

TRADITION BOOK

CULT OF ECSTASY™



T R A D I T I O N B O O K :

CULT OF ECSTASY™



Cropped, Corrected and Improved by Duelist

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PROLOGUE: INTO THE BELLY

*And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.*

—William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*. Act i. Sc. 1.



Just a few days ago, Lee Ann had been lecturing Kyle on the finer points of Cult philosophy. Now, descending the creaking stairs into the depths of a Hellfire Club, sword and magic ready, the situation seemed as different as one could imagine. From tutelage in the comfort of a sheltering Chantry garden to prowling through the grisly Sanctum of a cabal that was bent on turning victims into catalogues of experiences... Lee Ann tried to shake off the blurring of perception that came with the memory. Sometimes, experiences of past and present came together too abruptly.

Moving as stealthily as possible given the stairway's tendency to creak at every footstep, Kyle kept close to Lee Ann. He eyed her lotus sword nervously, head craning around her shoulder, in an action that she only barely noticed out of the periphery of her vision. Behind him, he heard Strathma breathing. On one level, he felt comforted by the presence of Lee Ann's fellow Cultist, but the quiet susurrations still unnerved him.

"Calm yourself," Lee Ann hissed in exasperation. "They'll pick up on your anxiety, feed on it, turn it back on you."

Kyle gulped and closed his eyes. He took a soothing breath, let it out and opened them again, focusing once more upon the edge of the sword. "Sorry. I've just... I'm not used to this sort of, well, violence," he mumbled.

Lee Ann sighed in resignation. "I know. It's not easy for me, either, but it's something we have to live with. In any case, these Hellfire Clubs know enough not to expect much mercy from us... and that means they're all the more desperate when they're discovered."

Shifting his weight slightly and inching forward a bit more, Kyle nodded. "But why so much energy fighting other Traditionalists? We have bigger enemies...."

Lee Ann shook her head and let her guard waver for a moment, the sword point dipping toward the floor. "You should know by now that it's not that simple. It's easy to talk about allies and enemies in abstract historical terms. It's not so simple in real life. Even if we have similar goals, our means are so different that there's simply no common ground, you know?"

"Kind of like Greens and Democrats, huh?" Kyle whispered.

"Kind of," Lee Ann said with a half-grin. "Now hush. This isn't the time. You'll be learning more important things in a moment — and calling on what you've already learned as well."

Creeping forward again, Lee Ann, Kyle and Strathma finished their descent. At the foot of the stairway, a heavy door barred further passage. At some point in the building's past, the door had probably opened into a storage cellar or perhaps even a refrigerated room. Now, its metal frame barred the way to the depths of iniquity.

Lee Ann bent down, resting her sword blade momentarily across her left arm. Eyes half-shut, she murmured a quick, repetitive chant in Hindi. Her eyelids flickered briefly, then she reached down with her left hand, sliding her fingers under a worn doormat. After a moment's searching, she withdrew a heavy, ornate iron key. Dull and blackened from lock grease, the key had three thick teeth and a wavy circular handle. Lee Ann eased herself back up and slid the key into the lock. "Funny how they always leave that there," she muttered.

"Magic?" Kyle queried.

"Maybe," Lee Ann said. She turned hard on the key, and the lock gave an audible click-thud as the heavy bolt slid free. "Now be ready!"

Lee Ann stepped against the door, moving smoothly sideways, her weight shouldering it open. The door swung into the room to the right, and she followed its movement. Kyle crouched near the doorjamb on the opposite side, while Strathma covered the entrance with his pistol.

Beyond, in the lavishly appointed sitting room, a solitary man with thinning gray hair waited in a plush, overstuffed chair. Shelves along the sides of the rooms were packed with arcane tomes and lesser books. A large red and gold rug dominated the floor, its designs drawing the eye hypnotically. Glass trophy cases held vases, hookahs, paintings — anything from pieces of glittering art to tools of decadence. Tasseled pillows lay scattered about the floor, and clean, fluffy white robes hung from a hook next to a closed wooden door on the opposite wall.

The middle-aged man in the overstuffed chair, complete with evening robe with a brilliant red neckpiece, removed a pipe from his mouth with a flourish. Lee Ann shuffled a half-step toward him, sword point hovering at the level of the man's throat. Unconcerned, the gentleman exhaled a ring of smoke and gave her a condescending smile. "Lee Ann. Do join us. The party's almost over for tonight, I'm afraid. I'm sure we can find something for you and your friends to enjoy, though."

Kyle looked uncertainly at Strathma. The Cultist shrugged but never dropped his pistol's aim, although a look of surprised curiosity spread slowly over his features.

"Enough with the diplomacy," Lee Ann said in a stern voice that somehow came across as uncertain in the echoless room. "You know what I'm here for."

"Indeed, but I have to see if you're going to follow it through," the man replied with a throaty purr. "Do you have the conviction? Are you so sure of your righteousness?"

Lee Ann nodded her head fiercely, her hair forming a whipping sort of halo in the dim light. "Oh, yes. I don't know why you keep bringing the Hellfire Clubs back, but we'll keep shutting them down."

The man made a slight tsk-in sound. "Really. So if I simply sit here, in my chair, that's enough, then? I'm the wicked man, and you're going to heroically run me through?"

Kyle whispered at Lee Ann, "Um, shouldn't we—"

"Shut up," she hissed back at him, never taking her eyes from the man in the chair.

"But you don't kill a man who's just sitting in a chair," Kyle complained.

The man grinned and let out a hearty chuckle. "Indeed, listen to the wisdom of your young ward. You don't just *kill a man in a chair*," he repeated with peculiar emphasis. "Or do you? Are you a casual killer? How delightfully shocking, my dear. It must send a thrill right up your spine. The end to Lakashim — putting a bullet through the head of the eternal dancer."

Lee Ann frowned. "You know damn well what this is about. You pervert Lakashim. You twist the vibration into a scream — the screams of the people you use."

With a frown, the man made a dismissive wave with his hand and pipe. "People who never even feel Lakashim until we give it to them. How can you wake them up, Lee Ann? Do you even care? Or do you want them and their world to go on sleeping?"

Lee Ann shut her eyes tight for a moment, squeezing them with terrible force. When she opened her eyes they seemed unfocused, as if looking through the door behind the man. "The pulse is life," she said. "It's life." And she leaned forward...

...The man in the chair growled and twisted as he tried to stand...

...Kyle saw the glittering edge of the sword, pushing forward, ready to taste hungry blood as it penetrated flesh, saw Lee Ann lost in a haze of times, and he knew that past, present and future all came here...

...and he fell, something not

quite

like

this.



INTRODUCTION: COMPLEX PLEASURES



How to describe, in simple terms, the most irreverent Tradition? The Cult of Ecstasy takes joy in breaking rules, conventions and boundaries. Well, that's no excuse for clouding the issue. You'll find some conceptual boundaries in this book, **Tradition Book: Cult of Ecstasy**, but it'll be your job to move beyond them.

The Cult certainly has an interesting image, too. Rock musicians? Drug peddlers? S&M fetishists? Sure... but aren't those a little one-dimensional? A Cultist of Ecstasy won't be confined to a box! Cultists are people too, and perhaps a little mind-expanding education will show how they can be more than just some crazy hedonistic pleasure-mages. (Not that being crazy hedonists is a bad thing, mind you.)

Yes, the Cult of Ecstasy takes pleasure where it's available, but a good many Cultists recognize the fact that a level of responsibility comes with their magic, as well. Where's the line drawn between recklessness and responsibility? Ah, *there's* the rub....

THEME: ACTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Cultists are mages of action. They don't sit around waiting for things to happen; they go out and experience everything that the world has to offer. Even with their incredible ability to see through the veil of time, Cultists feel a drive to go out and see things first hand. It's not enough to fake your way through something. If you feel passionate about it, *do it!* Conversely, if you do it, you'll only garner a stronger feeling about it (one way or another). Each Cultist takes a personal shot at enlightenment by grabbing life by the naughty bits and riding wherever it goes.

Just as the Cultists take their chances with the rough stuff, they encourage other people to explode boundaries and explore new directions. Sometimes, doing so leads to enlightenment. Other times, though, it's cause for tragedy, as people dive in too deep or find themselves overcome by personal fears and demons.

The Cult tries to teach how to reach beyond limits, but limits usually exist for a reason.

The trick, of course, is to find the balance point. How much is really *too* much? And what's a Cultist to do when every person out there has a different breaking point? Right or wrong, the Cultist must keep moving to stay alive — but that risk is one that can all too easily catch up other people around the mage and draw them in too deep. What's experience and ecstasy for the mage can drown the unprepared acquaintance.

Along with the quest for personal enlightenment, the mage thus has a responsibility to the people around him. Will the mage shoulder that burden, even if it's ultimately a barrier to true enlightenment, or are a few sacrifices along the way worth it?

MOOD: BREAK THE BARRIERS!

The Cult of Ecstasy ultimately preaches a simple credo: Break the barriers. Pass outside of your comfort zone. Throw away your fears. Make yourself bigger, better or at least more experienced. You really can't know anything until you've tried it. Taste the forbidden fruit!

Breaking down barriers always comes with risk. Sometimes it's the risk of breaking laws or social conventions — the chance to become an outcast. Sometimes it's personal fear — the catch in the throat or the spine-chilling terror of trying to do something that just doesn't sit right. Occasionally the reward on the other side isn't as sweet as expected. To the members of the Cult, that's all part of the experience. Touch it, taste it, feel it, make it real.

Cultists often approach life with rabid enthusiasm — regardless of what they're doing. Sometimes this attitude isn't safe or healthy, but it's almost always enlightening. The experience of the Cult is one on the edge: the fight to achieve great insight before burning out or fading away.

CONTENTS

Like other Tradition mages, Cultists of Ecstasy often suffer under the weight of stereotyping. Sure, it's an amusing stereotype, and being the life of Tradition parties ensures a constant string of friends, hangers-on and sycophants. On the other hand, enlightenment is serious business, and one that the Cult pursues fervently. Many mages fail to recognize where the party ends and the mystic begins — sometimes, even including the Cultists themselves.

Separate truth from perception. Seek wisdom beyond the boundaries of mundane definition. The Cult of Ecstasy is far more than a loose alliance of rebel musicians. This book shows why.

Chapter One: The Endless Moment — What's history to a Tradition that sees beyond the lens of Time? The Cult may have ancient roots, but its seers also know the future to come. Still, the future isn't always easy to understand: so, too, the past. The trick lies not in peering through the mists of past and future, but in recognizing the turning points.

Chapter Two: The Pulse of Ecstasy — Isn't there more to enlightenment than sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll? There most certainly is. The Cult of Ecstasy espouses *many* paths to awareness. The road to Ascension is paved with possibilities, some might say. Here's a look into the Cult's techniques and beliefs, and how to bring depth to a Cult mage.

Chapter Three: Shooting Stars — Cultists of Ecstasy, like other artists, tend to burn bright and flare out. Some have made flares of light so profound that they leave contrails across the night skies of history. Others burn with a slow but wild flame. The best and brightest find expression here.

LEXICON

Ananda — A moment of bliss that surpasses the boundaries of worldly perception. To most mages, a moment of sublime awareness that comes with Awakening or a successful Seeking. To the Cult, a step on the road to Ascension.

Chakra — Energy paths and points along the body, radiating outward from central points of power. These paths, or meridians, focus mystic power when a Cultist performs the proper exercises. The points, which can correspond to endocrine centers or vital organs, serve as junctions between the physical body and the mental or spiritual self.

Code of Ananda — The Cult of Ecstasy's code of behavior that governs responsibility in the pursuit of ecstasy. The Code exists not to set boundaries, but rather to dissuade Cultists from pursuing paths that lead to destructive behaviors or damaging experiences. Schisms in the Cult most often come down to whether a given cabal or sect upholds the Code or eschews it.

Congrex — A sacred communion between partners — not necessarily sexual, but any sort of close (mystical) bond. Often achieved through mutual participation in activities of heightened awareness, sensitivity and passion.

Dakini — A woman of Tantric power, whose passions are so strong and whose wisdom is so profound that she burns with spiritual energy. Traditionally, only flames clothe a Dakini, for her enlightenment is so profound that no outer trappings can contain or augment it.

Diksham — The bond between teacher and student.

Divya — "Super-consciousness," a Master mage.

Dreamline — A magical missive to call to other Ecstatics in emergencies.

Jambo — A meeting of Cultists to discuss serious Tradition matters. (Of course, as is likely at any Cult gathering, various paths to ecstasy inevitably spring up.)

Kamamarga — Paths of Ecstasy. The tools and techniques for inducing ecstatic awareness. Foci and practices that open the floodgates of magical consciousness.

Krishna — The eighth reincarnation of the Hindu god Siva (Shiva), and a supreme deity in his own incarnation.

Kundalini — The "coiled serpent." The power that rests within until awakened through spiritual action (often Tantra). To Cultists, the potential for magic. Aroused, the kundalini uncoils into Shakti (q.v.).

Lakashim — The World Heartbeat. The constant ebb and flow of energy that resonates through all living things. This divine pulse floods awareness during moments of ecstasy and brings the ecstatic into communion with all life. From a moment of such cosmic connection, magic flows. In essence, the flow of Prime through all things.

Mandala — A design or pictogram of lines, circles and triangles, used to focus thought and as a meditation aid. To the Cult, a traced or drawn mandala acts as a conduit for Lakashim and a way to focus magical energy.

Mantra — A repetitive phrase used to focus spiritual energy. "Om" is a common and powerful phrase, rounded and simple. "Hare Krishna" forms the basis of a mantra of prayer to Krishna.

Muse — The Avatar. More generally, the Greek goddess-figures of inspiration tracing back to the eighth century BCE. The muses come upon artists and poets in order to grant them inspiration, but they also demand great strides of creative effort.

Ojas — Life force. The energy that flows through Lakashim. Ojas refers to the personal wellspring of life, channeled through the chakras.

Okox — Spirit communication. Ecstatics perform okox through possession and communicative trance, with the human consciousness expanding or fleeing to allow a spirit entry through the human mind.

Rasarnava — A 12th-century Tantric manuscript dealing with the transmutation of metals — Indian alchemy.

Sahajiya — Old form for Cultists of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Shakta — To the Cult of Ecstasy, the male counterpart to the energy of Shakti. In counterpoint, this energy is focused and controlled. Fusing Shakta with Shakti leads to the whole energies of creation.

Shakti — The Hindu goddess of energy or power. Also, a term for the creative power that springs from that goddess. Raised through Tantric practices, Shakti leads to spiritual liberation. This energy is unfettered and wild.

Siddhu — An Indian mystic; a wandering holy man.

Siva (Shiva) — A Hindu god, often considered the male counterpart to Shakti. To the Cult of Ecstasy, Shakta.

Tantra — Post-Vedic documents dealing with religious rites, temple construction and refinements of health, but also metaphysically explaining practices of spiritual development and magic. Tantra creates a set of opposed practices through which a person can achieve spiritual liberation. The term means "loom," probably stemming from the interconnected nature of its opposing practices. *Dakshinacara* is the right-hand path, which stresses liberation through service to a higher power and refusal of the mundane, physical shell. This path revolves around mantras, meditation and mortification. *Vamacara* is the left-hand path, which focuses on ecstatic communion with the inner energy of Shakti or the outer divinity of other beings. Ritual copulation, dance and yoga form the core of the left-hand practices.

Vedas — Hindu sacred scriptures.

Yantra — "Instrument." A very complex and linear form of mandala used as a meditation aid. Following the form of a yantra, combined with yoga, helps to focus the postulant on the steps to enlightenment.

Zeitgeist — The spirit of an age. Cultists who are familiar with spirit-talking can communicate with spirits that form out of ideologies so potent that they take on an image of a specific period of history.



CHAPTER ①: THE ENDLESS MOMENT

*What was the primal matter? What the beginning?
How and what manner of thing was that from which
The Maker of All, seer of all, brought forth
The earth, and by his might the heavens unfolded?*
—The Rig Veda

TITLE AGAIN



It is a week ago. Lee Ann lies sprawled across the floor of the house, propped up on some hefty pillows. Outside, rain makes a staccato pattering against the windows: *tap tap, tap tap, tap tap*. Inside, the soft lights illuminate her bejeweled coat, her book of Tantra and her small bowl of burning incense.

Kyle coughs. He has never much cared for smoke indoors.

“Sorry. It helps me to free my thoughts, you know?” Lee Ann comments. She stands and takes the bowl of incense over to a low table in the corner of the room,

where the house’s air conditioning will whisk away much of the smoke.

