeatable process and learned through a standard spell, mages chase rumors of teachable rites. None of these investigations have borne fruit, but they've provided opportunities for deception. Grimoires that promise Ascension destroy souls; Scelesti claim to possess the Final Key, but say they've made "Bodhisattva Vows" to wait until they can share it with worthy disciples.

## *Wisdom Ascension*

Although Ascension is amoral, some mages believe that ethical perfection grants the Final Key. Doctrinaire Silver Ladder mages insist that the path of Wisdom is part of the Lie and want no part of it, but outside their order many Awakened believe. In theory, any mage can do the right thing, use magic cautiously, and control her thoughts to attain a form of sainthood, but no reliable accounts of Wisdom Ascension exist.

## Beyond Ascension

Is Ascension the highest state a mage can aspire to? Most believe so. A smaller number think that if ultimate enlightenment is possible at all, Ascension must be its prerequisite. Some religious mages place the highest realm within the doctrines of their faiths — in the afterlife perhaps, though Awakened culture is biased against believing anything a Sleeper religion has to say about the cosmos. The best evidence they have for a realm beyond the Supernal manifests in beings that speak of a highest Principle and radiate a power distinct from Supernal Mana.

Sometimes, though, mages encounter phenomena that point to enlightenment beyond the structure of Above and Below: holy men and women whose presence inspires extraordinary transformations and around whom destiny constructs portentous events. Despite the fact that these sages are surrounded by fraudsters and fanatics, they seem to be at peace with the Lie around them. Some mages envy them. Some despise their complacency.

## *Traces of Ascension*

The various paths to Ascension include literature, magical objects and guardian entities. Even mages who do not follow a given path still search for traces. They possess special powers and teach magical secrets.

## *Astras*

Each Astra is part of a True god who dwells in the Supernal Realms. Occult texts depict the Astra as part of the deity's panoply: a weapon, symbolic object or even part of its body. The Astra appears to be one of these items, but this is a limited Fallen representation of the God's essence. Astras have been known to change shape, speak to their wielders, or act of their own accord.

Astras are often sought for the Divine Union Ascension, but the requirements needed to harness it for that purpose are unknown.

Astras possess the following characteristics:

**Sublime Power:** An Astra performs one task perfectly. For example, an Astra sword could instantly kill anyone it strikes, but the wielder's player must still prevail with a Strength + Weaponry roll. Alternately, it might automatically strike its target (after subtracting Defense, every die automatically scores one success). Such a weapon could not *both* strike and kill automatically, however, as each is a separate "perfect task."

If dice pools are necessary, subtract any relevant Resistance Traits. Do not roll the remaining dice — instead,

they grant one automatic success each. Invoking the power costs 2 points of Mana per use. Some Astras also require a command word, ritual, or special meditation to activate the Sublime Power.

Where applicable, the Astra possesses a base +5 equipment bonus. Every 2 additional points of Mana spent to activate the Sublime Power increases the bonus by a further +1, to a maximum bonus of +10 for a total Mana cost of 10 points.

Even Sleepers can use an Astra's Sublime Power; the Artifact, not the wielder, spends its own internal Mana. Only mages and Supernal natives may utilize their personal Mana stores or spend more than the 2 points necessary to invoke the Sublime Power.

**Secondary Powers:** Most Astras possess secondary functions that replicate the standard powers found in other Artifacts. They conform in all ways to the rules found on pp. 80–81 of **Mage: The Awakening**. Only Awakened beings may use these functions.

**Soul Winnowing:** Using an Astra's Sublime Power is a Rank 1 Wisdom (or other Morality) sin, as the wielder joins his soul to the Astra's god. The deity threatens to consume the user's sense of self. Mages pursuing Divine Union have supposedly discovered ways to prevent soul winnowing, but the secret has been lost, perhaps even hidden by the gods themselves.

**Divine Rule:** The Astra's god may modify any of the Astra's powers and characteristics (weight, appearance, etc.) at any time. The god *might* be able to transport the Astra or reclaim it, but many legends speak of Astras being stolen from their divine owners so this ability may require special conditions.

**Mana:** An Astra possesses 20 Mana points + 1 per secondary power. Like an Artifact, an Astra regains 1 Mana point per day, though its creator may speed, slow, or halt this replenishment process at will. A mage may also replenish it just as if it was an Artifact.

### *Sample Astra: Heaven's Will*

Indestructible; Size 2, 21 Mana

Awakened historians identify Heaven's Will with the Vietnamese sword of the same name, Thu n Thiên, and a few even say it's the truth behind the legends of kingly swords like Excalibur, Joyeuse and Kusanagi. The sword changes shape to blend with the cultures that adopt it. In 1901 it appeared to the Tetrarch Ixion in the hands of a Free Council assassin. Ixion easily slew the intruder and examined the sword, which appeared to be a yard-long, double edged straight blade made of *orichalcum*, the golden variation of thaumium ( pp. 203–204, **Mage**). He had no opportunity to decipher its complex runes, as the sword burned him then vanished once he attempted to touch the blade. Ixion took this as a sign that the Free Council was backed by a Supernal power and directed his Seers to walk away from the great war to destroy them.