Kyle nods. “Just an allergy. My eyes swell up until I can’t see. Don’t worry too much, though. It takes a while.”

Lee Ann gives Kyle a brief grin before she answers, “You’ll get over it. Honest.”

“What did you mean by free your thoughts?” Kyle inquires. “Like a ‘free your mind’ sort of thing? It helps you think?”

“Yes and no,” Lee Ann says as she sinks back down onto one of the pillows. “It’s not so much that it helps me to *think* in the way you think it means. It doesn’t

make my thoughts all clear and logical. The smell helps to carry me off to other times and places.”

“It helps you dream,” Kyle interjects.

Lee Ann pauses, her mouth half open. “Sort of,” she says, this time with a wince. “I know it’s a little confusing. You know how you feel sometimes when you’re lying in bed and your mind just starts to drift away and you have strange memories or associations? Visions of fantasies? Like that. It’s not thinking in the ‘rational’ mind. It’s thinking that leads to other times and places.”

“I don’t understand,” Kyle says. He furrows his brow and shifts his position on the floor, acutely aware that his arm is falling asleep. “You mean you see dreams and fantasies... but other times, too?”

“What is a dream or a fantasy, Kyle?” Lee Ann asks. “It’s another place where we haven’t been, but, on some level, we want to. Or which we fear. Sometimes, I see things that have been. Other times, it opens the way to things that might be. Occasionally, it shows things that never were but might have been. It’s all the same.”

“But some things are real and some aren’t,” Kyle objects almost automatically. He definitely frowns now, thoroughly ill at ease with this rejection of a basic logical world.

“Are they?” Lee Ann says. “Never mind—let’s leave that for another time. Let me give you an example. The smell of the incense, I imagine, is much like the incense used by the Hindu priests way back in the beginnings of

India. No, I don’t mean it smells the same,” — she cuts him off before he can object — “but it serves the same purpose. I can see what it was like back then.”

Kyle nods hesitantly. “Because smell is tied to memory, right? It brings out memories of similar things. You remember studying those times, or you can imagine what it was like for them.”

Lee Ann sighs heavily and sits up. She leans back against a hefty bean bag before she continues. “No... how to put it? Smell is Resonance.” She pauses, waiting for Kyle to comment, but he simply remains exasperated. “The incense does for me the same things it did for Brahmins hundreds of years ago. It’s a power that has come unchanged down through the years. I may not smell the same things they did, and I may not do the same magic they do, but we have a connection. It’s the smell of enlightenment. It’s the scent of spirituality. It’s all connected, and I can see and smell their connection to Lakashim — the universal pulse — just like my own.”

Kyle cocks his head, thinking for a moment. A flash of lightning illuminates the window, followed a few moments later by a peal of thunder. Kyle jumps in his place, inadvertently taking a deep breath. The scent energizes his nostrils, and before he can cough, he finds himself floating. He’s not really floating off the ground, but his mind begins to wander corridors of strange, half-remembered scents.

Lee Ann smiles. “You smell it? Good.”

FIRST ECSTASY



“It’s sometime in the past — not sure when, really. We’ve gone back by a link to Tantra and stepped through the universal nature of ecstasy.” Lee Ann’s voice seems to ring hollowly, as if from across a great gulf.

Kyle cranes his head. On one level, he’s aware that he’s in a sitting room in a house on a rainy night. On another level, he smells burning wood, rancid sweat and the bitter scent of fermentation. He can’t see Lee Ann, or himself.

Lee Ann’s voice echoes out again. “It’s the cradle of civilization. Later historians will argue whether this should be southern Africa or mid-east Europe. It doesn’t matter. Right now, the world is young, barely formed. Africa and Europe aren’t places. There’s just here and far away.”

Among low mud-and-straw-brick houses Kyle sees people moving about. They’re shorter than he is, with bronzed skin and enlarged features. They move in rough woolen clothes, and their feet are bare. Dusty paths wind between the simple hovels. No great walls or roads or works

crisscross the city. Even so, the people are at ease. The setting sun casts orange light across the sky, and small crowds of people move about laughing, drinking and loving.

“Men have discovered the lure of alcohol, and women the power of sexuality. There’s no alcoholism or sexual disease yet, though. Instead these tools are ways to ecstasy. People do things to be happy and change their perceptions. The priests and seers can commune with spirits, but anyone can take a drink or a bath or an evening of copulation and, for a time, sense the Lakashim. Life is hard work, but the respite is all the more potent,” Lee Ann explains from her vantage centuries away.

In the middle of the streets, a man dances about in a circle, holding a clay urn in his hand. Brown liquid spills from the jug, but he happily drinks some and offers it to his neighbors. A small circle of people surround him, clapping their hands and stamping their feet as he spins and prances.

“Notice how they react?” Lee Ann inquires. “They don’t stare at him like he’s crazy. They smile and watch. They clap and encourage. He’s not a drunk or a

madman. He's someone taking a moment to feel joy and spread a little of that joy to others."

Kyle finds his voice. His throat feels dry and tight. His voice seems to echo through his head, and it requires an effort to push the words out. In a way, he thinks the words, but only when he finally forces himself to say them does he realize that he hadn't spoken aloud after all. "Where is this? Why do they do this?"

It feels as though Lee Ann shrugs. Kyle thinks he sees her do so, but he's not sure any more. "It doesn't matter. It's a time and place where people didn't fear joy and didn't regard release as a shameful thing. It's innocent wisdom: They didn't have to relearn the ways of pleasure and ecstasy. They already know."

FADING SMOKE

A whiff of smoke, and Kyle thinks he can smell the incense again. It draws back into a strange, sparkling sensation. It tickles his nose but doesn't make him sneeze. For a moment, he thinks he's falling into a well, but something holds him up. "What was that?" he asks in wonder.

"It's a line further back," says Lee Ann with a bit of resignation in her voice. "We don't know how far it goes. Ecstasy has always been within human reach. It's only the modern age that makes it harder to find. But we can't see all the way back to when it started. Who knows? Maybe before all this it was chimpanzees, like Darwin says. Or angels. Or gods on Earth, or aliens. Some things are lost to history."

"Why?" is all that Kyle can manage.

"Because the world has moved on," Lee Ann answers. "Remember how I said this place isn't Africa or Europe or anywhere? The world isn't the same then as it is in the future of our now. It's possible that the world is so different back before this that we have no way to understand it. We can't see it because it's so different from what we know that we could never comprehend it."

"This happens sometimes," Lee Ann continues. "Ages come and go. The world turns and returns. Shiva enters a new incarnation, the great god blinks, and everything is destroyed and remade. The more we pass through the veil of time, the harder it becomes to peer. Eventually you can't see further forward or back, at least not with any magic we know."

VEDA

Evening cooking fires and revelries give way to repetitive ululations. Men in ornate dress circle about a tremendous statue of a many-armed god. At a small stool, a man marks laboriously with a cramped hand. His writing is precise and clean, in characters that Kyle's just started to learn about: Sanskrit.



"That one's an innovator," Lee Ann points out. "He's skilled with ink and brush, a rare art indeed for this age, back around 800 BC. He's taking notes on the chants of the other priests. He's compiling copies of various writings, liturgies and instructions. When it's finished, he'll have compiled one of the Vedas — the Hindu manuscripts that tell of hymns and ritual observations.

"For now, the Vedas form the basis of early Hindu thought. Eventually, they'll be expanded and used as texts for all sorts of magic and priestly ritual. They'll also form the basis of lifestyles along the Indus River. These Vedas comprise the most important tenets of social and mystical life for these people.

"Now, the Vedas themselves do contain some hints at mysticism, but they're not solely Cult-oriented material. They are important for what they inspire, later... as you'll see."

DIONYSUS

The smoke becomes thick and Kyle almost chokes. He's lost for a moment in great pyres and clouds of black soot. When his vision clears again, he sees through watering eyes that the sun is rising. Wild, streaming parties of revelers twist and whirl across low grasses and abundant hillsides. Kyle turns his head and sees isles in the sea — bent trees interspersed with white stone columns, all rising from low hillsides that dot the shining ocean water.

"It's somewhere around 600 years BC," Lee Ann narrates. "Greece has inherited the Dionysian tradition from Thrace. Wild festivals of revelry range from bouts of drinking to maddened orgies and everything in between. Sometimes, the celebrations are simply thiasoi — processions — carrying thyrsos — a pine cone wreathed in ivy at the end of a wand." Lee Ann murmurs in a low voice, "Probably a phallic symbol as well as a sign of Dionysus."

Along the roots of the mountains, revelers twirl and screech. Some shout out and bite or scratch at others. A few couple or lose themselves in the fermented juices of the grape.

Her voice rises, and she continues. "They celebrate all the aspects of intoxication and insight. Dionysus brings happiness and revelry, but his grape can also bring wrath. His revelers are creatures of joy and ferocity. When they spin and dance, they feel no pain. Sometimes they even devour one another, tearing at the flesh of animals or people. As they consume, they are consumed. Dionysus — the power of spirit — enters them, and they transcend their mortal place in time. Some of them

become more than human. The maenads follow the call of Dionysus, and they become eternal in turn.

"Popular culture would have you see Dionysus as a god of wine and drunkards," Lee Ann contends. "He's seen as a minor and impotent deity — the holder of the grape vine, the man stumbling about with the jug, attended by mad women. The Bacchanalian revels — that's from Bacchus, one of his other forms — are discounted as these maddened festivals where the maenads, the mad women, tear people to pieces and eat them. It's an intersection between insanity and drunkenness, but certainly not something divine, right?"

In the Greek summer, the dancers twist and bend. Their faces are masks of another world. "Euoi, euoi," comes as a persistent cry, almost in mimicry of the seagulls.

"Did you know that Dionysus was also a prophet?" Lee Ann adds. "He had his own temples, his own oracle, and, in some places, he was accorded as much insight as Apollo. He was a counterpart, in many ways. He was inspirer, joy-bringer, but also a herald of rage and furious action. Dionysus soothed man's pains but he also could rouse man into anger. He parted normal vision and replaced it with the vision of fantasy: the inner vision, the wants and desires that go unanswered. He was all the passions of the living — intercourse, ecstasy, rage, hunger. Primal power. Lakashim, flowing without judgment."

"Later, the Dionysian revels give way to the power of drama. Dionysus sponsors the stage and the theater, where tragedy and comedy come together — dynamic, polar opposites, the extremes of emotion. The Dionysian theater becomes so central that it also becomes a meeting place and a spring festival." Lee Ann's voice stretches as the women wail, their voices carrying a dubious combination of ecstasy and pain. In the midst of the revels, a man in goat skins wears a white cloth mask over his face. He shouts nonsensical phrases of Greek, babbling of ships at sea and fading empires.

"Who's that man?" Kyle interjects.

Lee Ann shifts. Kyle can hear her moving, but he can't see her any more. She explains, "He's a ritual speaker. Almost a priest, of a sort. By masking his face, he separates himself from the sight of the normal world and allows Dionysus to come into him personally. His pronouncements can be dramatic, comic, tragic, nonsensical, prophetic — whatever the god speaks. In this age, the gods are literally speaking through their servants."

"What's that word they're repeating?" Kyle asks dubiously.



"*Euoi*," comes Lee Ann's drifting voice. "It's the cry of the maenads. It's not a chant, really, or a piece of language. It's a primal sound. It's all vowels — no end, no staccato, no structure; just a circle of sound. In some ways it's like a mantra: repeated over and over, because it's a sound that has its own power without needing a meaning."

Kyle shakes his head, trying to clear it, yet he finds the house increasingly distant. He's without body, lost in a formless past. "I don't understand! How can they be so wild? They're *eating* each other!"

"That's the way of life," Lee Ann answers calmly. "It can be frightening, yes. But we eat plants and animals. Life feeds itself. Lakashim calls out to itself: The most potent way to ingest the stream is to find another conduit of that river. Fear comes from our inner conflict when we refuse to acknowledge life. We want something, but we don't think we can or should have it, and so we're afraid — afraid to act, afraid of seeing someone else do that thing. We're afraid because it's so powerful that we can lose control and identity and become more than simple people stuck in time. Inside, kundalini uncoils and wants to rise up to divinity, but the body and mind are afraid of being left behind. It's ego. We're afraid because we don't know what we'll become if we do all the things we want to do."

"If we gave in to every impulse we'd only be animals," Kyle says with a hint of revulsion.

"Animals? Or gods?" Lee Ann says with a sigh. "Thought and will can direct Lakashim, yes. Ego can be a tool to overcome weakness and desire, but when ego responds only to weakness and desire, Lakashim is lost to us. Animals have only their desires to drive Lakashim. People have more. We can follow Lakashim and see where it takes us, or we can direct Lakashim and let it flow into new places. But Lakashim is life, and life will not be denied. Understand why you feel what you do; embrace your feelings. Even if you don't act on them, acknowledge them."

NICOTIACHEAN ETHICS

A cool breeze seems to waft by Kyle, something he can feel even though he's not experiencing it. Overhanging trees give shade while a sun-wrinkled man in simple robes lectures to a small group. He gestures with his hands, indicating the sky, the trees, the surrounding world. His hands close together, as if to show how small they all become.

"Aristotle," Lee Ann breathes.

Kyle shakes his head a bit, confused. "Isn't he a Technocratic thinker? A creator of their... rational mind?" he asks.

"Yes and no," Lee Ann says. "It's rarely that simple, remember? Aristotle pioneered new ideas. He wanted people to think in different ways about the world, to expand their minds and explore. He didn't envision creating a world of rigid reason so much as he wanted to live in a world where the mind could envision and explain anything, I think. He'd be terrified by what the Technocracy's made, I'm sure. But even though he wasn't Awakened, he was inadvertently one of the best proponents of the Cult's ideas, long before the Cult took form."

"How so?" Kyle said. "I mean, he's so big on the mental experience. Maybe I can see him as a proponent of expanding the mind... but ecstasy?"

Lee Ann waves her hand in front of Kyle's face — or so he thinks. He feels the breeze again, but isn't sure if the blending of color comes from shadows in the trees or Lee Ann's fingernails. "Silly boy. You should do more studying. Aristotle has a philosophical writing that he names for his son. It's a simple treatise, worth a couple days' reading. It's called *Nicomachean Ethics*. In it, Aristotle examines the chief aims of humanity and tries to arrive at the greatest goal of all mankind."

Kyle waits for her to continue. He feels almost like he should guess at the significance of the work, but he doesn't remember it.

"Ultimately," Lee Ann finally says with a heavy exhalation, "Aristotle examines human behavior as behavior geared toward the achievement of happiness. He asserts that the greatest good follows from acts in accord with inner virtue, which lead ultimately to happiness. He argues that inner virtue is recognition of personal desire tempered with responsibility. To Aristotle, the perfect society is one that strives for perfect happiness, for happiness comes only with excellence. Therefore, a society of happiness is a society of people who strive to realize their greatest potential."

"But what about lazy people, or people who just want a moment of happiness?" Kyle asks. "They have a moment of happiness, but, in the end, it leads to disaster. His philosophy sounds like Communism to me — nice theory, but people suck."

In the auditorium, Aristotle's voice drops low. His student leans forward to listen and learn, recording everything in memory for later writing. His eyes dazzle with the passion of inspiration.

"People have to recognize the needs of greater happiness," Lee Ann explains. "If you just tune out and drop everything, you may find a moment of release, but no happiness. You recognize this in anxiety and self-destructive behavior. People fret and worry over things

left undone or things they could do better. They should spend their energy *doing* better in the first place. Happiness isn't instant. It's eternal. It requires work. People confuse gratification with happiness."

Aristotle leaves his teaching circle. He meets his son, still a young boy. The lad's face lights up at the sight of his father, and the ancient philosopher responds in kind. The source of Aristotle's happiness is clear.

"I just don't get it, I guess," Kyle says with a sigh. "It sounds like a recipe for social disaster."

"In any case," Lee Ann said, her voice drifting slightly, "there were some people who felt as you do."

MAENADS AND SIBYLS

The maenads of ancient Bacchanalian rites have long since vanished. Ancient Greece's violent orgies don't bring out mad festivities of screaming women in this banal age. The same, too, is true of oracles... with the long-ago fall of Greece, the sibyls and prophets of ancient days have passed on.

In the Umbra, though, and in Shallowings, some things live on. Maenads — not simple women but actual entities changed forever by the touch of Dionysus — still dance their screaming dance. When perception and reality intersect, these visions sometimes come forth to dance once more for a brief time in the mortal world.

In game terms, the maenads of the Umbra are not quite human and not quite spirit — they have transformed through the auspices of ecstasy into something else. They're harbingers of ecstasy, in a sense: beings consumed wholly by passion. Sometimes, they dance and sing. Other times, they rend and destroy. Always, they show and act out the most vibrant passions without hesitation.

Mages who encounter the maenads see a long-ago tradition of release. Participation in the Dionysian rites can be refreshing, or dangerous. A participant can't do things half-way — the maenads will force the issue. Often, the mage may be thrust into wild acts of self-mutilation, copulation or vigorous bouts of inebriation. Surviving such an experience pushes away inhibitions and opens inner sight: It can be a doorway to a Seeking. But the maenads are whimsical, like the movement of all predators. They can turn on a mage and tear him to shreds, reducing him to sustenance for their Umbral horde.

For more ideas on the maenads and oracles, see the Greco-Roman section of **Dead Magic**.

END OF INNOCENCE

Kyle blinks lazily. He feels sleepy, and he doesn't know why. The house is lost to him except for the smell of incense and the occasional *tap-tap* of rain. As he blinks the world turns around. This doesn't startle him in the least: It's like a dream, where things change without warning, yet seem natural.

The afternoon sun illuminates cracked walls and hillside villages. It's only a short distance away from Greece, now. Tomatoes dry on ledges and gardens boast basil, onion and garlic. Italy.

"Here in Italy, the cult of Dionysus flourishes," Lee Ann explains. "The popularity of Dionysian and Bacchanalian revels ensures the spread of the religion. Among women in particular it's popular. It's a form of anonymous freedom from the constraints of usual society. Patriarchal societies fear this liberating power, however. They condemn the cults as purveyors of iniquity. They fear what they desire."

On the hillside, an edifice burns. It's a simple wooden structure adorned with vines and branches, with grapes hanging from the doorframe. Fire licks at it as a small group of soldiers watch nearby. One soldier drags a woman by her hair. The woman screams and scratches at him, and he flinches from her nails. He thrusts her against a wall, then knocks her to the ground with a blow of his fist. The woman crumples, sobbing.

"By 186 BC, the senate of the Italian peninsula had had enough. These revels alarmed and shocked them. They wanted a society they could control and rule. Classical philosophy springing up led to the adoption of stricter societies. While the old gods are still revered and adopted into local pantheons, their practices are seen as a danger to society. The revels now are ended. The senate passes harsh legislation outlawing all of the lodges and play-houses of Bacchus, their incarnation of Dionysus. Followers flee or are imprisoned. Their ecstatic communions are at an end. Separated from one another and from their practices of worship, only a rare few can touch Lakashim unaided. These meet with the power of the government and rarely survive."

Kyle gulps at the air. Smoke, smoke again: This time the burning wreaths and ivy of Bacchus fills his lungs. The acrid stench reminds him once more of incense.

"It's an offering to their gods," Kyle blurts out. "It's their sacrifice of a way of life they don't understand, to appease the life of control and the order of society."

"Very good," Lee Ann compliments him. "You may learn something yet. But this isn't the end. Even

outlawed and hunted, the festivals continue in the peninsula along the Mediterranean. Sponsors build Dionysian stages, where seasonal festivals aid in the birth of drama. It's the beginnings of community storytelling, when everyone comes together for a matter of seriousness about fantasy and imagination."

BLOOD GODS

Floating, Kyle is buoyed on the ocean. He drifts over its waves, the current passing beneath him. Shapes in the deeps are like black motes swirling without predestined direction. Clouds sweep overhead as he passes up into the sky, then back down to a land of jungle and swamp. Great buildings of tan, cracked stonework form an empire that spans from ocean to ocean. His floating form arrives in a great open atrium, where a man catches up the blood of his pierced body in a large green leaf. The man's body is dark and wiry, his forehead flat.

"I recognize this," Kyle blurts out. "It's America — the Mayans, right?"

"Indeed. Two for two," Lee Ann purrs. "They're not really part of the Cult of Ecstasy, because the foundation of the Cult still hasn't organized. It's only about AD 200. We haven't met them, but we will meet them, and because we have had that meeting in our now-past, we can see what they were before they were with us."

"This man is a priest, too. He gives an offering of his blood. He'll burn it and send it to heaven to please his gods. But it's more than just a ritual of sacrifice. As he lets out his blood, the pain and the loss make him dizzy. He enters a trance. Pain is lost to him, but his mind floats away. Without having to drink anything or eat anything, he gives up his shackles — they flow out with a little bit of his life. He pierces his chakra and Lakashim flows ever more freely."

"What will he do? It's magic, right?" Kyle inquires.

"Yes, it's magic," Lee Ann says. "Perhaps he's looking into the future, or asking for good fortune for the crops. He uses his magic for his people. His ecstasy is tempered with responsibility. This sacrifice isn't something light or trivial; it's his role in life. Every time he undertakes it, it's special. It's not something he teaches other people to do, or presses them into: He makes the sacrifice himself."

The Mayan priest wavers on his feet for a moment, then places the leaf and blood into a ceremonial urn. It quickly catches fire and the smoke rises. Once again, Kyle scents the common thread.

PASSING CENTURIES

Kyle feels dizzy again. He feels something rough against his cheek and thinks that his body has fallen sideways. He feels something soft and realizes that Lee Ann's helping him back up, placing him against another plush pillow for support. Blackness swims in front of his eyes, and stars.



"It's a long time without organization for the people who will eventually make up the Cult," Lee Ann explains. "In the Americas, the use of pain-induced trance continues as a priestly tradition, but in some places, it's bent. The Aztecs and their infamous human sacrifice push other people into the position of taking responsibility against their will and for lives not their own. In Europe, the Roman Empire is fading. It's outlawed many of the Bacchanalian rites and practices, but it keeps theater and philosophy alive. As the fifth century approaches, it loses more and more grip. Its priesthood wanes, and Christianity spreads. In Asia, Buddhism's on the rise, along with obscure branches of Hinduism. But the real breakthrough, as far as the Cult's concerned, is still a good half-millennium off."

Kyle feels himself spin, and he's flying over the ocean again. Stars burn overhead, churning as years whirl away. He passes beyond Greece and once more to India—the place of the Vedas.

"You mentioned the Vedas as important before. This is it, isn't it? They formed some sort of ecstatic group here?" Kyle opines.

"Mmm, yes, eventually," Lee Ann answers. "Around AD 500, the Shakti cults are on the rise. These are mother goddess cults centered around feminine power. At the same time, the Vedas have cemented into the form of the caste system. The Brahmins in the Ganges valley orchestrate the social structure of India of the era. Worship of Vishnu, in many forms, is prevalent. Hinduism, by nature, is a tolerant faith; it sees other gods as emanations of its divine principle. When the mother cults become integrated with the core Hindu faith, a little bit of drift is inevitable.

"Incidentally, this is also the birthplace of the Euthanatos. Among the Hindus, they learn the cycles of life, death and reincarnation.

They take the Vedic scriptures to heart, and, like Kali, they wear bones to symbolize their ascendancy over life and death. They believe that this universe is just part of the endless cycle of godly progressions. As priests, they occupy the upper castes, and they exercise judgment over all of society.

"But another holy war is already underway.

"Siddharta Gautama has long since brought Buddhism to the fore. Centuries before, he argued that the divine principle and worship of Vishnu could not free humanity from the basic problem of suffering. Instead, he proposes that one must be free of the ego completely, and give up all worldly ties. He tells that gods are nothing more than emanations trapped by phenomenal desires to match their cosmic powers. Buddhism becomes popular, partly because of his incredible charisma, partly because it's accessible even to the lower classes, and partly because he and his followers are credited with many miracles.

"By the sixth and seventh centuries AD, Buddhism and Hinduism are in a philosophical clash for followers. Buddhism carries esoteric knowledge from China, where its philosophers have traveled and returned with elements of Chinese alchemy and Taoist thought. Hinduism retains its stranglehold on the social structure. The two could coexist, except that their followers of the age disagree on fundamental principles. Hindu philosophers take to the streets to attack Buddhist doctrine, resulting in the closure of many Buddhist temples. In response, the Buddhists move much of their strength back into China or into small western provinces under local kings who are sympathetic to their cause.

"Incidentally, the Buddhist and Hindu clashes parallel the battles between the Akashic Brotherhood and the Euthanatos, to some degree... but this story isn't about them."

As Kyle finds himself outside of any form, he hovers over the cities of India. It's like watching a tableau unfold. Below him, a great map of the continent seems to stretch as far as he can see. Over the hills, riders approach on horses. With pennons and mail armor, the dusky invaders swarm down into the Ganges valley. Wherever they ride, the map bleeds. Kyle sees abstractions, as the invaders strike with their superior weapons and organization at the cities of an ancient and stratified civilization.

"Over the next several centuries, Buddhism's on the decline, becoming little more than a mystery cult inside of Hindu doctrine — and then there's an invasion. Muslims from the west crash into India and take over large portions of the stagnant kingdom. Islam becomes the official policy. Hinduism suffers the vagaries of different Muslim kings — some tolerant, some

persecutory. In the northeastern province of India, mystical Buddhist philosophy collides with Hindu theology and the feminine power archetypes of the Shakti, and something new is born — Tantra.

"That's right. It's not until the 12th century that Tantra actually comes out of Hindu teachings. The combination of the Buddhist mysticism, carrying alchemy and meditation, with Hindu social constructs and worship, married to the idea of creative power, synergizes into something totally unforeseen."

Kyle focuses his eyes once more. He's in the bleak provinces of northeast India. Here, practitioners of this new Tantric form explore wildly divergent techniques, each borrowed from other religions. Some keep to an ascetic regimen, meditating in the sweltering autumn heat. Others debate the structure of the body's meridians. Two men liken the body to a mandala: The meridians are a puzzle, a set of channels that can be followed to enlightenment. A man and a woman only a village away couple in ecstatic heat, stemming the tide of climax in order to turn vision inward.

"It's the power of sex, combined with spirituality, the magic of the gods, worship, dance, ritual, meditation, alchemy and mysticism. It's us — Lakashim awakens once more. Kundalini uncoils, and enlightenment strikes."

Kyle feels a great pressure against his forehead, and he leans his body back, only to realize that he seems to be falling again. This time, it's not his physical body that's falling over. His dream-self waits to impact as fire rises in his belly.

"Let it flow over you, Kyle. It's a powerful moment in history to us." Lee Ann's voice is comforting, and he thinks he feels her cool hands on his forehead. A fever seems to burn through his consciousness, even though he can't feel his body except for the heat.

"It's interesting that the Tantra existed with Buddhism as much as five centuries earlier. It wasn't until it was reintegrated into Hinduism that it became the form we use most commonly, though. The Muslim invaders had little patience for the Tantric paths. Islam derided the use of alcohol or the practice of sex outside of strict marital arrangements. The Islamic kings regulated Hindu and Buddhist practices to some degree, but especially held a contempt for the sorts of practices that the Cult would encourage."

Turning his head from side to side, Kyle casts his gaze over a mountainous province. He sees the waves of the Muslim armies crash against the mountains again and again, but they never penetrate the fastness. Inside, the people keep to their old way of life. He watches as the priests and monks continue their studies, reading from the Vedas.

"It all comes together here, in a little kingdom called Kamarupa. This kingdom's in northeastern India, in an area where natural terrain helps to keep out invaders. The Muslims push against it every now and then, but they never manage to get inside. Consider for a moment... all the centuries of development of Buddhism and Hinduism, from the entire subcontinent of India, preserved in a single province. Sometimes, Hindus and Buddhists from outside flee persecution by their conquerors and bring their versions of faith to the province as well. A whole continent of disparate ideologies, all shoved together in one desperate little kingdom. There was no other way: The people *had* to learn something new. They *had* to accept the strange ideas of their neighbors and sometimes, just sometimes, they experimented a little themselves.

"Of course, Kamarupa doesn't survive. The Cult's ancestors still haven't fully organized. They now have a doctrine, Tantra, that espouses the Cult's dual purpose of responsible introspection with ecstatic communion. They have a religious network, and they have mystical practices, but they lack a widespread power base. They're a small group of quirky magician-priests in a kingdom that's slowly being overtaken by the migration of outside cultures."

Kyle opens his eyes, and realizes that he's lying on the floor of the house. Smoke hovers about the ceiling, and the pungent scent of the incense still floats in his nostrils. Lee Ann is sprawled back against her bean bag, her eyes half-lidded, as if she's only partly awake. With an effort, Kyle pushes himself aright again. He feels as if he's directing his limbs from a great distance, but he manages to sit up.

"What's happening?" Kyle manages to croak out. "That was like a dream... it all seemed to make sense, but now... What did you do?"

Lee Ann's lips move, but it takes a moment for sound to form. Incense smoke issues forth in a small puff of grayish vapor. "I guided you, Kyle. You opened your eye to time... I just guided you." Her chest heaves with a sudden deep breath, and she blinks. Then, she gives one of her usual impish grins. "Better than a ten-dollar movie, huh?"

Rubbing his eyes, Kyle tries to gather his wits. "I feel so... I don't know... muddled."

"Don't worry," Lee Ann says as the rain picks up a bit outside. "We're halfway there."

"Halfway?" Kyle can't quite conceal the crack of worry in his voice.

"I've showed you the roots," Lee Ann replies somberly. "Might as well take you along for the rest of the ride." She

leans forward on to her knees, and inches toward Kyle. She places her hands over his eyes and murmurs softly, "Back into the dream with you, mister...."

TRADITION, FORTIFIED

This time, Kyle dives into the dream of time, and he retains some sense of himself. In the time stream, he's a ghost — intangible, floating hand-in-hand with Lee Ann, who guides him along corridors past moving visions. Arcing to the sides in curved panoramas are hallucinations of times past. Here, a soldier clings to life as his blood empties onto a jungle plain. There, a young couple celebrates the birth of a new son. Kyle feels his breath labor, as if the air is gelatin.

"The forerunners of the Cult are a scattered bunch by the thirteenth century AD," Lee Ann's voice comes, startling him out of his reverie. To one side, an image passes of a thewy man with burned rune-markings marring his skin. The rune-scarred giant grits his teeth as he applies an iron brand to the inside of his arm. The sizzling of flesh accompanies his gurgling, choking pain, and his eyes roll back in his head. The brand falls from his hand, and he collapses into the snow, quivering.

On his right, Kyle sees a trial — a mob trial, like the witch-trials of popular fiction. A theatrical vagabond waits in a hangman's noose as a vitriolic speaker fires the crowd up with hate for the man's antics and irreverent profession. Neither churchman nor noble is anywhere to be seen. The inquisitor is little more than a wanderer himself, garbed in tattered clothes and armed with snatches of ill-remembered scripture. He sends the actor swinging and sets to collecting money from the crowd. The actor hangs limply as the crowd watches and pelts him with stones. Hours later, when they've left, he contorts his hands and his shoulders and pulls his hands free from the knot behind his back, then pulls himself up the hanging rope until he can untie it and free himself. His lips are chapped and his neck burned, but he lives long enough to flee the people who do not understand his craft.

The panoramas slow, and Kyle spots a moving scene that gives him chills. Men in a cloistered tower pore over manuscripts, making bubbling concoctions and elixirs from recipes. Kyle recognizes the Sanskrit writing characteristic of the Vedas and the Tantric alchemies. Here, the man has no room for spirituality or sacred ecstasy. He deconstructs the recipes, mixes them, tries them again and again. He does not want enlightenment or communion. He wants only money and logic, and, as he makes notes, he destroys the original documents, proclaiming them lies.

"The Order of Reason," Lee Ann breathes in response. "Just one scene of many. The Order started small... at first, just a loose alliance of God-fearing men who hoped to 'put the world aright' and make reason the keystone of understanding. They had no room for magicians or spiritualists. They wanted a world safe from whimsical gods or chaotic powers. They got it, too."

"Honestly, if it weren't for the Order of Reason, the Cult might never have formed. Okay, not a fair analogy — if not for *many* factors, the Cult might never have formed. But the Order made the last big push that turned a scattered bunch of ecstatic practitioners into a fused, single Cult.

"By the 15th century, the Order of Reason had become a real power. Their 'age of reason' was well underway. Some of the Traditions that already existed, like the Order of Hermes, were on the ropes. Others weren't so bad off yet, but they could see what was coming.

"See what was coming... that's it. One seer who had incredible insight into the Tantras and Vedas recognized the coming storm. Perhaps he theorized it, or perhaps he saw it. As stories tell it, he could travel through time, if he wished. Sh'zar, *the Seer*."

Kyle sees this man, now: an impressive man with a finely honed body and a sense of wonder. His eyes stare off toward an unknown horizon. Moving slowly, unhurried, he conveys a sense that he knows where he needs to be at any time, and that he knows that time will bow for him. For a moment, his eyes flash as they cross Kyle's place, hanging in space, and the young student can almost swear that the vision sees him.