Heaven's Will sometimes guides its possessor through a legendary cycle of rule. Its owner founds a dynasty or prevails through an idyllic age. Alienated Seekers say the dragons that led humans to Atlantis gave the blade to its first king — and took it away when his progeny defiled the Supernal. The sword was undoubtedly created by a Supernal god, but that being has only manifested to give or take the sword — never to advise the wielder on its use. A lady of the lake, a great dragon-turtle and a warrior enveloped in storm clouds have each manifested with the blade, but speak as if they are only fragments of the sword's ruler.

**Sublime Power:** Anyone who meets the sword's wielder regards her as his natural ruler. This doesn't mean the subject obeys without question—in fact, he can even rebel against his “queen”—but he will always believe that acting against her interests is rebellion against rightful rule. All patriotic feelings and similar allegiances transfer to the owner of Heaven's Will.

Spending 2 Mana from the sword's reserve invokes this power against any number of people, as long as they can see the sword with the unaided eye. The effects last until the sword is taken by an enemy or by the god that made it, and ensure that the wielder automatically succeeds at every Presence + Persuasion roll made to assert her command.

**Secondary Functions:** As a thaumium weapon, Heaven's Will can cast a reflexive 18-die counterspell at the cost of one point of Mana. It may also inflict aggravated damage at a cost of one Mana point per attack. This expenditure is reflexive.

**Other Traits:** As a sword, Heaven's Will inflicts a base 5 Damage. This equipment bonus may be raised by 1 per two points of Mana expended, to a maximum of 10.

### *Sariras*

Although it resembles a lifeless physical body, the Sarira is not a corpse, but the solidified Resonance of a mage's physical form influenced by her nimbus and magical style. Death magic cannot affect a Sarira and most of them do not decompose, but may exhibit strange changes over time. Male bodies have turned to female. Skin has turned to gold.

Every Sarira possesses other signs that it is no ordinary body. Concentrated Resonance takes the form of pearls and gems embedded in the chakras and other magical energy centers. Crystal bones and Atlantean tattoos manifest.

Occultists liken the Sarira to a caul, a remnant of birth the Ascended casts away to enter true life. Not all Ascended mages leave Sariras behind, but they manifest often enough to be identified by educated mages. An Ascended mage's order usually preserves her Sarira as an object of veneration and guards it, because Awakened thieves love to steal them.

A whole Sarira may be a potent Artifact, but it's even more valuable when it's cut to pieces and traded to multiple clients. This is a purely economic decision; the whole body will always possess more magical power. Many ancient Sariras only exist in fragments: hands, eyes, femurs, and fingers.

A Sarira possesses the following properties.



**Divisible:** Sariras may be divided into pieces that often retain portions of the entire relic's power.

**Fragile Artifact:** A complete, undamaged Sarira is a 10-dot Artifact according to the rules found on pp. 80-81 of **Mage: The Awakening**, with the exception that it lacks the Unbreakable quality and does not store Mana as described in that section. The Tass property below overrides that standard rule. If anyone divides a Sarira into various parts, assign Artifact dot values and thematically related powers to each component. Once they've been severed, parts of minor symbolic value retain little to no power.

**Tass:** A Sarira attracts Mana so that over time, it becomes ever more potent Tass. Upon manifestation, a Sarira collects as much Mana as the Gnosis-based maximum capacity of the mage that produced it. An undivided Sarira's Tass value increases by 1 point per decade of existence. Cutting up a Sarira divides its Tass. This does not necessarily correspond to body mass, so a sapphire that was once the mage's pineal gland might contain 20% of the Sarira's total Tass, while an entire leg possesses no more than a point or two. If it's cut to pieces, the Sarira's Tass value stops increasing over time.

When used as Tass, the Sarira progressively crumbles or rots. This makes it impossible to recharge with Prime. When all its Mana disappears, the Sarira completely dissolves. A Sarira loses Artifact dots in proportion to any Tass expenditure, so that every 10% lost costs the Sarira

an Artifact dot. If its Tass drops below 30%, the Sarira no longer functions as an Artifact.

**Supernal Magical Tool:** Whole or in parts, a Sarira acts as a dedicated magical tool to any mage with the same primary Arcana as the Ascended sorcerer, no matter their Path or order. No special ceremony is necessary. The tool doesn't necessarily possess an Intimate sympathetic connection to the caster, though it might build one over time.

*Sample Sarira: The Green Scepter*  
(●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 10, 48 Mana

When the Thyrsus Kirtimukha Ascended, his flesh turned into moss and earth. His hair became vines. His bones turned into emeralds, and it is said that his true power lay within them. Thyrsus elders say that the full skeleton could create new species, but only one femur remains. Ferocious panther-monkey fusions stalk the Nepalese forest near the cave where this Green Scepter lies. Thyrsus Masters have added many defenses over the years, including carnivorous plants and guardian spirits, but mages only visit occasionally to contemplate Ascension or perform high rituals using the Sarira as a tool.

The Green Scepter's wielder may cast the rote "Transform Median Features" (**Mage: The Awakening**, page 187) as a contingent power. In addition, the Sarira acts as a dedicated magical tool for Life and Spirit Arcana.



# APPENDIX: IMPERIUM

*All the gods and their angels gave blessing and honor to him. And for his part, he was delighted and continually boasted, saying to them, "I have no need of anyone." He said, "It is I who am God, and there is no other one that exists apart from me." And when he said this, he sinned against all the immortal beings who give answer.*

—Untitled Text from the Nag Hammadi Scrolls

Imperium is an optional system that provides tools to play out archmasters' influence over the cosmos. Designed to integrate with standard **Mage** and **World of Darkness** rules, it also introduces a system to resolve the Rites of Imperium: the Supernal thaumaturgy that destroy civilizations and drives the Golden Road Ascension.

Imperium requires careful preparations and secret maneuvers in the Fallen Realms that prepare them to accept an archmage's vision. Imperium cannot help but be a chronicle design tool to account for the way its Mystery manifests through the worlds. To empower her vision, a Seeker inspires symbolic actions in the Fallen World. These *Omens* prepare

the Supernal for her will. She retreats to her Cintamani and begins the Rites, using a series of *moves* to prepare the way, counter enemy Imperium Rites, and Exalt her Omens.

Once an Omen has been fully Exalted, she desires it symbolizes change the universe (at least, as far as the archmasters are concerned — see Chapter Two for alternative points of view). They become Supernal symbols, her imagination shaping the cosmos so that it has *always* been this way. History, physics, art, culture, Invisible Realms, and even the true nature of Atlantis conform to her vision.

When every Omen has been Exalted in the Supernal, the Final Key reveals itself: the archmaster may Ascend — and perhaps, wash her hands of the universe she left behind.

## This Game is Incomplete

Imperium is a game of vast scope — too vast to account for everything with the space available. For example, we've deliberately left out systems that modify effects based on Arcanum and Supernal Realm. And what happens when two contradictory reality edits happen close to each other?

Take up these questions for yourself. Use your personal World of Darkness cosmology to find satisfying answers. This game doesn't have all the answers, but it provides a structure open to your answers. Don't be afraid to use them to hack what you see here.

## *The Province of Gods and Sages*

To begin the Imperium Rites, a mage must possess a Gnosis of 6 and six or more dots in at least one Arcanum. These must be permanent traits, not temporary grants from patrons or unnatural enhancements. The ideal archmage is far more powerful, because without sufficient power, her enemies can interfere with the Rites and even use them against her.

At the Storyteller's discretion, other beings may also play at Imperium if they possess a supernatural power equivalent to Gnosis of 6 or higher, a supernatural power rated at six dots

or higher, and free will. Spirits and magical automata may not participate. The candidate must also possess the ability to directly influence the Supernal Realms, but might possess a special nature that allows them to do this from afar.

## *The Noumenon*

First, define your Seeker's *Noumenon*: the imago of his Ascended soul. Make a grand statement describing her aspirations and ideal world. Use it as a guide when you detail the Three Omens below, but be ready to let these goals feed back into the initial statement and adjust it to fit your Omens when necessary.

## *The Three Omens*

Divide 6 to 9 dots (your choice) into the Seeker's Personal, Earthly and Celestial Omens. These are the goals your character must accomplish to achieve Ascension. The number of dots you choose is a matter of style—the higher you raise Omens, the more challenging they will be to accomplish, but the harder they are to counter. Each Omen begins at one dot; additional dots add to them. You may raise each Omen to a maximum of 5 dots.

It may appear as if these objectives might be accomplished using magic or mundane actions, but an Omen in Imperium must be satisfied with the Exaltation Rite (see p. 80). Only then will the Omen be accomplished and only then is it immune to being undone by anything less than another act of Imperium.

You may aim for multiple Omens in one category by splitting one Omen into two Omens that are one dot lower, or into four Omens that are two dots lower. You must do this after initially dividing your dots.

Once an archmaster defines his Omens, they become part of his soul. As in a Mystery Play, the Tellurian reacts with challenges, opportunities, signs and prophecies, even where none appeared before. At the Storyteller's discretion, you may introduce new antagonists and other elements to the chronicle.

## *Personal Omens*

Personal Omens relate to the Seeker and individuals important to her: mages, gods, and any other creature sufficiently powerful to act as a stepping stone to Ascension.

If a Personal Omen involves changing, destroying or creating a supernatural being, the Omen's dots must be equal to the creature's core supernatural power trait (spirit Rank, werewolf Primal Urge, vampire Blood Potency) -5. If the result is 0 or less, the entity is an unsuitable subject for an Omen.

Other examples include:

- **Masterful:** Find true love where it never existed before. Maintain 10 dots of Wisdom without supernatural assistance beyond the Imperium Rite.

- **Epic:** Eliminate all evidence of your existence on Earth. Attain 11 dots in a Skill without supernatural assistance beyond the Gnosis advantage and Imperium.

- **Legendary:** Attain 11 dots in an Attribute without supernatural assistance beyond the Gnosis advantage. Discover or create a candidate for the Awakened Messiah called the Hieromagus.

- **Godlike:** Create a perfect duplicate of one's self (not an Ochema). Learn the secrets of Ascension from your Atlantean incarnation.

- **Supreme:** Merge with a True god. Undo or compel the Ascension of another being. Journey to the true Atlantis.

## *Earthly Omens*

Earthly Omens encompass the archmage's broad plans for the Sleeping world, including politics and natural phenomena.

- **Masterful:** Create an ancient worldwide conspiracy (which has always existed once Imperium is invoked) with magical powers at its disposal. Rule a nation of moderate power from the shadows.

- **Epic:** Rule a superpower or multinational bloc. Conquer a hostile supernatural conspiracy. Erase the existence of a nation or other cultural entity with moderate global influence.

- **Legendary:** Erase a superpower or equivalent cultural institution from existence. Destroy every member of a major supernatural template.