"Sh'zar understands the fundamental principles that form the core of the Cult. He's not only a powerful magician and visionary, but a man of principle beyond his own time. He recognizes the need for respect between people. While he believes that limits are illusions, he encourages people to recognize their own illusions; he doesn't thrust them headlong into their fears. Because of this, he's not motivated to form a power group out of personal strength or political acumen. Rather, he deals with people as respected equals. Most mages are so used to condescension and derision in this era that his words carry weight — the weight of validation. He helps other mages feel good about themselves, so they listen.

"Sh'zar explains what he knows. He recognizes that the Order of Reason will finish casting its net over the minds of men in the near future. The world will become a tool of Reason, with no room for mystics. He can't always explain the details — the closer you look at the picture, the fuzzier it becomes — but he's passionate, and he's a master of his arts. His Initiates, Akrites Salonikas, Tali Eos and Kalas Jnana, follow him on his

journeys and speak on his behalf. He travels the length and breadth of eastern Europe and eventually heads out to France as well. There, he uses his knowledge of time to track down various Masters in places where he knows they'll be. He shows them visions of the times to come, and he convinces them that if they don't act now, the time of Reason will arrive soon and crush them all.

"Together, the Masters might stave off the age of Reason for their lifetimes. Apart, they will fall under the heel of the Order of Reason. Self-preservation's a wonderful motivator. While they might not all want to believe him, they have to recognize Sh'zar's strength as a Master of Time magic, especially since he gives them the same respect."

Kyle sees an argument he's only heard about before. Seated around a long table, gathered as if for a war council, are magicians of tremendous stature. Barely hidden magical energies crackle and roil around them even as they shout and cajole. The predecessors of the Traditions bicker for supremacy.

"Sh'zar stays to relay his visions and continue the diplomacy," Lee Ann's voice says, hovering in the nothingness around Kyle. "Without him, he knows that the various mages won't find a compromise. The Order of Hermes blames the Chœur Céleste — the Celestial Chorus — for bringing the Church to bear against magicians. The Verbena harbor the same grudge, and furthermore accuse the Order of poaching their members and killing the few people who try to reconcile both groups' ways. The Chorus, for its part, wants nothing to do with godless heretics, and blames both Verbena and Order for elitism that fractures the social order. If not for Sh'zar, all groups would bicker until the Order of Reason came for them. With his guidance, they remain focused on the long-term problem — the picture of times to come. He teaches them a little something about tolerance.

"Meanwhile, Sh'zar's Disciples travel the world. Once again, the Master of Time is one step ahead of everyone else. He knows that the Traditions will need allies in their coming battle, and that every ally not recruited immediately could be crushed on the morrow. The other groups won't get around to sending emissaries until they work out their differences over Europe. Sh'zar's more pragmatic — he has to be, since he knows what's coming. The other groups will send out the olive branch to recruit far-flung mages from the corners of the globe who all have an interest in this new alliance. Sh'zar, though, has a different plan. His Disciples are on the look out specifically for people to bind together in a new group to back Sh'zar.

"If you listen to the Order of Hermes, they'll tell you this was a power play, pure and simple, that Sh'zar wanted to challenge the authority of the Hermetics at the convocation. They'll tell you he wanted to poach as many mages as possible, and perhaps even become the titular leader of the formative Traditions.

"It's much simpler than that. Sh'zar knew that he was just one man with a few supporters. So long as he sat in a room with three representatives of these other magely groups, it was his one voice with three others. He had a fair shot at representation. As soon as the meeting became a matter of entire Traditions, though, he was in trouble. Without the backing of a whole magical order, he suddenly had only one voice. His visions wouldn't mean anything — committees would debate them away. Without the guidance of the future, the council would be too short-sighted to finish its work in time. The Order of Reason would win again.

"In short, Sh'zar needed enough political clout to force the Traditions to do the right thing, no matter how much pride or expedience they had to swallow."

The panoramas come faster now: Kyle sees snippets passing away on either side like snapshots. Sh'zar's Disciples travel through dreams and landscapes with-out time in order to circumnavigate the globe. In India, the Tantric Hindu magicians recognize the universal dance of Lakashim in Sh'zar's practices. In the Americas, the Mayan Master Xiootin lox sees the future death of his people, and he hopes to preserve his old ways by joining with the visitors from outside time. In Africa, rock paintings come alive as the painter sucks on the juices of a poisonous weed, bringing forth images from the subconscious so that he can slay his fears. Sh'zar's Disciples are there, too, bringing the message of a convocation of all mages who feel the pulse of life.

"Fortunately, it worked. Having a gift for prophecy is a wonderful way to deal with potential impediments, after all," Lee Ann comments with a quirky chuckle. "Since many of Sh'zar's converts were *also* seers, they could agree on the coming storm. Not everybody saw the same future, but the most talented all saw that it would be bad — and that, if they didn't do anything, it could get worse.

"It's that knack for prophecy that earned the Cult its first name. With the primary Masters of the new group all focused on the magic of time — a power that many other mages found unfathomable — they became the Seers of Chronos. That's from the Greek word for time. For their part, the new Seers agreed on their roots fairly quickly. Sh'zar had not only picked other Seers, but other ecstasies. All of them felt the pulse of Lakashim.

The two go hand-in-hand, really. Once you feel the pulse of Lakashim, time itself vanishes; Lakashim exists for all time and outside of time. In Lakashim, the Seers all became brothers and sisters in ways that no other Tradition could match.

"Couldn't have happened sooner, either. The Order of Reason started quietly, but picked up momentum. Tradition Chantry houses started falling to the thunder of cannons. Seers picked out likely places and nexuses in time, helping to cut losses. The most skilled mages even traveled out of synch with time, able to cross great distances in short weeks or days. Messages and warnings became the Seers' stock-in-trade. Like doomsaying prophets, they'd show up just before an Order of Reason assault, giving the Traditionalists time to prepare — or to flee. All right, so the other Traditions may not have been fond of the carrion-crows, but this at least saved some lives, right?"

"Sh'zar, himself, stayed on as the representative of his majestic union. He'd worked too hard to watch it all fall apart! While other new Seers traveled the lands to coordinate battles or trade techniques, he stayed involved at the high levels. He wanted to make sure that this new organization would continue fighting for something worthwhile.

"Like all strong leaders, Sh'zar had an idea of what the Seers could become, and he wanted to take a hand in steering them right. 'What's right?' I can see you about to ask, and yeah, you're correct — it's very subjective. But Sh'zar knew some of the possible things that could go wrong. That made him all the more determined to set the future.

"Essentially, Sh'zar figured that people had to be free to explore their own limits, but that meant *on their terms*. That's why he created the Code of Ananda and pretty much rammed it down everyone's throats.

"Granted, the Code isn't followed by all Cultists today. Some refused to follow it back then, too. But Sh'zar meant to set guidelines by which then-Seers could help other people feel Lakashim, without necessarily using or violating them. He practiced what he preached, too. To make his point, he stressed responsibility again: He relied on diksham, the mentor-student bond, and upon congrex, the ties between two people stemming from intimate conduct. He impressed on Seers that, before they do anything, they should understand how what they do will impact someone else, and consider what they'd feel in that position."

Another image floated past Kyle, slower now: the angry Sh'zar, terrifying in his impassioned rage. His chakras full of energy, Sh'zar bends the air around him like a heat storm. He nearly floats as he moves smoothly

across the stone floor of a Tradition stronghold. His hands grasping the face of a shocked young magus, his terrible stare as he kisses the mage on the forehead: and the moment of stark silence following his words. "As you have done, so be it upon you."

"That is the basis of the Code, there," Lee Ann murmured. "Do unto others... you should already know it pretty well. Some rules really are universal."

Silence and blackness follows. Kyle casts his head about, looking through the void for more panoramas, but he hears only Lee Ann's whispering.

THE FIRST CABAL

"It's a dark time afterward. The First Cabal forms. You've already heard this one, right? The Traditions send forth their representatives?" Lee Ann asks.

"Yes," Kyle replies. "They're betrayed by one of their own. Most of them are murdered, and the Traditions suffer a terrible setback. I'm kind of fuzzy on the specifics."

Lee Ann purses her lips and places one finger against them. "It's a very bad time for the formative Seers. Only Sh'zar's charisma has kept them together thus far. When the Cabal implodes in 1466, Akrites — one of the cabal members — takes a heavy share of the blame. Tradition mages argue that the Seer should've known it was coming, but they suspect that he was actually smitten with Heylel so he covered for the Solificati. Akrites does nothing to dissuade their beliefs. In fact, he probably had a little guilt over the whole thing, since he either didn't see it coming — which he should have — or he simply didn't do anything. Regardless, he goes into hiding. He doesn't want his disgrace to taint the Seers, the popular version says. In truth, he was probably just so miserable that he was burned out on the whole deal.

"Sh'zar's not about to give up one of his greatest Disciples. He heads out into parts unknown to look for Akrites. Thanks to congrex, he has a strong bond to Akrites. No, goofball, they weren't lovers — I don't think — but they'd been through so many strong emotional moments together, and traded so much knowledge, that they had an unbreakable bond. Akrites heads out for the bleakest, furthest wasteland that he can find, because he doesn't want anyone following him. He figures that if he goes far enough, congrex won't matter — nobody will risk coming after him.

"Once again, Akrites bets wrong.

"Sh'zar finally meets his destiny somewhere out there. I suppose it would have to be something we'd recognize as the Umbra today. Back then, it could've

just been some barely formed part of the world. Being a Master of Time, and likely using his magic to fight for his life, nobody's ever been able to peek in on exactly what happened — or if they have, they're not telling. Regardless, Sh'zar doesn't come back, and Akrites has called it quits for good.

"Xiootan Iox gives up the ghost about this time, too. Not a good batting average! Master gone, Disciple gone, great foreign Master out — there's not much leadership left for the nascent Seers. Some think that Xiootan simply gave up once he knew that Sh'zar and Akrites were never coming back. Others suspect that it has to do with him being away from his homeland. In foreign Europe, his magic wasn't strong enough to preserve him.

"Fortunately, Sh'zar had trained his Disciples well. Tali Eos tries to distill the Seers' thoughts on magic, the Spheres, life and Sh'zar's vision down into a form that anyone can share. The result is the *Nine Sacred Passions*, a book describing the connection between passion, soul and Ascension. Eos argues that all passion stems from the soul. As a result, passion must be embraced and followed. By opening the doors to strong passions, the mage creates congrex with her own soul — a way to discover deeper layers of spirituality. In some ways, it's also an extension of good old Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Eos proposes that every soul must have the chance to explore these passions fully and in a personal way. To break a passion, or to render it inert, denies the individual a chance at the personal spiritual encounter required for Ascension. In this fashion, Eos sets the tone for the Seers and reinforces the Code of Ananda. Every person needs to experience passion, but on personal terms — not forced, not dulled and not turned into a weapon by someone else.

"Eos' book finishes what Sh'zar started. While Sh'zar was telling Seers what *not* to do, the *Nine Sacred Passions* explained what Seers *should* do. From her personal experiences as a common woman, a rape survivor, a mage and ultimately a leader of her Tradition, Eos made a positive contribution, helping Seers find direction for their talents and showing new Initiates the way to experience the Seers' path. Without her book, the Seers might have died out from want of Apprentices."

THE SAHAIYA

Kyle nods while he hovers with Lee Ann in the void. Around them, color blossoms — vague blobs and shapes at first, coalescing into swirling mixtures of brilliant light. They don't form pictures, but instead seem to cast colors along the pair of mages.



"This is our real beginning as a Tradition," Lee Ann says. "We survived the birth and the first ordeal. Here, in this part of the past, it's time to grow up."

Kyle closes his eyes. Light still flashes in front of them, sometimes illuminating just enough that he senses a hint of color even through his eyelids. He listens to Lee Ann's soothing voice.

"The Seers pulled into India and the Middle East as the Traditions stabilized. The strongest roots still lay there, and other Traditions had claims to European lands. As the 16th century approached, the Tradition membership became more and more a combination of Greek and Indian Apprentices, with the small sects recruiting just enough to keep their own numbers. No reason to fight with the Order of Hermes or the Celestial Chorus over western Europe; best to keep strength in areas where the Tradition's own ideals remained strong. The Seers took up the name Sahajiya. In Europe itself, most of our kind were mendicant seers and wandering madmen. Since the insane were alternately considered demon-possessed or touched by divine insight, most Sahajiya could survive like this, especially since Time sight warned of places to avoid.

"The real impetus stemmed from the increasing frequency of clashes with church and reason, though. The Church, recoiling from failed Crusades, turned inward to its own lands. While the witch crazes probably weren't as severe as the Verbena claim, they were still pretty bad for mages everywhere. Imagine for a moment that you're in a superstitious land where people are more than willing to hang you for a few shillings on the off chance that you might be a wizard. It's kind of like being a mage and working at Starbucks today."

Kyle raises an eyebrow at Lee Ann's analogy. She smiles briefly and continues. "Sorry. Anyway, the Sahajiya practice a form of magic that the Church doesn't condone. Increasingly strict Christian moralities deride the body as a prison of sin. Islam has always frowned upon the use of intoxicants, but the harsh Christians sometimes even come down against the Sahajiya's simplest practices, like dancing and playing music. It's a pretty hard time in Europe. That's the other reason for the Sahajiya's move east. India's Muslim inhabitants are fairly tolerant, leavened as they are by Hindu influence that accepts Sahajiya practice, and Greece still remembers its roots to some degree. The

Greek church may be close to Rome, but it's far different from the Church of the rest of Europe.

"We survived. Not much forward momentum, mind you. But the Sahajiya had an idea of what they were about: bringing out passion in people as a spiritual experience. It was enough to keep going."

CULTS AND FACTIONS

"Like any good-sized organization, especially one spread in conspiratorial cells across the world, the Sahajiya started to splinter along ideological lines. I won't get into all of the politics just yet; we'll save that for a *different* rainy day. But suffice to say that the rise of Reason across the world gave the Sahajiya plenty to do.

"In some places, the Sahajiya continued their old ways — trying to bring joy to people. More and more often, though, we found ourselves pressed up against the wall. Progress and colonialism spread us thin across new lands where old mores still held sway. By the time of the Victorian era, we were in bad Dutch. Morality of the age was just too strict to continue ecstatic ways. I mean, they had frickin' modesty covers on *table* legs for God's sake!"

Kyle nods and picks up Lee Ann's thread. "And colonialism marginalized native cultures. England's bid to butt in on India's religious schism probably only made matters worse. Muslim Sahajiya on one side and Hindu on the other... and all the ones in the Americas and Europe labeled as crazies or freaks."

Lee Ann nods emphatically. "You've got it. The Sahajiya became desperate. They started to fight back... not a bad idea, on the surface. From the roots of hashishin and Kali cults, we learned the crafts of assassination and murder. The Sahajiya became an unholy terror to the Technocracy, let me tell you. Anywhere the Technocracy tried to get its hooks in, the Sahajiya could be counted on to show up right *before* anything important finished up. For a while, we were neck-and-neck with the Euthanatos.

"Then *he* showed up. Sh'zar. Any doubts about him being a Master of Time? Gone. He showed up at a meeting where the Sahajiya were trying to figure out how to overcome the problems of the rapidly modernizing age. While he didn't understand the times, Sh'zar knew the real trouble. It wasn't modernization or technology. The problem was that the Sahajiya had lost their direction. In becoming killers and fighters, they'd burned all of their passions but hate.

"Sh'zar turned that back around. He made the Sahajiya realize that all the energy they'd spent on that fighting was energy that wasn't awakening new people

to joy and to the cause of the Tradition. He told them that their mission was to bring ecstasy to people, not just to wallow in sensation and righteous anger.

"He turned his children back into the Cult of Ecstasy."

Outside the window, lightning flares once more.

"Sh'zar made several pronouncements. He explained that the Cult had turned from a tool of enlightenment into a tool of vengeance. The Cult had to stop splitting itself over anger and violence issues and instead work to *heal* humanity. Now, this certainly seems all obvious today, but you know what they say about hindsight. Consider that, in 1867 — when he appeared — racism was still widespread, cultural imperialism was rampant, and many countries still believed in divine sovereignty, women as household objects and ecstasy as something sinful and perverse, to be experienced only in bordellos of ill repute run by debauched gentlemen in back parlors.