- **Godlike:** Return Atlantis to the world or build a worthy successor. Eliminate the Shadow Gauntlet on a global scale. Change the age of the world on a geological scale.

- **Supreme:** Destroy the Earth. Eliminate the Sleeping Curse.

## *Celestial Omens*

Celestial Omens influence the Invisible Realms in accord with the archmage's personal metaphysics. No known act of Imperium may affect the Supernal Realms, though it might change the relationship between the Supernal and a Phenomenal Realm.

- **Masterful:** Build a city in one of the Invisible Realms. Conquer a personal domain in the Invisible Realms beyond the Golden Road or Chantry.

- **Epic:** Create a new major domain within an Invisible Realm or destroy it. Create a new frame of reference within an existing realm so that it is perceived differently and possesses alternate natural laws for a category of beings—dreams array themselves in an array of chambers instead of in Astral Layers, for example.

- **Legendary:** Create a permanent metaphysical connection or partial overlap between two Invisible Realms, similar to those binding the Oneiros and Temenos.

- **Godlike:** Merge two Invisible Realms or sever the connection between them.

- **Supreme:** Create a new Watchtower, Celestial Ladder, or major realm.



*Example:*

## *To Exalt the Lord of Justice*

The Alienated mage called Achamán (see p. 56) wishes to Ascend in the service of a fallen principle of justice. His player, Dave, writes out the archmage's Noumenon:

*I will free the Bound Lord of Justice, raise temples and worshippers in His honor, break the Seals on the gate of His heavenly abode, and sit at His right hand in the Aether.*

Dave spends 6 Omen dots on the following:

**Personal** ●●●●●: Once Achamán has built a cult to empower the Bound Lord of Justice, he will merge with the God and attain Ascension.

**Earthly** ●●: Achamán will create a secret society to worship the Bound Lord and give its members supernatural abilities.

**Celestial** ●●●: Achamán will build an Emanation Realm of Justice to give the Bound Lord passage to the Aether.

Who is the Bound Lord? What challenges await Achamán on his quest for Ascension? Dave and his Storyteller will determine that as Achamán prepares to Seal his Omens.

## *Profane Omens*

Although Ascension is the common goal of Imperium, Seekers use Supernal Rites for other reasons: love, compassion, greed, revenge and the rest. The Rite's power is a tremendous lure, but giving into it complicates the search for Ascension.

Your Archmage may voluntarily add additional Omens. Use the descriptions from Noumenon Omens to set the goal's dot rating. These Profane Omens do not belong to any particular category, however.

Profane Omens complicate the Golden Road Ascension. The Seeker must Seal and Exalt them before making headway on any other unfulfilled Omens. Until that time, the Mystery in her Noumenon doesn't change the world to spur her journey.

## *Sealing the Cosmic Scroll*

After defining his Noumenon and Omens, an archmage prepares the Fallen World to receive his will by overcoming challenges in the Phenomenal Realms. If he succeeds, he *Seals* his Omen in the Cintamani so that he may work Imperium upon it.

Each Omen possesses a corresponding challenge. The character's Omen dots (including the dots assigned to quests for Banishments and Pneuma) determine the challenge's base difficulty, which is equal to its dot rating +5.

## Changing Your Soul

As fundamental bonds between her soul and the Supernal, a Seeker's Noumenon and Omens aren't easy to change. It's possible, but it causes damage to the soul, which is forced to contradict the imago the archmage set upon it.

To change an Omen, the Seeker must sacrifice a dot of Willpower within his Cintamani. To alter his entire Noumenon, she must destroy a dot of Willpower *and* Gnosis there — and as in the creation of soul stone, the lost dot of Gnosis reduces his maximum by 1. Fortunately, changing her entire Noumenon allows her to rewrite every Omen without further penalty.

**Example:** Achamán's 5 dot Personal Omen of possesses a base difficulty of 10, but his one dot Earthly Omen's difficulty is only 6.

## *Designing Challenges*

The Seeker's player and Storyteller develop the story behind the challenge. It should fit the theme and narrative logic behind the Seeker's Noumenon and Omen. Each challenge takes at least a chapter of play to confront or the equivalent in time in the game world (one day to one week, by default). Resolve challenges with one of the following options:

**Quick and Dirty:** In Quick and Dirty play, participants narrate the lead up, roll the dice, and use the results to describe what happened. Average the highest and lowest applicable dice pools used among all agents confronting the challenge. Roll this average dice pool against an opposed roll equal to 2.5 times the challenge's difficulty, rounded up (2.5 represents a combined dice pool handicapped by the opposing force's weaker aspects). Success overcomes the challenge.

If the archmage undertakes the challenge directly and fails, he suffers resistant aggravated damage points equal to the margin of failure or his player must roll a Wisdom check at a penalty equal to the margin of failure. Storytellers may choose another penalty for failure based on what happened in the story — the above examples provide a starting point. If the archmage used proxies (see below) or other allies, they suffer in accord with their relative power; anything capable of injuring an archmage will do far worse things to weaker beings.

**Full Sessions:** Play out a session normally by designing a chapter of play. Use the difficulty rating to guide the climactic scene's challenge. Antagonists possess dots in relevant Traits that are roughly equal to the difficulty, with specific abilities to counter those of the archmage and his agents.

## Using the Storyteller Adventure System with Imperium

The Storyteller Adventure System (SAS) uses 1 to 5 dot ratings to determine the Mental, Physical and Social difficulties of scenarios. As each Noumenon-based challenge is essentially an adventure, you can use the SAS system to further define it. Assign the challenge's full difficulty to one of the SAS categories for the most difficult scene in your story.

To use published SAS adventures in your Imperium games, compare the most difficult scene's highest rating to the challenge's difficulty, and adjust the adventure accordingly. As basic difficulties are 6 or higher, this is usually most useful if the Seeker uses a strategy (see below) to lower it to mortal levels.

**Example:** Achamán determines that the blood of an avatar of evil and celestial imbalance must be sacrificed to give his cult (his Earthly Omen) supernatural power. Achamán's Omen difficulty is 6, but he uses proxies and the cloak of the mundane to lower it to 3. This happens to be the highest difficulty of the SAS called **A Night with Jack** (available for free at [drivehrupg.com](http://drivehrupg.com)). Achamán's player and the Storyteller decide that his followers must ritually consume the flesh of the creature called Smiling Jack (detailed in the SAS scene).

## Challenge Strategies

The difficulty rating determines the relevant single Trait ratings (Strength, Occult, Gnosis, etc.) that anyone attempting them should possess for more than a 50% chance of success. You can modify the challenge's difficulty by using the following strategies:

- **Cloak of the Mundane:** Mundane methods disguise the archmaster's efforts. If he refrains from using magic and his agents don't possess a supernatural template, reduce the challenge's difficulty by 1. The benefit vanishes if a Seeker or his agents utilize magical items or other supernatural resources that the Seeker's controls.
- **Dividing the Challenge:** You may split one challenge into two challenges with -1 difficulty, four challenges at -2 difficulty, or eight challenges at -3 difficulty. The Storyteller may modify the number of challenges by one or two to avoid stories with a contrived-looking length. The archmaster must overcome every challenge to Seal its Omen.
- **Imperial Spells:** Using an Imperial spell to attack the challenge reduces its difficulty by 1 by employing brute Supernal force.
- **Proxies:** Relying on free-willed allies, retainers, and dupes to confront the challenge reduces its difficulty by 2.

The Mystery that generates these challenges focuses on the archmage; his proxies receive less notice. Mind-controlled servants provide no benefit.

You may combine up to three of strategies to reduce the difficulty of a single challenge, but no method may reduce a challenge's difficulty below 3. If an archmaster violates a strategy's rules, the Tellurian undoes her progress so that no matter what happened in the Phenomenal World, the result doesn't prepare the Omen. It is sometimes wise to interfere nonetheless, as overcoming that challenge through "cheating" means that, strictly speaking, he doesn't fail and can avoid the corresponding difficulty penalty (see below).

**Example:** Achamán guides a cabal to Chicago to recover the *Celestial Flange*, an Artifact capable of opening the Bound Lord's tomb. Dave and his Storyteller, Malcolm develop a storyline with eight challenges by splitting the challenge into eight lesser challenges (-3 difficulty), and using proxies (-2 difficulty). The base difficulty drops to 5: a job for a cabal of Masters. If Achamán assembled a group of Sleeper agents, the difficulty would drop to 4. If the archmage succumbs to temptation and directly assists his proxies, even victory cannot Seal his Omen.

## Failed Challenges

If the archmaster or his agents fail an Omen's challenges, he may search for a new challenge to meet it — but this time, the challenge's base difficulty (before applying strategies) increases by 1. This is a cumulative increase, so several consecutive failures can place Sealing the Omen — and Ascension — out of reach.

**Example:** If Achamán's agents failed to capture the *Celestial Flange*, Dave and Malcolm can design an alternate challenge but its base difficulty increases to 11.

## To Claim Imperium

After Sealing the Omen, a Seeker uses an Imperium Rite to Exalt it, granting it eternal, universal truth. Archmasters also perform rites to hinder enemies or help allies. He crosses the Abyss into his Supernal Cintamani: the ceremonial space for his greatest magic.

## Banishment and Pneuma

Seekers build specialized energies to power their Imperium Rites or interfere with an enemy's. These are represented by points of Banishment and Pneuma. Acquiring points in either power source requires one day per associated dice roll, spent on personal rituals and meditation within the Seeker's Cintamani, Golden Road or at a 5-dot Hallow connected to his Path Arcana.

## Banishment

Banishment points represent raw Supernal energy harnessed by the Seeker's magical knowledge and domineering spirit. Banishment points dull rival acts of Imperium among

the Personal, Earthly and Celestial categories. Each type of Banishment may be used to impede other Seekers' corresponding Omens.

Choose a base Arcanum for each type of Banishment. Your character may accumulate a maximum number of Banishment points in each category equal to that category's key Arcanum. Track the points in each category separately. To earn Banishment points, spend 2 Arcane Experience and roll Intelligence + the category's key Arcanum.

*Example: In his Cintamani, Achamán binds a swarm of elementals within a cage of blue-black fire, ready to release them against his enemies' Celestial Imperium Rites. His player spends 2 points of Arcane Experience, rolls a dice pool of Intelligence 6 + his key Arcanum of Forces 6, and scores 5 successes. Achamán earns five Celestial Banishment points — his player could spend 2 more Arcane Experience and accumulate more, but could only earn one more Banishment point — six in total, equal to Achamán's Forces Arcanum. As he spends points, elements stream from the cage, burning and tearing symbols of his enemies' Celestial Omens.*

## *Pneuma*

The spiritual energy that courses through the archmage's Golden Road, *Pneuma* points may be channeled add power to Exaltations—including power a rival *doesn't* want. To channel *Pneuma* into the Cintamani where it may be used for Imperium Rites, spend 6 Arcane Experience and roll Intelligence + Gnosis; each success adds a point to the character's pool, up to a maximum equal to the character's Resolve + Gnosis total.