"Sh'zar's lesson was profound. He insisted that the Cult's continued fighting only led to a cycle of bloodshed. He taught that mages inured to looking for enemies became paranoid, until they considered one another enemies. Cultists who could've been allies in Europe and India instead sided with their own national interests and fought one another. Cultists who should've been spreading ideas like passion and poetry among humanity were instead squandering their talents on writing war propaganda or drowning themselves in absinthe. Sh'zar realized — from *centuries away* — that the Cult had turned away from its mission and become a torn-up club of bitter, entrenched magicians bent on destruction. He knew that this would only end with the demise of the Cult itself.

"Remember the old cults of Bacchus from Greece? Remember the Maenads we talked about before?"

Kyle nodded, his vision blurring momentarily with the recollections of his historical sight.

Lee Ann continued in a soft tone, "Like the Bacchanalians and the Maenads, the Cultists had become violent and cannibalistic, even rending one another and devouring the people they could've inspired. They lacked vision, instead having only one direction: Frenetic energy turned outward in a destructive orgy. Sh'zar recognized that responsibility must temper passion. That's why he'd been a founder of the Tradition at the start, after all: No matter how much he disliked the idea of organized and stratified mage society, he realized the need for responsibility. Reckless mages become dead mages. So he appeared one last time to spread this lesson.

"Sh'zar's final admonishment was to change the Cult's name. A symbol or a name is powerful: It conveys the sense of self-image. The Cult of Bacchus was a Cult devoted to self-gratification and orgies of violence. A Cult of Ecstasy would instead be a Cult devoted to exploration and breaking personal boundaries in pursuit of self-knowledge and pleasure.

"Sh'zar vanished after that. Probably for good, but one never knows with him. Maybe he jumped to another future crisis; impossible to say at this point. His motions in time were profound, but he was so skilled at covering his tracks that it's difficult to tell if any given perturbation was from him. For all we know, he could just be floating in the eddies of time, leaving tiny nudges and adjustments here and there."

THE 20TH CENTURY

Kyle stretched and stood, taking a few paces to keep the blood flowing in his legs. He blinked a few times, rubbing his eyes in an attempt to clear them, but he still felt bleary, as if sleep hadn't quite left him yet.

"So..." he started, then let out a large yawn. He found himself struggling to draw in enough air and after several seconds finally managed to stifle himself. "So... um, that leads up to the next century?"

Lee Ann tendered a hint of a smile at Kyle's yawn. "Not too bored, I hope?" she queried.

"No," Kyle said. "I'm just... well, to be honest, this is a lot to digest, and the smoke's been making me a bit dizzy."

"I'll open a window for a bit," said Lee Ann, doing so. "Have you followed all this?"

Kyle nodded. "Just coming up on the turn of the century, to the 20th. That means movies and electricity and the burgeoning world economy. It means workers with wages and free time and the opportunity to travel or become educated or spend their money on entertainments, right?"

Lee Ann chuckled briefly. "Back up a sec," she said, and took up a cross-legged position once more near Kyle. "Sh'zar made radical changes to the Cult by sheer force of reputation and personality. Those changes rippled throughout the end of the 19th century as well. We saw the emergence of industrial economies and mass production, the beginnings of electricity, yes; this all led, as you noted, to wage-earners and people with disposable income.

"The important part of this is that it was finally freeing people from lives in bondage to a specific labor or ideal. You no longer had to spend your whole life working on a farm every day, like in the Middle Ages, or

inheriting your job from your father because it was the trade you learned. It also meant the phenomenon of upward mobility. People could and did gain education and move into newer and better jobs. Some of them became the *nouveau riche*, those who gained fabulous wealth by speculation and risk. Most importantly of all, this meant that suddenly people could take charge of their own lives. They weren't born into a lot where bucking the system automatically meant a death due to poverty and hunger. Sure, it was still risky, but ultimately survival and prosperity depended on responsibility and personal, managed risk. It meant people could be in *charge* of their own experiences — and that meant they didn't need a controlling Church or a central king. They could form their own companies, invest money, *buy* land — owning land without noble fiat — or just travel the world, spend their money on pleasures and new things and beautiful trinkets and healthy, happy lives.

"All of this increase in standard of living had been building up, of course, but by the time the Cult changed from Bacchus to Ecstasy, this was at the birth of the electrical era. Radio, and later television. Trains and automobiles. Cruise ships. The world contracted: You could go anywhere, do anything. News was wired across the world in seconds instead of days. Anyone could hear about goings-on in distant India or Japan. And this meant...."

Kyle broke in. "Spread of information. And that means spread of culture and lifestyle."

"Exactly," Lee Ann finished with a triumphant grin.

Kyle kept talking, adding, "So suddenly people could try out the ways of life from other parts of the world. New ideas flooded in from all over. The big burst, not of technology so much as culture. Different dress, different sports, different food, different experiences. A way to see the world through someone else's eyes."

"You betcha," Lee Ann said. "That's what gentlemen's canes and top hats produced: A world where people could experience novelties without the risk of sudden death and disaster just for trying something strange and different. This led to the blossoming experimentation of art in plays, books and later movies. Not bad, considering that in 1899 the US Patent Office's head resigned with the declaration that everything that could be invented, had been invented.

"So, the century turned. Movies started as a minor little thing that, as they always say about minor little things, would never go anywhere. People had money to burn on alcohol, opium, dance, ballet, theater and the new forms of home entertainments like radios. Gas lamps gave way to glittering electric

lights. At last, it seemed like humanity would have the chance to grasp its own destiny, to free every man and woman to take risks and responsibilities in order to further their own life experiences."

A WORLD ON FIRE

"What about the negative social consequences of all this?" Kyle interjected. "The mass production brought sweat shops and labor inequities. I'm sure with the spread of culture came the spread of crime, drugs and squalor. It sounds like it was terrible at the same time. In fact, I'm sure it was. Some people had it good. Some, maybe not so much. *The Jungle*, right? Pollution? Child labor?"

Lee Ann sighed resignedly. "Yes," she admitted. "All of these good things came with side effects as well. And that's where the Cult's job came in during this time. The Cult makes sure that people learn to push boundaries, learn that it's OK to explore and experience, but also deal with the consequences. We clean up when people screw up.

"In this case, though, we had entire societies — a whole world — on a crash course to screwing up. While we had society balls and new entertainments and people with leisure time, we also had to accept the consequences of those things. Sadly, though, the Cult wasn't ready for this. The Cult had survived its raging phase and its early phase, but massive social responsibility? from a bunch of hedonists? Unfortunately, it took a world war and the consequences thereof to sober us up.

"The first world war caught the Cult *almost* completely by surprise. For a bunch of Time junkies, that was something of a feat. The general feeling was that nobody wanted to *believe* that something so awful could happen. So, in typical Cult fashion, lots of them just buried their heads in the sand and floated away to some other plane of enlightenment, hoping the world would straighten itself out.

"I don't need to fill your head with war stories. World War I taught the world about trench warfare, the real horror of artillery, air power and all that stuff you see in old black and white films. It was an age of horror and peril: Running anywhere in the globe to live on the seat of your pants, exploring darkest Africa or busting heads in Europe, but with this specter of massive human conflict over it all.

"This, and the accompanying Prohibition, showcased the next great crisis for the Cult. As a minor religious faction in India, the Cult could function as, well, a small cult. As a vendetta-oriented group of revolutionaries, the Cult worked like a disorganized

cell-structured rebel group. But what was the Cult supposed to do in order to combat human suffering and misery on such a colossal scale? How could the Cult possibly spread the ethic of ecstasy to a world embroiled in this kind of terrible war?

"Don't get me wrong, the Great War was horrible. For the Cult, though, it was the tip of the iceberg. The real nose-breaker was Prohibition." Lee Ann stopped to fetch a glass of water from the kitchen, her voice receding as she walked. A few moments later she returned, wetting her lips.

Kyle interjected in the pause, "I can see where Prohibition would ruffle some feathers. An entire nation bent on the denial of having fun, right?"

Lee Ann quickly swallowed some water and put her glass down. "Something like that. It scared the crap out of the Cult. It'd been done before — heck, the whole US was founded by conservative religious groups seeking to flee persecution for their stern ethic, right? — but on this scale... it was like society as a whole had become sick of the idea of blowing off steam. People couldn't be *trusted* to be responsible for their own recreation. Religion and government decided that people had to have strict rules, no exceptions."

Kyle ruminated for a moment and then burst out, "A backlash — against the changing times. If industrialization and wage-earnings gave workers the chance to have free time and leisure, it also freed them from direct threat of material consequences from the upper classes. You couldn't be thrown off your farm and sent to starve in a ditch anymore; you could move, find a new job. You had free time that you could use to read or try things — to have *fun*, have time to spend as your own. The church couldn't tell you that you lived to work and pray and die, because now you had time to make your life your own. That's what the authorities feared. People making their own lives."

Lee Ann paused and ran one finger over the edge of her glass. Finally she looked up. "I think you might be right. I'm not sure. Certainly that's what scared the Cult: Society rejecting the possibility of responsible recreation or indulgence to expand awareness."

Pacing back and forth, thinking about Kyle's comment, Lee Ann clasped her hands. Finally she said, "All right, let's think about it like that. Society's embraced the Technocratic lifestyle, but all the old-guard elements are scared. People aren't just going to line up and do as they're told; the Masses have been empowered, and now they're a threat to status quo. So it becomes *Metropolis*: Take away the option to do something potentially rebellious. Quell anything that looks like it

might foster individuality or broadened thinking, under the guise of danger.

"It's about fear. Fear creating control. Maybe to the Technocratic Union it was just a social experiment, but the populace learned to fear disinhibition so much that they made it punishable by the group."

Lee Ann let out a heavy sigh. "Well, I don't need to tell you this scared the heck out of the Cult. If this was first, what was next? Removing freedoms of religion? Tightening up on sexuality again? So the Cult didn't have a choice. To survive, it had to help ecstasy to prosper.

"I wish the Cult could take credit for repealing Prohibition, but it can't, really. The Cult didn't have its social shit together enough. I suspect it was a backlash of sorts. Society needs safety valves. I shudder to say it, but phenomena like drug use and religious cults may simply be the results of having a super-orderly and highly technical society. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' applied on the societal level instead of the personal one, if you like," Lee Ann concluded.

"I suppose," Lee Ann said, "that might even apply as far as to things like serial killers and worse. If you don't give people a way to let off steam in a healthy fashion, they'll find unhealthy ways to do so.

"Anyway," she said, dropping her hands onto her thighs with a smacking sound for emphasis, "I think that woke up the Cult. On the one hand, the government wanted to crack down not only on alcohol itself but on all of the ancillary baggage: speakeasies and dance halls and the like. On the flip side, the people who wanted to keep it going fell into the same trap that the Cult had, less than a century before — they fell to violence.

"The result, of course, was the Depression. Society managed to pull out of its inward-poisoning cycle of crime and repression just in time to suffer another huge crash. Sometimes experimentation breeds dangerous results. In this case, social experimentation — trying to cope with a transition to huge governments, massive corporations, stock markets and high-speed global communications — was just too much. *Crash!* The Great Depression.

"The Depression was the Cult's panic point: Great War, economic catastrophe, Prohibition — it seemed like society was *bent* on self-destruction. Some Cultists thought that humanity was about to end. The world seemed like it didn't want to survive. Unfortunately, the Great Depression had no end in sight, until the *Second World War*."

Kyle's breath hissed inwardly out of habit. He made a nervous smile at Lee Ann and opined, "You don't have

to tell me how nasty *that* was. I think we all know the numbers by now. Genocide leading to the atomic era — could hardly become worse."

Lee Ann nodded affirmatively. "What can I say that would paint the picture? For mages it was especially bleak, I'm told. Nephandi everywhere. The Technocracy pulling out newer and nastier weapons all the time. In the end, we came together with the Technocrats long enough to avert total disaster — or at least, that's the usual line. I suspect that the Technocrats and Traditions may have been so fired up on their all-consuming crusades that only a good dose of luck and the sense to back up and say 'whoa' after the first nuclear firestorm is all that stopped them.

"So we've had two world wars, the suppression of responsible indulgence on a country-wide scale, massive economic catastrophe — must've seemed like the end of the world. I can only presume that the result of all this taught the Cult what it needed to know. The Cult recognized that, as a social network *and* as mages and visionaries, they also had to be supporters for and architects of social change. Everything the New World Order tried to do to turn the world into its gray Orwellian image, the Cult had to counter. Many Cultists did this by joining up with war cabals and kicking the crap out of Technocrats. Unlike many of the other Traditions, though, the Cult also became involved heavily in the society and culture of the world. It was time to bust out and show everyone, in grand style, how to do the same!"

Kyle let out a quick laugh. "The '50s and '60s!" He gestured wildly with his hands, mimicking hippielike mudras and waves. "This is where you tell me that Jim Morrison was a Cultist, right?" he said, holding his splayed hands in front of his face in a parody.

"Oh, knock it off," Lee Ann grouched. She smacked Kyle on the head, but grinned nevertheless. "A lot of people say Morrison was a Cultist. Me, I'm always leery of tagging celebrities like that. Besides, a lifestyle so seemingly *controlled* by drugs and sex wouldn't be a good advertisement for the Cult ethic. Then again, maybe he was a lot savvier than most people saw. Maybe it was all Technocratic propaganda to make him look like a drugged-out zombie. Regardless, it ultimately doesn't matter if he was a Cultist. He presented a strong message, and people listened. Besides which, I like his music, so there."

Kyle rolled his eyes.

"Hey, learn some respect. It doesn't matter whether the message goes out from mages or Masses. What matters is that the message is heard. The message that resonated through the '50 and '60s, through that whole

Woodstock and Summer of Love, was simple: Live, learn, love. Experience all that the world has to offer. Explode your consciousness. For the moment, it provided a perfect insight into what the Cult had to offer.

"Of course, we deal with the results of that now. The next two decades were all about living the *consequences* of those things. But that's responsibility — just something else the Cult had to take up along with the job.

Lee Ann paused and sipped at her water once more. She checked the incense, which was nearly burned out. Outside, the weather continued its turmoil. "Still," she finally said in a quiet voice, "the Cult can't *completely* claim the credit for the Summer of Love. People were ready to break out of all the disasters of the past few generations. Heck, the whole 20th century up until then had been one disaster after another. It was time for them to take it in their hands and make it something better. The Cult helped show the way to a few. Where they took it from there was their business. The Sleepers made it their own show.

"Joplin and McCartney and Leary and Warhol and company turned the world around and turned it into a giant experience. Most importantly, they provided a *message* people would listen to and a *model* that said 'Yes, you really can live differently.' It provided an unfettered generation."

Kyle leaned back and stretched his back. With a groan he said "Then *my* generation was born."

"Actually," Lee Ann replied quickly, "your generation would be the '80s and '90s, but close enough. The world didn't Awaken. The movement didn't last. The Cult started something rolling but couldn't control where it went, and wasn't prepared to deal with the end result. So... the Summer of Love had to end; it wasn't sustainable. All things pass on, and all that. The Sleepers had their party, but then they had to clean up.

"At first the Cult wasn't ready for this. A lot of Cultists wanted to just hang on to the feeling, keep watching *Xanadu* and patting themselves on the back for near-history. It really took the '90s to shake that up. After the consumer culture and corporate power decades of the '70s and '80s, some Cultists finally started seeing familiar patterns. Ugly ones. Shifts of demographics back to military complexes or to social conservatism. 'War on drugs.' Crackdown on human rights in China, Africa. Cold War. Awful. Nasty. The world woke up from the 'beautiful dream,' and it woke up annoyed and mad and kicking at reality.

"Enter the new millennium. The Cult's finally wising up. It's time to become a force for social change, and that means social leadership and activism. This isn't just a matter of ganking the right people or tuning out on the right drugs: It means showing the world at large how to open up again. *That's* going to be a real challenge.