*Example: Achamán meditates within his Cintamani, visualizing it as the crown of an iridescent lotus. The Golden Road is its stem. His player spends 6 Arcane Experience and rolls Intelligence 6 + Gnosis 7, scoring 4 successes. Achamán accumulates four points of *Pneuma* as power ascends the stem of his Golden Road, the lotus shines, and he prepares to work his will. He could accumulate as many as 13 *Pneuma* points at once.*

## *Moves in the Imperium*

Upon the Seeker's arrival at his Supernal Cintamani, roll Resolve + Gnosis. Each success allows him to make one move: Imperium's basic unit of time and action. A Seeker may claim additional moves in exchange for Aponoia (see p. 81) at the rate of one point per move, to a maximum of three additional moves for 3 points of Aponoia. If the Seeker stays in his Cintamani any longer than that, the Supernal Realm absorbs his soul, removing him from play.

Although time is not a constant in the Supernal Realms, the Mystery of Imperium arrays the moments according to its internal logic as represented by the order of play in your game. Two Lustrums in which Imperium Rites occur are considered to take place at the same time if participants enter their Cintamanis during the same story chapter. If a participant enters during a different chapter, his moves begin earlier or later based on the difference in time measured as chapters, at the rate of one move per chapter.

Once two Seekers begin their moves during overlapping Lustrums, each participant decides upon his moves secretly and reveals them simultaneously — though not necessarily to each other, unless they possess some way to perceive each other's actions. Some Imperium Rites may reveal themselves in any event however. See "Imperium Rites" below for more information.

*Example: Achamán's journey to the Cintamani suffers a delay, so he enters his Cintamani one chapter later than Xaphan, a Storyteller character. His first move takes place at the same time as Xaphan's second move. Achamán's player Dave reveals his first move at the same time as Xaphan reveals his second.*

## *Imperium Rites*

Once he is enthroned in the Cintamani, the archmaster begins Imperium Rites. Each Rite costs a certain number of moves, listed immediately below the entry. The Seeker's player utilizes any relevant systems on the first move. No matter the result, the archmage cannot abort the Rite in the middle of its appointed period.

As the mightiest magical workings an un-Ascended being can undertake, Imperium Rites defeat general descriptions of how they might look and feel. Storytellers and players should work together to ensure that the story of the rite fits their standards for an epic, mythical event. Each move may take days or weeks to accomplish, so the rites can include great journeys, huge wars and other adventures.

Save for the Rite of Repose, each Rite charges the archmage's mortal form with the Supernal. He no longer needs to eat, drink, sleep or breathe.

## *Rites of Banishment*

### **Two Moves**

The archmage attacks a rival's Cintamani with disruptive energies. They manifest as angry demons, storms, or other aggressive elements that reflect the Seeker's Nimbus. (As such, magic and study may trace it back to its source.) Malefic forces soar down the enemy's Golden Road to undo her works.

To use a Banishment Rite, your archmage must possess Banishment points of the same type as the Omen he wishes to attack. You may spend a maximum number of points on each rite equal to the Arcanum linked to half of its maximum pool, rounded up. You may spend points from no more than one pool per rite.

Only one Banishment of each type may affect a given target at a time. If two Banishments target the same Omen, only the most powerful takes effect.

Rites of Banishment include:

### **Banishment of the Unsealed Destiny**

The Seeker attacks an unsealed Omen. If a Noumenon Omen belongs to the same category as the Banishment pool, increase the base difficulty of its associated challenge by 1 per

point spent. If the pool and Omen do not match, the rite has no effect. If the Omen is Profane, any pool is effective.

The Banishment lasts for as long as the Omen remains unsealed unless the Seeker who cast the rite dies, Ascends, or consciously ends the Banishment.

### Banishment of the Arising Soul

This rite drains Pnuma as it is used by an enemy during one entire Lustrum in the caster's subjective present future. Spend Banishment points from one pool. If the pool matches the Noumenon Omen the Pnuma is being spent to affect via the Exaltation Rite, reduce the amount of Pnuma that actually affects the Exaltation by one point per point spent, every time it is spent.

If the pool does not match the Omen, the rite is ineffective. Any pool may be used to drain Pnuma if it is being used to Exalt a Profane Omen.

The Banishment of the Arising Soul lasts for each move in the target's Lustrum unless the casting archmaster dies, Ascends, or consciously ends the Banishment.

### Banishment of the Supernal Sign

This Banishment Rite attacks one Exaltation Rite during the caster's present or future. Spend Banishment points from one pool. If the pool matches the Noumenon Omen being Exalted, or if any pool is used on a Profane Omen, it reduces the Exaltation Rite's Force (see below) by the points spent. If the pool does not match the target Omen, the Banishment has no effect.

This Banishment lasts for the duration of the opponent's Exaltation rite.

## Rites of the Pnuma

### One Move

The archmage manipulates the power of an Exaltation Rite by spending Pnuma. Pnuma is the unified power of a Seeker's soul before it radiates into categories that subject to the Arcana.