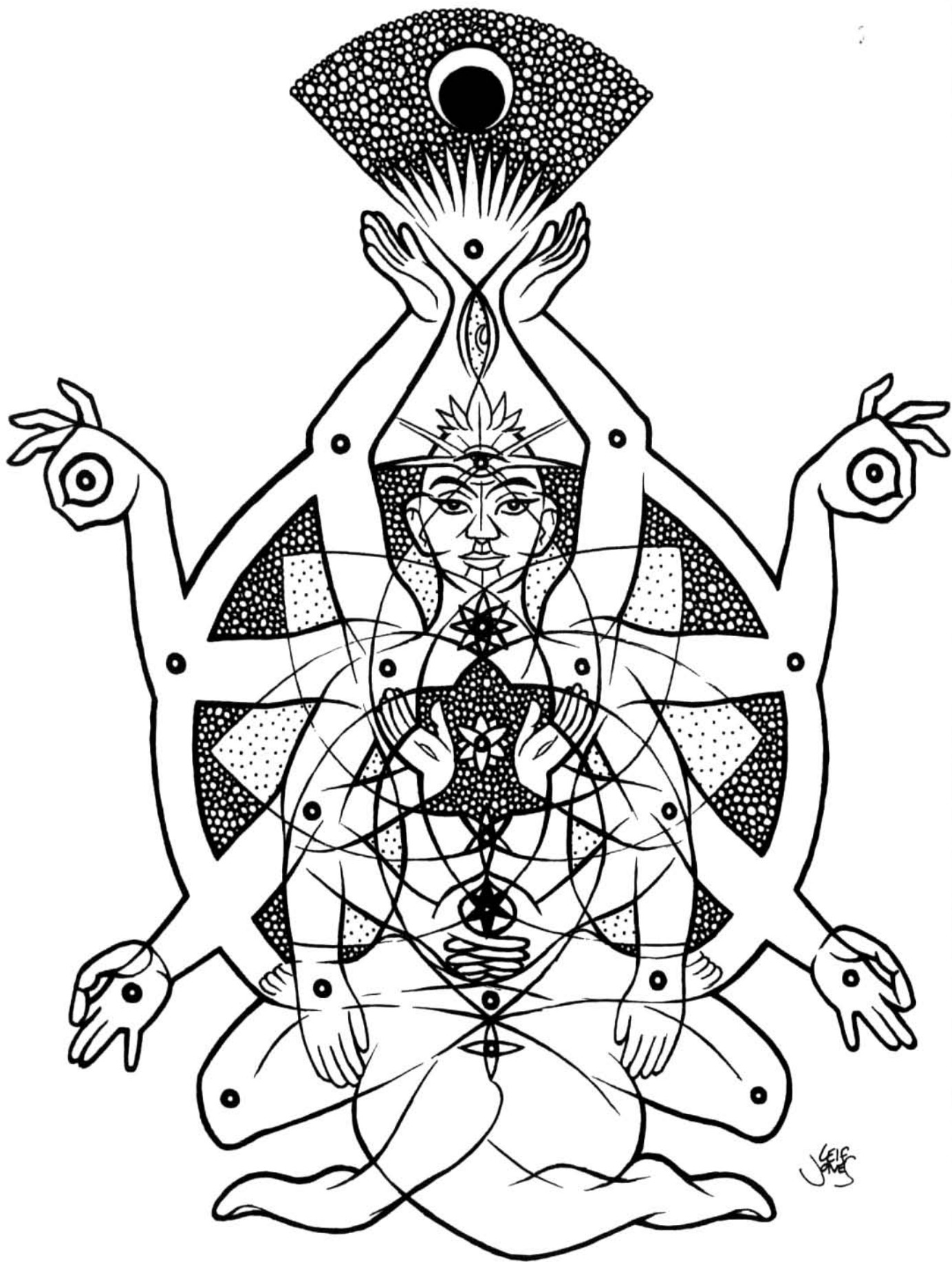
"Honestly, I don't know if the Cult's up to it. I'll be damned if we don't try, though. That's why I spend so much time helping people out there who need to get on their feet. You can't pursue a life of your own choice, unfettered by survival needs, unless you don't have to worry about survival. Once you *have* something to risk, you can *take* risks."

Lee Ann leans back. Kyle isn't sure when he returned to his body. "That's where we are today," Lee Ann says. "Woodstock, Lilith Fair, virtual experience — it's all part of the ecstatic experience. It's the centerpiece of what we're about."

Lee Ann stretches and stands up, as the rain begins to lessen. "I don't know about you, but I'm a bit hungry. How about I tell you about ecstasy itself *after* we've had a bite?"

Kyle simply nods. He has plenty to digest already.





CHAPTER TWO ⊕: THE PULSE OF ECSTASY

Maturity is only a short break in adolescence.

—Jules Feiffer

THE DISSONANT HEART



It is 18 days ago. Lee Ann and Jessa are embroiled in an argument of responsibilities as they wait in line at the movie theater. Kyle isn't here, but he's aware of what's transpiring anyway. He senses that he's seeing something as Lee Ann is doing it in his past.

"...but who decides the boundaries?" Jessa says. "You? Is it up to you to decide what's acceptable enlightenment for other people?" Her arms are crossed, her body language angry.

"Absolutely," Lee Ann replies without hesitation. "Without provocation, some people will never pass beyond the boundaries they set for themselves. I'm sure you've known some. People who can't be bothered to try new foods or to check out a movie they're not sure they'll like. Those are just little things. If you can't pass the boundaries of little things, how can you pass the boundaries on big, important things, like life?"

Jessa continues frowning. "So you're going to force people to do things they don't want to, just because you think you're right."

"Not quite," Lee Ann says, shaking her finger. "I offer opportunities. I show people that it's possible to cross those boundaries. How many times have you thought about, say, just having a mundane fast-food dinner or watching the same movie on DVD, but when a friend came over with a better idea you went? I know of at least once," she added, motioning toward the theater with one arm.

Jessa continued frowning but didn't reply.

"It's easier with other people, sometimes. So I have to take responsibility. I want to show people that they can do more and be more, right? How can I do that if I don't get out there and meet people and show them how it's done? This doesn't mean that I have to force people into things, but I can encourage. I can show them what it's like to feel ten feet tall and how much they can enjoy trying something different."

Lee Ann thinks for a moment, and she and Jessa move up a bit in the line. "Consider this. Mind states are interchangeable. How many times have you been in a snit and decided you're going to hate something, and then when you try it, you do? We remember how we feel when we do things. If you're in a bad mood when you go to a play or try out a new brand of coffee, you'll associate it with that mood. It'll remind you of those emotions. You don't have to stick with those emotions, though. Know how sometimes people tell you to just change your mind and pull yourself out of a funk? You can. The Grayfaces would have you believe it's all chemical and you can't do anything about it, but you can — if you know how to change the way you think.

"Before I go out to try something new, I remind myself that it's something I want to do. I put down the jitters and allow myself to feel the excitement of trying something different. Then I can approach it with real relish.

"The problem is that many people don't understand this. They just take experiences as they come. If you stick something new in front of them, they just become angry or upset or afraid. You have to teach people to relish something new. A few fortunate ones have that pioneering spirit; they like to try different things. Those are the ones that are easiest to teach. But the majority just don't have that... and they need all the help we can give.

"Some people will never, ever do anything new of their own volition. In a way, we're like Muses. We encourage people to try different things. This is both necessary and dangerous. Some might say that we'd still be in caves beating sticks without progress. The real danger, though, is that progress needs to be emotional and spiritual as well as rational. You need to be ready to fly in the face of reason and find the truths beyond the boundaries of simple logic or science."

Jessa winces. "Dangerous, though. If you push some people too far, they break."

Lee Ann points to Jessa with a smile. "Exactly the problem! We have to help people move on, but we can't push them when they aren't ready. Usually."

"How do you decide 'ready'?"

"That's the trick of experience," Lee Ann says, again stepping up in the line. "Sometimes you just have to watch people and see when they're ready. Sometimes they think they're ready when they aren't. Sometimes they are but they're too scared to admit it to themselves. When you share, you have to use your own judgment to decide when someone's ready to break a barrier.

"When someone's first brought into the fold, it's often through a few 'gateway experiences.' You know — simple stuff to help show the broad spectrum of Awakening. The typical young member—"

"— is brash, hotheaded, and jonesing for sensation," Jessa finished. "I know the sort. The usual stereotype. I kind of started out the same way. Party every day and every night and use your power to make it better, longer and sweeter."

Lee Ann nods and grins. She continues, "Yup. Some folks never really grow beyond that level. They just cruise along, enjoying the party. They're missing the point. You have to seek out new and difficult experiences as well as pleasure and parties.

"That's how you can tell the more experienced Cultists — they've left behind the pleasure-for-the-sake-of-pleasure." Lee Ann bites her lip and thinks for a moment. "No, that's not quite right. Rather, they still recognize the value of pleasure, but they recognize the value in responsibility or in experimentation. They realize that fulfilling fantasies and living dreams is only one side of the coin. Then they have the tough job of trying to sell that to the young ones."

Lee Ann sighs as she and Jessa pass the ticket-taker, hand over their tickets and get back their stubs. The two women head for the theater itself. "The worst problem," Lee Ann says, "is that there's no easy way to draw a definitive line and say, 'This is too far.' Some Cultists just help people expand their experience. Others push or surprise their charges in an attempt to force them beyond self-imposed limits. A few resort to pain — to driving the mundanes before them and into the jaws of enlightenment or disaster. And who's to say which way is really best? What's the value of breaking boundaries when it's all voluntary and safe? Do you really ever gain anything valuable with no risk or cost? Those sorts of questions occupy the old Cultists, the one who've seen and done it all. The Adepts and beyond have already found the ways that work for themselves. With a responsibility to find methods that work for others, they fight over the exact techniques and responsibilities. A few cop out and just leave the Sleepers behind. Others go too far and leave dead bodies behind them, reasoning that the ones who didn't make it never deserved enlightenment. Worse still, for all of the Cult's vaunted precognition, looking to someone's future doesn't help. If you already know the outcome, there's no risk!

"The Cult recognizes achievement in two ways because of this: in personal enlightenment, and in helping others to break on through. Sadly, some Cultists achieve a measure of acclaim because their risky methods pan out at first and only show problems later. Other very responsible Cultists never get anywhere because their peers see them as stodgy or held back.

"It's the fight that's occupied us since the very formation of the Cult. We want people to grab hold of

life and suck the marrow out of it, to take all the risks and pains and failures in stride with the great successes and heroic ecstasy. Sadly, some can't take it, and some break too soon when too much pressure's applied. We have to

keep that pressure on, but the question is, will humanity break on through, or break completely? And that's something we can't foresee."

JUDGMENT



It is a place where time collapses into a multitude of fragmented possibilities. Kyle winces and shakes his head. He can't concentrate. He keeps seeing manifold directions of the future, unable to resolve them. Each one seems only slightly different from the last.

"I judge you," Lee Ann says in one. She's wearing her button-up half-top and silver earrings. "I judge you," she says again in another. She's wearing a black leather vest and has scars around her wrists. "I judge you."

"Violating the Code of Ananda," echoes through Kyle's mind. He hears Lee Ann's voice in several timbres, a morass of pitches that flow in differing speeds. At last, one unifying thread pulls together all of the pieces of time — the Code.

Kyle's awareness bounces again, flitting from time to time, but in each segue, the Code plays a part. In one place, he hears Charlie instructing Lee Ann. The cheerful man's bass voice has a serious cast to it as he explains, "Never do harm to others. Enlightenment is personal. You cannot force someone to become enlightened by your methods."

In another vision, a tall, bearded man with a burning aura and flaming eyes destroys another mage with spells that destroy the victim's equilibrium and cause rapid aging. "Art thou one to judge another's place?" his voice asks. His eyes seem to look past his charge, to bore into Kyle. "Give pleasure and solace, not pain and suffering. E'en those without our gifts must have the chance to live well. Create lives of comfort. Only from a moment of security might one find the opportunity to risk."

THE CODE OF ANANDA

Handed down to the Cult by Sh'zar himself, the Code of Ananda outlines the strictures of behavior and judgment for the entire Cult. It's not exactly a legal code or a code of justice so much as it is a guideline of acceptable behavior. Sh'zar foresaw that some Cultists would seek to abuse their power over others, whether by design or by misapprehension. Through the Code, he hoped to foster a level of basic responsibility and to prevent the worst excesses of Cultists who considered Sleepers little more than test subjects.

Initially, the Code served more as a form of relations to outside Traditions. By proclaiming the virtues of the Code, the Cult could seem less like a disorganized mob and more like followers of a reasonable, if somewhat risky, philosophy. Furthermore, the Code helped to give direction to the fledgling Tradition. With a strong axis of "do's and don'ts," the Cult could see clearly what sorts of behaviors and members would cause later problems. Sh'zar and his divyas foresaw the difficulties of Cult acceptance in later years, especially due to irresponsible Cultists who caused problems for other mages (and Sleepers). By enforcing the Code, the founders hoped to prevent the Cult from becoming overpopulated with pointless hedonists or dangerous fanatics, and thus preserve their ways. After all, if the Cult as a group went too far, even the reasonable and

responsible members would suffer in the resulting backlash. Witch-hunting crazes knew no innocents.

In the modern Cult, the 10 principles of Ananda remain sacred tenets of bliss. The Code is, essentially, an admonition for the Cultist to follow personal ecstasy, but not to make it someone else's problem. Still, young Cultists care little for the rote memorization of rules and regulations. Divyas and Adepts can often recite the Code in full or in part, but learning it isn't a formal part of initiation. It's the essence behind the Code that counts, not the rigid letter of the rules. The Code's a list of ideas, not regulations.

Some Cult groups eschew the Code completely. While they are still considered Cultists due to their shared practices, they're often viewed as irresponsible and dangerous. Cultists such as the Aghoris break some or all of the Code regularly, seeing it as more needless regulation of their practices. More traditional Cultists take such violations very seriously, and from this conflict stems the worst infighting of the Cult. Ultimately the line of responsibility — how much is too much for the Sleepers? — creates the thin division that leads to war over Ananda.

I. Thou art miraculous: So are we all. The Cultist must realize that magic and enlightenment isn't selfish.

It doesn't center solely on himself. Every person is an individual miracle. Even the most mundane human talks, thinks and experiences, which is surely more a miracle than an empty cosmos would ever be.

II. He who spits upon his good right hand shall find the left one fails him in need. An admonition to cooperate. The Cultist may be a powerful individual, but even he will sometimes need help. The Cultist shouldn't take anyone or anything for granted. Arrogance and abuse of other people just leads to desertion.

III. Each gold coin yields two like it; each stalk given creates a bundle. Yet, each coin taken turns the rest to dross, and one bundle gone creates a famine. Thus shall a Seer count his deeds. A close equivalent to the metaphysical laws of return held up by other Traditions, this rule is one of accountability. The Cultist has a responsibility to give to his community unselfishly. Magical power does not create the means to personal aggrandizement; it creates the means to share good fortune with all people.

IV. Some minds rest best asleep. Stir not those who would not waken otherwise. Perhaps one of the most hotly debated topics of the Code, this rule advises the Cultists not to push Sleepers who aren't yet ready to Awaken. Opposing Cultists argue that only by pushing humans past their boundaries can humanity rise out of its current rut. More level-headed Cultists still follow this rule and instead hold that Sleepers must first seek ecstasy before they can be taught to find it.

V. Truths foreseen are not always truths. Applying equally to magical sight and metaphor, this Code again warns a Seer not to depend wholly upon magical insight. True experience comes from life, not from magic. Even foreseeing the future does not always set it in stone. Also, the assumptions that a Cultist makes should never be mistaken for fact. Always remain open to new possibilities.

VI. If a man (or a woman) would rend another's passions, let him be as one torn by wild dogs. For passions are the seat of the Self, and if they bleed, so too does the soul. Young Initiates aren't always sure what this rule means by "rending passions." In brief, the Cult wants to create ecstasy (which is sometimes a result of painful practices), but one should never set out to turn a source of joy into a source of pain, fear or terror. Every passion drives a person forward. To despoil a source of passion and taint it is to consume the individual with bitterness,

hate, anger and fear. Such victims cannot reach ecstasy to expand their lives and spirits.

VII. Let each Seer account his own deeds, and if those deeds should want for wisdom or kindness, let him be put forth to weep alone. Sh'zar's sense of community comes through here. The Cult requires community to function; Cultists seek out others like themselves for safety, training and partnership. The rest of the Cult shuns a Cultist whose deeds are found harmful or foolish. Some modern Cult activists find fault with this rule. Shouldn't the Cult take responsibility for those who use its practices to dangerous ends? Still, a Cultist exiled to loneliness rarely gets much further, especially after making a few enemies.

VIII. Humor cooleth blood: Wrath spilleth it. Masters of the Traditions often take their positions very, very seriously. After all, they reason, the future of magical practice hinges upon their every word and their slightest action. In such surroundings, gamesmanship becomes deadly. Slightings become offenses, which become vendettas between entire Traditions. People are just people, after all. Even Masters shouldn't take themselves too seriously, the Code admonishes. Long after any given mage is gone, the cosmos will still turn, so it's best to simply take life in stride.