Your archmage must possess accumulated Pnuma to use the rite. You may spend as many points on the rite as the character's Gnosis.

The rites include:

### Rite of the Soul's Might

Your archmage spends Pnuma to increase the Force of one of his next Exaltation Rite, at the rate of 1 point per point of added Force. Remember that too much Force may cause an Exaltation to escape the Seeker's control (see "The Exaltation Rite"). He must use this rite within the same Lustrum as the Exaltation he wishes to enhance.

### Rite of Supernal Balance

The Seeker spends Pnuma to decrease the Force of his next Exaltation Rite; each point reduces the Exaltation's Force by 1. This is a useful way to moderate excess Force caused by the power of the Omen or enemy influence. The archmage use the rite within the same Lustrum as the Exaltation he wishes to enhance.

### Rite of the Bridge of Light

The Bridge of Light transfers Pnuma to another archmage's current or future Exaltation Rite, increasing its Force by 1 point per point spent. This is not always a compassionate gesture, as the archmaster may be attempting to "overload" the rite's Force. The Bridge of Light affects one Exaltation Rite per use.

The Bridge of Light manifests as torrents of fire, rapidly growing vines, or some other manifestation of the rite caster's nimbus. This makes it possible for the recipient to track the rite's origin.

The Bridge of Light may not be used to decrease an Exaltation Rite's Force, only increase it.

## Rite of Repose

### One Move

The Seeker uses a move to spend a chapter of subjective time in his Cintamani, during which he may cast spells or perform other actions. The archmage's mortal form requires food, water, and sleep during the Repose. The archmage may also leave the Supernal World, but cannot return during the same move.

## The Rite of Exaltation

### Two Moves + One Move per Omen Dot

After Sealing his Omens, an archmaster must weave them into the Supernal through the Rite of Exaltation. Success is not assured, but isn't a matter of chance, either; Imperium uses a diceless system to determine the rite's results.

Unlike the other Rites, Exaltation is always resolved on the last move it requires, not the first. Once begun, the rite may not be abandoned.

## Exaltation Traits

Note the following information beside each Sealed Omen:

Sealed Omen Dots	Difficulty	Exaltation Points
•	3	○
••	4	○ ○
•••	5	○ ○ ○
••••	6	○ ○ ○ ○
•••••	7	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

**Sealed Omen Dots:** Seekers may only Exalt Sealed Omens. List the dot rating of each Omen.

**Difficulty:** The difficulty rating lists the amount of Force (see below) required for a basic (1 Exaltation point) success. Use the difficulty rating for the lowest dot value that possesses no filled-in Exaltation point boxes.

**Exaltation Points:** To Exalt an Omen, the Seeker must accumulate *Exaltation points*. Each point fills a box. Start



with the first box beside the one dot rating, and fill them horizontally, working from the lowest number of dots to the Omen's full dot value.

When every box has been filled by Exaltation points, the Seeker has fully Exalted the Omen and its goals come to pass.

### Creating Force

The strength of an archmage's Omen combines with preparatory rites to generate the Exaltation Rite's Force. Comparing the rite's Force to its difficulty produces success, failure, and other fallout.

The rite's base Force is equal to the Sealed Omen's full dot rating. Modify this with the influence of any Banishment or Pneuma Rites.

### Resolution

After discovering the correct difficulty and total Force, apply the results of the following table:

Success Threshold	Result
3 or less	Failure; the Omen loses its Seal and all accumulated Exaltation; the archmage suffers an eternal wound
2 less than the difficulty	Failure; the Omen loses 1 point of Exaltation
1 less than the difficulty	Failure; no other effect.
Equal to the difficulty	Success; the Omen attains 1 point of Exaltation
1 over the difficulty	Success; the Omen earns 2 points of Exaltation
2 over the difficulty	Success; the Omen earns 3 points of Exaltation but accumulates 1 point of Aponoia
3 over the difficulty	Success; the Omen earns 2 points of Exaltation but accumulates 2 points of Aponoia
4 over the difficulty	Success; the Omen earns 1 point of Exaltation but accumulates 2 points of Aponoia and the archmage suffers an eternal wound.
5+ over the difficulty	Failure; the Omen earns no Exaltation but accumulates 3 points of Aponoia and the archmage suffers an eternal wound.

**Failure:** The Seeker fails to earn Exaltation points. Severe failure destroys his progress, erasing Exaltation points. The worst result breaks the Omen's Seal; he must regain it by confronting a new challenge in the Fallen World (though this does not increase the challenge's difficulty).

**Success:** The Seeker wins 1 or more Exaltation points. Fill boxes from end to end, starting from the boxes beside the lowest dot to those beside the highest.

**Eternal Wound:** The Supernal rejects the archmage's working and along with it, his soul, or he loses control of the power and it dissolves part of his existence. If it succeeds too well, it drains a fragment of the mage's existence. Both situations inflict eternal wounds. Sacrifice Traits from one of the categories below.

- 3 dots of Attributes, divided as the player sees fit.
- 1 dot of Wisdom
- 1 dot of Gnosis

An eternal wound not only eliminates these dots, but reduces the maximum dots the character may attain by the same amount. Eternal wounds manifest as tears and mutations of the archmage's Nimbus, sores and lacerations that never heal, or some other deformity.

**Aponoia:** The potent energies of the rite change reality in some strange fashion. See "Aponoia," pp. 81 for a thorough explanation.