IX. Even trees rent by lightning may grow new fruit. Some controversy follows interpretation of this rule. Some Cultists believe that it refers specifically to sacred passions, that even a person whose passions are defiled — a rape victim, drug addict or burnout — can heal and learn to enjoy life again. Other Cultists see it as a rule of forgiveness, preaching that even a Cultist who's fallen from the Code may find redemption. All Cultists agree that it's an instruction to keep hope, because miraculous things happen in the most improbable parts of life.

X. A fool feels no fear; A Sleeper remains shackled by it; A Master transcends it, yet recalls its wisdom. It is good to be afraid: It is folly to bow to terror. This final reminder refers to foolhardiness. Many Apprentices become enamored of the idea of confronting their fears head-on and trying to face off anything dangerous. This practice leads to a lot of dead Cultists. A seer must balance sagacity with ambition. Fear tells the Cultist something — it's a reminder of risk and danger. To ignore fear is to invite folly. One should not, however, be enslaved to fear. Be aware of risk, but do not shun it.

PATHWAYS



It is still 18 days ago, but before the movie theater.

Lee Ann looks up at the dress in the window. It is absolutely gorgeous, and she can tell the level of care and detail that went into making it. It is a soft white color, and she can see by simply looking that the satin is almost velvety soft. The lace has intricate patterns that someone spent a great deal of time hand-weaving, and tiny pearls are sewn into the patterning. The satin ends just above the breast and the lace continues into an elegant empress neck, then down the arms ending the sleeves in loops that hook over the middle finger of each hand.

She loves it, and she knows it would be perfect. She can see how she would look in it. She would look like a princess. She would be a princess. She can just see the look on Ryan's face as she walks down the aisle. He would see her and he would think how lovely, and he would know—

"It's pretty, but I don't think it's really you," Jessa says beside her.

Lee Ann jumps. She didn't realize that she'd tranced out looking at the dress. She looks sideways at her friend.

"It's very formal, Lee Ann, and let's face it. You're not a formal person. I could see you in something a little less..." Jessa thinks for a moment and then finishes, "...containing."

Lee Ann looks at Jessa. She doesn't even have to read Jessa's mind to know what she's thinking.

"What, do you expect me to walk down the aisle naked?"

Jessa grimaces. "I'm still trying to picture you walking down the aisle. But I would at least think you'd pick something a little, I don't know, looser?"

Lee Ann shakes her head.

"All this time, and you still don't get me, do you?"

Jessa shrugs. The two girls begin walking away from the store, whose wares are far higher in cost than Lee Ann can afford.

"You have to admit," Jessa says. "You're not exactly someone who's easy to get. I think you purposely make it that way."

Lee Ann smiles.

"It's not that I try to make myself hard to understand," Lee Ann says. She guides Jessa into a small coffee shop where they can sit down for a while. They'd been walking all day, and, by Jessa's look, Lee Ann thinks that



her friend could use the break. "It's that I don't really know how to explain myself to other people."

The two women sit down. The waiter comes by and asks for their order. Lee Ann asks for a mocha latte and a piece of cheesecake. Jessa opts for a simple decaf coffee and a piece of apple pie.

"Why don't you try?" Jessa says after the waiter has left.

Lee Ann looks up inquisitively.

"Why don't you try to explain yourself?" Jessa says, trying to bring her back to the previous conversation.

"Oh," Lee Ann smiles. "Well, I suppose I could. Where would you like me to start?"

"You can start with why you're a Cultist. You're not typical."

"I'm a Cultist because that's who found me, and taught me, and I found it easy to learn the way he taught me."

Jessa looks confused.

"I thought you said your mentor got you off of drugs and cleaned up."

Lee Ann doubles over laughing, almost to the point of knocking over the tiny table. Others look at her like she's lost her mind. She looks up at Jessa's chagrined expression and doubles over again. It isn't until the waiter comes with their coffee that Lee Ann has composed herself and the other patrons go back to ignoring them.

"What?"

"I just thought that the generalization was cute, especially from you."

Jessa shakes her head, still not following.

"Not all Cultists use drugs. It depends on the Cultist. My mentor used them occasionally, but he was well aware of the extent of my abuse. He knew that my using them would be really bad. I wouldn't learn how to use magic. I would just learn how to achieve a really cool high."

Jessa nodded. "Okay, so I can see how you're the geek among freaks. But why? You'd be so respected as a Verbena or a Dreamspeaker. Why even deal with the disrespect you get?"

Lee Ann smiles. "It's not that big a deal. Yeah, some people have problems with me, and they get the wrong idea about me. But that's common in any Tradition. I can't be an everyman kind of person. I have to be me and let those who like me like me and those who hate me hate me, and just deal with it. It's not like I'm ostracized by my Tradition or anything. I actually do get respect and I do a lot of good in my Tradition. The good is really all I care about."

Lee Ann pauses a moment. "I'll get off my soap box now."



Jessa smiles. "Good. So why put up with being the black sheep in your family?"

"Because I always have been. Like I said, I find the way to the magic easy to do. It seems natural. I was always taught that magic followed the path of least resistance. It makes sense that I do the same if I want to perfect my craft."

Jessa starts to say something, and Lee Ann hushes her.

"I don't care about politics, really. I know I have lives where I did, and I really fucked things up badly when I did. In this life, I just try to focus on the simplest things. My magic and the approach I take. All I care about is using my magic to make this world better. The better I am at the magic, the better I can do. The easier the magic is for me to do, the better I can control and use it."

Jessa nods. "Okay, point taken. I think I understand. I don't know if I agree, but I understand. So, what's so easy about how you do magic?"

"It's a natural progression. I Awakened when I was strung out. Charlie taught me that I could see things without the drugs, I just had to learn to focus my awareness and see what I wanted to see. It wasn't easy to learn on the outset, mostly because my body was craving the drugs, and my mind suddenly had a logical reason to want them. I really had to focus through it all. Once I got it, though, it made everything easier. It made cleaning up easier because I could achieve the same states I got from the drugs, but without the drugs and all the negative side effects. Without the drugs clouding my mind, I figured out that I couldn't stay in that state all the time. I remembered that there were things for which I needed to be... here. As I cut down the amount of time I spent in a state, I found that I enjoyed it more, which made me push to learn more and faster."

"Okay, so if you don't use drugs to achieve the ecstatic trance thing, then what do you use?" Jessa asks.

Lee Ann smiles. "Usually I use meditation. I've gotten to where I can slip into a meditative trance pretty quickly. If I am where I can, I use incense that draws certain moods. I use a really sweet purification incense if I want to cleanse myself. I use this weird soft incense if I'm doing a Seeking. I sometimes use different sounds to help me focus my work."

Jessa grins. "You're a Dreamspeaker."

Lee Ann shakes her head. "No. All right, maybe we use the same foci sometimes, but we approach from there in different ways. I've gotten the chance to talk to a Dreamspeaker shaman once and compare how we do things. The mechanics of our magic were similar, I'll grant that. But when we got into the spirit of it, well, that's where it was different. The Dreamspeaker was

trying to reach a spiritual place, to touch the spirit of what was around him. I was trying to reach a place of sensation to touch the world around me. That is where we differed.

"All those things help me achieve a state where I can open my senses. Once my senses are open, I can work my magic."

"So what about on the fly?"

"Well, I've been at it a while, so I can get myself in a state pretty easily. But I used to carry things like sachets of incense that I could smell and bring myself into a state. I can meditate about anywhere, even in a car. These days, I can even meditate under fire, so long as I know someone's covering me."

Lee Ann smiles.

"What?" Jessa asks, curious.

"Well, don't laugh, but remember how I've always played around with probability?"

Jessa nods. "Yeah, you're scarier than a cabal of Euthanatos sometimes."

"Well, I used to carry around an old *Avengers* comic. When I wanted to play around with probability, I used to think of the comic. Sometimes I'd pull it out and imagine I was the Scarlet Witch."

Jessa tries not to laugh, but it's difficult. "I don't really see what's so Ecstatic about that."

"It's perfectly Cultist. Do you even know why Cultists use drugs and other weird things?"

Jessa stops laughing as she comes to the one question she's never really bothered to ponder.

"To achieve an alternative state of consciousness so that we can connect with the magic around us in a way that is personal to us, through sensing it. All I was doing when I was pretending to be the Witch was altering my state of consciousness so I could feel what I needed the magic to do."

Jessa nods. "I think I get it."

"Good. We all do different weird things. We do them for a reason, and not all of us do the same weird things. What we do, though, is whatever gets us into that state. Like any mage, we eventually learn how to just put ourselves there. As we do, we drop the things that got us there, usually, because just going there is more efficient."

"But not always," Jessa adds. "Because sometimes you get bitch-slapped if Reality catches you taking shortcuts."

Lee Ann grimaces. "To quote me, yes."

"Well, then don't talk to me like one of your newbie-brats."

Lee Ann sighs. "Yes, mistress."



Jessa mock-throws her fork as their pies show up. The waiter looks a little concerned, but their smiles reassure him, and he goes to tending another table.

"You wanted to know a little bit about why I do what I do, right?" Lee Ann asked.

"Yeah, but I know about why you keep some of your foci," Jessa says.

Lee Ann shakes her head. "No, you know why a lot of mages keep their foci. But of all the Traditions, I have to say that, in some ways, at least, the Cult is the most dangerous."

Jessa thinks to object, but Lee Ann continues before she can. "Think about the foci that we use. Drugs, a lot of which are addictive. Sex. Fetishes that can border on violent. And that's light. Some Cultists achieve states by tempting fate. Swallowing poisons, bleeding themselves. Self-mutilation to achieve a state is not at all uncommon in this Tradition. If you mess up those foci, you can really hurt yourself. Even kill yourself."

Jessa is quiet.

Lee Ann smiles. "Good, I gave you pause."

"All right, so if you have to be so careful, where's the ease?"

"I used to be a drug-addict. Even when I was strung out, I would watch how much of what I was using. If I ever overdosed, it was usually either because I got something that was stronger than it was supposed to be, or because I wanted to."

"You'd want to overdose?"

"Well, yeah. If I just really couldn't handle things. Sometimes I would do it because at least at the hospital I would have a roof over my head. I was in a pretty bad place back then.

"For me, the magic wasn't in the risk of using drugs, or in the altered states that such things brought. Rather, my risk was in trying to live a worthwhile life *without* them. For most of us, certain drugs can induce a state of mind that opens one to experience. For me, I had to experience life on its own terms. I was running away. You can't confront risk and reach ecstasy while you're running away.

"Anyway, it's never been too much for me to just watch how much of something I do. I learned after a while to take precautions too. And if I don't think I can focus on it, I make sure I have someone with me who can."

Jessa shrugs.

"Give me just a minute."

Lee Ann gets up and heads for the back. Jessa finishes her pie as Lee Ann comes back. She sits down and quietly finishes her coffee and cheesecake. Jessa waits patiently for her to finish and share with her what is going on.

Lee Ann finishes and daintily taps her lips with her napkin and sets it on the plate. Almost immediately, the waiter is there to collect things and deliver the check, which Lee Ann promptly pays, including tip, in cash. Jessa's mouth drops as the waiter walks away.

"Y-you just—"

"Did magic? Thought you were an old pro, not a newbie."

Jessa grimaces. Lee Ann only smiles.

"Yes, I did magic. I focused through my action of eating, so I could connect with the magic easier and bend the tapestry to make it a little more likely that the waiter would happen to: One, come just as I was finishing, and two, have our check ready if I wanted it. It worked, and Miss Reality is fine with it because while the chances are slim, there are still chances, especially since I was making a show of finishing up, in a way that the waiter might have noticed on his own."

"But that was so —"

"Mundane? No matter your Tradition, magic should always fit your circumstances, right?"

Jessa nods. "All right, I get it. So, what did you go off for?"

"A phone call. We're taking a field trip."

"To?"

"The Chantry."

Jessa's mouth drops. Lee Ann seems to not notice as she gets up. Jessa follows, lest she get left behind.

The Chantry is exactly what Jessa would have expected. First and foremost, it's a den of vices. There are people Jessa suspects are Sleepers who are in varying stages of tripping. There is a woman baby-sitting them, offering to them a collective vision that sounds like Alice in Wonderland on crack. As they enter and walk through, the woman smiles at Lee Ann in a way that makes Jessa blush. She speeds her steps so she's walking beside Lee Ann and leans in to whisper.

"What was that?"

"She and I used to practice together."

"Practice what?"

Lee Ann just looks at Jessa and smiles. Jessa opts for discretion and follows her further in.

The rest of the Chantry begins to resemble a normal Chantry after a while — somewhat. Some inhabitants practice what Jessa thinks could be Cult magic; others practice a more old-fashioned kind of less-spectacular magic. Jessa gets a really good idea of what Lee Ann and the woman practiced, and she decides that there's a reason there's not a guided tour with this trip.

The back room is the destination. As they enter, Lee Ann motions her to be very quiet. Jessa can see why.

There seems to be something going on. The smell of incense is the first sensation to hit her, and she almost feels herself falling into whatever is happening.

The room is full of people meditating in various postures. Some of these postures are simple. Others are very painful. For a moment, she is reminded of learning Tai Chi from Dent, and she feels tears start to come. She doesn't even realize that Lee Ann has her by the hand until she feels a squeeze. She returns it, happy for the support.

The meditators change positions as the man at the head of the room says something. Each time he speaks, positions change. Jessa watches entranced, then decides to alter her perceptions slightly. What she sees nearly causes her to cry out. With other-eyes, Jessa can see them doing what she can only envision as re-sewing a section of worn tapestry. She decides to try to see the spiritual aspects and can see shadows that she recognizes as spirits standing watch. Not protectively, though. They are watching to make sure that this group doesn't step out of bounds.

Jessa decides to be very, very quiet.

Lee Ann leans closer and whispers.

"I take it you took a peek?"

Jessa nods. "What are they doing?"

"Some agents came through town chasing Marauders. It resulted in some really nasty magic that left gaps in the Tapestry here. The Dreamspeakers sent a couple of shaman to try and fix it, but the spirits here nearly killed them. Very pissed off entities. So the Chantry decided to get together and work collectively to fix it 'by feel.'"

"You can do that?"

Lee Ann nods. "Yep. It's not typical for us, but we can." Lee Ann begins gesturing around the room.

"See the postures — some of them Tantric, some Tai Chi, some, well, I have no idea what? That is their way of focusing. I don't know most of these people. I know we called in a lot of Cultists from other cities."

"How come you're not doing this, too?"

Lee Ann shrugs. "I had other things to do today. Anyway, that human knot you saw that was Marco, Julie and Theta were doing exactly what you probably thought they were. It's how they raise up and direct energy. They're adding to this. Mary, the woman in the front, was working with those trippers. They're Sleepers. She's showing them what everyone else is doing. They're our watchdogs. If they start freaking, then Mary knows that someone's pushing the Tapestry to be something it wasn't before, and she's also mentally cued in to the others so she can warn them. It is a safeguard to keep the spirits from attacking."

Jessa nods. "I saw them watching."

Lee Ann nods. "I know. You probably saw a couple of people smoking a hookah pipe? They're trancing so they can see what the Dreamspeakers saw, the actual rip in the Tapestry. But we need more than sight to work. Did you see Steve and Kyle?" Lee Ann thinks a moment. "You might have been looking. They were cutting themselves in various places. A sort of pain-induced trance. What they're doing is feeling the pain of the Tapestry by cutting themselves. Consequently, they will heal as the Tapestry is repaired."

Lee Ann pulls Jessa out of the room, and the two go walking through the Chantry. "As you see, not everything we do centers around drugs and parties."

"But it's all weird."

"Not weird. But it does get extreme. It gets extreme because sometimes that's what it takes to awaken the senses. But not all of it is."

Lee Ann takes Jessa up a flight of stairs. As they reach the top, they can hear loud strains of music from the room ahead of them. Jessa wonders why they didn't hear it downstairs. It's loud enough to wake the dead. Then she remembers she's in a Chantry. She doesn't ask.

The scene inside is reminiscent of any party Jessa had ever been to. Teenager and 20-somethings dancing around to music, drinking alcohol, having a good time. She looks at Lee Ann.

"Break room?" she asks.

Lee Ann smiles. "Actually, kind of. The magic going on right now is an extended work, so there are people rotating out, and some of them are coming up here to relax and let loose. But they're also getting themselves into a state to work magic. They'll be going out and getting right back into things. The music and dancing is a focus, keeping them loose and letting them be something they aren't."

"Which is?"

"A normal Sleeper enjoying a party. We're fixing the Tapestry, not changing it. The party lets them pretend they're normal, which helps them focus their magic into just fixing, making it like it was, something that a normal person can live in without having to make sudden adjustments."

"And you're using the party to help you actually feel what it's like to be a normal human because it helps you feel the forces that you're fixing."