*Example: Now that his Personal Omen has been Sealed, Achamán prepares to Exalt it. In his Cintamani, he gathers its basic Force of 5. He hasn't earned any Exaltation points and no other influences modify his efforts, so he automatically succeeds and earn 3 points of Exaltation, but 1 point of Aponoia because his Force of 5 is 2 higher than the difficulty of 3. This consumes 7 moves — the Rite for such a powerful Omen is time consuming.*

*Fortunately, Achamán accumulated 14 moves to use during this Lustrum — just enough to perform the Rite of Exaltation again. This time, a rival archmage uses the Bridge of Light to add 5 Force to the Rite. As Achamán now faces the basic 5 difficulty of the Omen's third rank, a Force of 10 would cause him to fail, accrue 3 points of Aponoia, and suffer an eternal wound.*

### Exaltation Attained

When the archmage fills every box of his Omen with Exaltation points, the Omen becomes a Supernal Truth. The desires it represents become Supernal Symbols and emanate throughout the Tellurian. If he wished that a god had never existed, it never did. If he desired an ancient cult that prophesied his coming as the Hieromagus, it has always existed, waiting for him to redeem the Awakened.

### Aponoia

Failed and too-forceful Exaltation Rites crack and twist the archmage's imago of the world, loosing unforeseen changes in reality. Staying in the Cintamani for longer than the Seeker can usually bear, even if he did not perform the Rite of Exaltation, will also create these Aponoia.

Incoherent will made flesh, Aponoia unleashes changes the archmaster never anticipated. In some cases, the Tellurian doesn't properly shape itself around the new reality,

## Rising Doom

When an archmage begins the Exaltation Rite, the times (including the archmage's subjective present, were he to remain in the Phenomenal World) and places most closely connected to the Seeker flood with a refined form of Resonance. This manifests as a series of ominous signs hinting of the Imperium to come.

Most Travelers are not enlightened enough to directly behold this power; it only triggers the Unseen Senses of archmages unless some twist of fate grants the ability to another (if these individuals are Sleepers, they may lose their sanity to the apocalyptic warnings striking this rare Unseen Sense). Seekers investigate this immediately and may rush to their Cintamani to prepare counters. When Exaltation succeeds, this Resonance becomes part of the Tellurian's nature. Numerous archmages have left their mark on Creation, though none as thoroughly as the Exarchs.

leaving contradictions embedded in history, physics and supernatural existence. These typically go unnoticed by the natives. History books say the Wright Brothers invented aircraft, but 5,000 year old guilds build planes powered by blood sacrifice. Extreme examples are dangerous. Paradoxical reality belongs in one place: the Abyss.

Check for Aponoia when the archmage leaves the Supernal after performing Exaltation Rites, whether or not he succeeded or fully Exalted an Omen. Add the Aponoia points inflicted by these rites to points gained from the Lustrums where the Seeker willingly accumulated it to stay in his Cintamani longer after a previous Exaltation Rite.

Once he returns to the Phenomenal World, roll the total Aponoia as a dice pool and consult the table below. If the archmage Ascends, roll half the total dice at the moment of Ascension instead of waiting for a return to the Phenomenal World.

### Aponoia

#### Successes Effect

1	Minor Change: Some familiar names, places may have changed contrary to the Seeker's wishes, but the world is recognizable.
2	Moderate Change: Many things have changed, but the lives of Sleepers (or the baseline inhabitants of other realms) are basically as the Seeker intended it. New strange spirits haunt places that didn't exist before.
3	Major Change: The Phenomenal Realm has changed to contradict the Seeker's

Noumenon. A necessary figure might be missing or a nation remains against his attempt to obliterate it. The archmage must add a 1-dot Noumenon Omen to undo these changes and may not Ascend until he Exalts it.

4

**Mighty Change:** Creation is radically different. China colonized part of North America, or a previously unknown supernatural conspiracy holds great influence. Two large populations may possess radically different recollections of history. The situation contradicts the archmage's Noumenon, as above, but the Seeker must now add a 2-dot Omen to his Noumenon.

5+

**Catastrophic Change:** The continents are different; the wealthy employ alchemists to extend their lives. Multiple populations might perceive reality in wildly divergent ways. The Seeker must now add a 3-dot Omen to his Noumenon to bring it back on track.

*Example: Achamán accumulates 5 points of Aponoia from the Exaltation Rites he attempted in the previous example. He previously earned 2 Aponoia from a Lustrum in which he did not attempt the Exaltation Rite, but forced himself to stay longer in order to counter an enemy. Dave rolls 7 dice, scoring 3 successes. The cult Achamán created to serve his Bound Lord transforms into a Roman mystery religion. In this world, the cult survived alongside Christianity, and a great deal of tension now exists between the pagan-fundamentalist United States and liberal, European Christendom. Achamán refines his Noumenon, adding a 3-dot Omen that, once Exalted, will undo these changes.*

Tetrarchs are among the archmasters most likely to correct the effects of Aponoia, but most Seekers have little tolerance for extreme changes. Aswadim are the exception; the Abyss grows stronger when paradoxes infest the universe. This form of fallout is left for the Storyteller to determine, but may make it easier for Aswadim to Exalt their Omens.

## Imperium Attained, and Ascension

If a Seeker turns every Omen he ever accepted into his soul into a Supernal law, he has attained final Imperium. The Invisible Gate at the end of the Golden Road opens. He Ascends.

Creation bears the consequences.