Lee Ann nods. "Pretty much. You learn fast for someone who's not a newbie."

Jessa grimaces at her.

"Ha, ha. All right, so now what?"

"Well, we can sit and wait, or you can do what I know you're itching to do."



Jessa smiles. She goes into the room and joins in the party, dancing alone or with anyone who wants to dance. Lee Ann smiles to herself. She supposes that Charlie was right when he said she'd have something just as important to do. She watches as Jessa dances, helping those who need to relax and reaching out instinctively to help heal the strain of magic working on those coming through.

GENTLETTEN, CHOOSE YOUR WEAPONS

It is sometime in the past year. Kyle sees Jessa reading a set of papers shoved haphazardly into a large journal. She's frowning, going over yellowed documents. She leans forward on the couch, unable to relax. It's clear that what she reads unsettles her.

THE NINE PASSIONS OF TALI EOS

Although Cultists rarely agree on anything, most agree on the fundamental form of the sacred passions as laid out by Tali Eos. *The Nine Sacred Passions* laid out the form of the different emotions that Cultists embrace. Radical for her time, Tali Eos proposed that no passion is truly without merit. The opposite of love is indifference, as the saying goes. Instead, Eos devoted her work not only to the categorization of the passions, but to understanding how they all partook in the human experience.

Tali Eos proposed that humans live in a constant struggle of duality. On one hand, passions push humans to heroic heights. For love, honor and faith, a human will make tremendous sacrifices, seek justice at personal expense and create art of stunning beauty. Those same passions, though, can drive people to terrible acts of rage, destruction and horror. A crusader fights because he hates something, after all. That hatred gives the crusader strength to fight, but it can become an all-consuming rage that brooks no reason. For this reason, Eos broke each passion into its positive and negative components, instead of passing blanket judgment on any given emotion.

Not all Cultists subscribe to Eos' definitions, but many at least learn how she thought before setting out to find their own boundaries of passion. Her definitions included:

Joy (or Wonder): The fundamental feeling of exhilaration at something new, beautiful or engrossing. The sense of joy or wonder leads one to discovery. However, it also blinds one to the potential dangers of wondrous experience.

Empathy (or Sympathy): The feeling of empathy places the Self into the position of Other. From this, one can learn to feel the pain of others, which motivates one to perform acts of charity and compassion. Too much sympathy, however, leads to excusing the wrongs of those who commit terrible acts.

Lust (or Ambition): The passions of desire drive humanity forward in order to achieve those ambitions.

Humans want to soar, to grasp every ounce of fulfillment. Lust for wealth, comfort, sex or knowledge pushes humanity forward, but it also leads to conflicts over the objects of desire and sometimes blinds people to the value of pursuit instead of possession.

Grief (or Sadness): Through grief, one can feel remorse and learn from mistakes. The passion of sadness reminds us of the mistakes we've made and of the greatness of the past. Too much grief, though, and one is paralyzed with indecision and fear, unable to move forward because of the chance of repeating tragedy.

Fear: The passion of fear often springs from another passion, and bears a great deal of scrutiny due to its inclusion in the Code of Ananda. Some Cultists seek to overcome fear, but it's a healthy passion that reminds us when we're in over our heads. Like grief, too much fear can lead to inaction. First and foremost, a Cultist must acknowledge and embrace fear, then overcome it in order to break boundaries of ecstasy.

Jealousy (or Envy): While many people would consider jealousy a dark passion, it drives individuals to excel. Jealousy over the greater talents or possessions of someone else can drive the individual to match those through practice, dedication and work. It can also foster murder and ruin, if jealousy inspires destruction of the object of desire.

Hate: When Cultists hate, they do so without remorse. It's a hatred of injustice that fosters the pursuit of equity. A hatred of abuse pushes Cultists to offer healing and hope. Hate can drive someone to eradicate the negative. The trick is to remain unconsumed. Taken too far, hate overcomes other passions and sends one down the road of blind destruction.

Rage: While hate is a simmering, bubbling emotion, rage is a hot, flaring passion. In rage, one can accomplish feats of phenomenal strength. Rage ignores pain or human limits in the search for retribution. Uncontrolled, it lashes out at anyone, turning friends against each other and undermining the efforts of reason.

Dear Hanna,

She's not doing any better. I wish I could write you with good news.

I wish I could let you know that she looked so perfect lying there. I wish I could tell you she was at peace, but to be honest, she isn't. I'm not going to pretend that she is. Our daughter is dying, Hanna, and I don't know who to blame.

I wish I could explain to you what she was into here. She was getting so much better. Her schoolwork was improving. Her social life was looking up. Maybe some of her friends were less than desirable, but those that I met were nice. They're decent, and for God's sake, they weren't the pushers she was hanging out with before.

I don't really know what went wrong. She was learning all sorts of new things. She actually shared some of them with me — the daughter who could never connect with her father, teaching me a thing or two. Meditations, soft martial arts and little snippets of life philosophy — things like that. But she also taught me how to do things like really listen to music. I even enjoyed smoking my cigarettes again. I know it sounds funny for me to say that I learned something from my daughter, but I did.

Then I found out she was still using drugs. She and I talked about it. She assured me that it wasn't like it used to be, that the drugs were just for meditation, and that she wasn't abusing them. She wasn't getting her friends to use them, in fact she discouraged most of her friends from it because she knew they would only hurt themselves. I was angry at first — of course. How could she tell me she had it all "under control"? Something in the way she explained it all made sense, though. After all, I remember my own school days. I smoke, I enjoy an occasional drink, I used to share an occasional toké with my college friends. Who was I to judge?

I told her I wanted to see it for myself. So, she brought some of her friends to the house, and I watched over them while they tripped. "Shepherding," she called it — making sure nobody does anything foolish. It reminded me of our college days, actually. I told her about that afterward. She thought you were just the coolest thing in the world after that.

At first I was torn. I didn't want her hurt, and I felt that I'd learned my lesson and I didn't want her to make the same mistakes I did. But I realized that's the same thing all parents feel. We have to let them grow up, I told myself. We have to let them learn. Finally I told her I would allow it, provided that she followed the same guidelines that she did when I was watching. I would trust her, but she couldn't betray that trust. Never do anything without a shepherd. If I decided things were getting out of hand, it stopped immediately. I also told her that I had to meet her suppliers, and if I approved of them, they'd be the only people she could buy from. She agreed and made arrangements. I have to say, for

drug dealers, I was impressed. Seems that the people who make acid these days are a far cry from the folks of the Summer of Love. I'm not sure how I justified it all to myself... but I felt like it was experience, maybe something worthwhile. I know that I had to experience it myself when I was younger, and somehow I felt maybe I had to let her, too. Maybe in retrospect I was being delusional, but I trusted them. And I trusted her.

Hannah didn't really overdose, though that's what the official doctors' reports say. According to her friends, she overloaded her senses. They were using ecstasy to enhance their trances, and she completely spaced. They told me they did everything they could to try to bring her back while they waited for the ambulance, but she was too far gone.

I blame myself. I say if I had been a better father, then maybe she'd still be here. If I hadn't been so permissive. But I heard a couple of her friends talking. And it wasn't talk about how I would let her get away with things. It was talk about how I trusted her and tried to work with her, rather than impose my decisions on her. It made me think that maybe if I hadn't been permissive, something worse would have happened. How could I blame them? I'm the one who let her do this.

But God, I miss her. I want her to get well, but the doctors don't think it will happen. I don't know why I keep her on the machines. There's something I keep hearing, like her voice, begging me not to give up on her. So I keep hoping. I visit every day.

I thought you should know this. I will let you know as soon as she wakes up.

Sincerely,
Richard Holt
January 8, 2000

Dear Diary,

They just don't understand. My parents I mean. And I really mean it. They don't understand me. I can't blame them. I mean, I completely see the world differently. The weird woman, Lee Ann, says I've awakened to the real world around me. God, she makes it sound like the freakin' Matrix or something. She's nice, but let's admit it. She's a freak.

I wish I could make them understand. I got arrested today. Drug possession. I had LSD and Ecstasy. Lee Ann was disappointed because somehow she found out I was selling it to my friends so I could afford my own supply. Of course, on the good side, she did take me to a place where I can get exactly what I need. They have EVERYTHING. But, the condition is that I can't sell



it to anyone, and I can't send my friends there. I don't have to spend as much money for it, though. I can actually afford it on the excuse for an allowance I get. (I swear it's not fair. Gina gets twice as much as I do, and her parents aren't even rich. God, she's practically white trash. Do you call Italians white trash?)

So, anyway, it's a good deal. I told Lee Ann the only reason I sold it was for the money, and I wasn't pushing or anything. She didn't really seem to care. I told her I wouldn't do it anymore. I don't really see the need to, ya know?

I just wish I could make mom and dad understand WHY I do drugs. It's not for the high. Well, it is, but not for the reason they think. The drugs make it easy for me to get that state where I can feel what's going on. It changes my world. By myself I'm stuck in this body in a crappy world going to a shitty school and living a mundane middle-class life. When I get there, I can see what's going to happen. It's how I knew if dad didn't wake up on time the other morning, he was going to get into a serious accident. I made sure he was up early and all is well. No serious accident.

That impressed Lee Ann when I told her. She said I had the right idea, but told me that I had to try meditation twice a week with no drugs. What the hell? Meditation? I just wanted an outlet, not some Zen crap thrust on me by a half-fried dealer. She didn't say I couldn't use other things, though.

I went to the Newager's Paradise and got a really intense drumming tape. Even dad thought it was neat, and he's always complaining about my music. Oh, God, I must be growing up. I'm actually happy my dad liked my music. But it was kinda nice to sit and listen with him. It was really cool, because for a few minutes he was seeing the world like I do, as color and music and beauty. It's been a long time since dad and I have been able to really bond over anything. I haven't told Lee Ann that part. It's my own secret thing.

Anyway, I think tonight I'll try to meditate without music or anything. Who knows, maybe it'll work. I'm not holding my breath, but we'll see.

Okay, so later
love ya lots
Meeka



God, how do you talk to someone about how to use drugs as a focus without making it sound like a drug handbook? I mean, do you just go through what drugs are good for what work? What if the person knows almost nothing about using drugs. You've gotta make it safe and responsible, right? But making it safe and responsible means telling them what drugs are okay to use together, and what ones are a really bad idea. It means telling them how to safeguard against bad trips, and what to do if someone has overdosed. Of course, if we had something like that that was reliable, then I guess we wouldn't have the problems with drugs that we have. People would be able to use them responsibly.

I would have used them responsibly.

But I didn't, and most people don't. And if I write about how you can, and it gets found, well, that's going to bring down a world of trouble, because the straights just won't understand what it is I'm doing. They'll think I'm saying it's okay to use drugs and encouraging it. But I don't. I hate drugs. I hate when mages have to use them. But I understand why they

do, because I did. I just didn't know that's what I was doing because I didn't know then that I was a mage.

And I almost killed myself.

I'll talk straight to you. Drugs and magic are dangerous. Especially for us. Let's forget a moment about addictions and laws and dangers in obtaining. Let's just talk a minute about what we are, and what drugs are.

We are mages, but not just mages. We are the fingertips of mages. No, better, the lips of mages. Do you know how many nerves there are on your lips? Why do you think kissing is so pleasurable. It feels good, doesn't it, to touch another person's lips. It sends shivers down my spine to think about. But what happens when you burn your lips? Ouch, right? And not the finger-under-hot-water ouch. No, this is the hand-on-the-hot-eye-for-three-full-seconds ouch. It fucking hurts.

Well, that's us. Our senses are more open than most people. We see the world in a way that no one else does. We see its colors and the secret movements. We hear the drumbeats that not even rebels perceive. Anything that helps

us along to that perception is good. But if we're not careful, we open up too much, and it burns.

Whatever you do, you have to find some central point of moderation. Myself, I don't use drugs. I spent three years of my life stoned on anything I could find to try and forget the 16 years prior to it. I knew how to use them, but I wasn't always wise about it. I thought drugs were an escape. And when I needed a place to stay, overdosing made sure I had a roof over my head that I didn't have to fuck for.

But that's not what we're about, as the Cult of Ecstasy. For the Cult, drugs are a spring-board. They're to get you started, open your senses and let you experience yourself, others, the world and magic.

A couple of key pointers. Mellowing drugs are good for some things, but if you need to be quick on your feet, they can hinder you. Natural is best. Things that are manufactured may be effective and easier to obtain, but they have side effects that their natural counterparts do not. Stimulants can heighten your awareness, but they make you jumpy.

If you have to use manufactured drugs, study up. And use trusted resources, medical studies, for instance. There are mixes you can use to lessen the bad effects. I'm not going to give them to you. You have to figure some things out for yourself.

It's just bad news all around. I know that it's become a real big thing among the Cultist because it heightens the senses, but it's an internal razor-burn waiting to happen.

Besides drugs, there are a lot of other things that will heighten your senses and serve as excellent foci. Sex is one. Okay, maybe it's partially me. I mean, I really like sex. You'd think I wouldn't, given my past, but I do. Sex is a good way to awaken the senses as you focus on the different sensations going through your body. If you're working with another mage, it's a good way to blend your energies, or raise and direct energy.

Music is another. Drumbeats, goth, psychedelic sounds. Any music that draws out your imagination will work. And not just for the lengthy stuff or drawing out your senses. Okay, I find Dead Can Dance really helps me open up. I love the

mellow sound. But there are other songs for other things. There was once (okay, many more times than once) when Ryan and I were on the run from some agents of dubious affiliation (you know what I mean). I was driving because Ryan was trying to type something up on his laptop. The MiB's were gaining. So, I put in (don't laugh) "Danger Zone" from Top Gun, and before you know it, I was halving the time it took me to go from point A to point B.

The Aleashics have some things right. Tantrics, Tai Chi and other neat Eastern things are also really good for opening you up. Little known fact: If you practice Tai Chi long enough, you eventually learn how to kick ass. Martial arts are a good way to open your senses, and if you need a little help magically in a fight, it's an excellent focus. I would definitely suggest one or two rote involving combat. We always can hope that ours is a war of words, but you should always be prepared. Even if it's just defensive.

There are a couple of other foci you can employ. One is a steal from the Chorus. Prayer. I don't really care who you pray to. Just talking to a dead relative or pet will work too. This is a focus to open your senses to the spiritual. Just be careful. If something really is there to listen, well, there is always a risk in getting attention, good or bad.

And then there are stories. Telling, reading or listening to a story makes a good focus. It opens your imagination. One of my strongest foci has always been an Avengers comic of mine. It's old, but it's got one of my favorite characters, the Scarlet Witch. Movies aren't as strong, but there are some that really fuel the imagination or get you wanting to be like someone. Use it to your advantage. Make a rote that it will power. That's what I did.

Anything that opens your mind, body, soul and senses makes for a good focus. Build your foci and rotes in combination. An action, drug, item, song, whatever. If it gets your juices flowing (no fokes from the cheap seats), then come up with a rote that will go along. Or apply it to something you can already do. Multiple foci for a rote is actually a good idea.

So, I hope this teaches you something useful.

THE DRUG CRAZE

Cultists of Ecstasy are almost universally famous for their drug fetish. Every Cultist has some experience with mind-altering substances — and, usually, *multiple* such experiences. Stuffy Hermetics sometimes accuse the Cult of being little more than a feel-good club for hopeless addicts. Dreamspeakers say that the Cultists abuse sacred substances meant for spiritual communion. Akashics turn up their noses and judge that the Cultists are simply ruining their bodies with unnatural pollutants.

It's true, to some degree, that Ecstatic Initiates have a penchant for drug use. Drugs are very powerful tools, which naturally means that they're dangerous. However, because their effects don't rely on any special knowledge or practice of the user, they're a simple tool — one that anyone can use. The trick is to use the tool without becoming dependent upon it. Cult tutors rely on soft drugs to help novices open their awareness or change their mind states. At some point, the Cultist must grow beyond such use and find kamamarga to touch ecstasy without artificial chemical inducement.

A Cultist in a hurry — or with an addiction problem — might still rely on drugs for some trance states. Using drugs is certainly more sure-fire than relying on many other foci, such as dance or music. It's also something that the Cultist can't easily pull out of. For this reason, drug use usually drops off as Cultists become more experienced. A Cultist who has her personal kamamarga down doesn't need to rely on dosing herself.

Because of the prevalence of drugs, even Cultists who eschew mind-altering substances often make a study of such chemicals. Cultists tend to broadly categorize drugs into three groupings: "running toward," "running away" and "bad shit."

Running Toward: Drugs that create energy and foster activity are "running toward" drugs. They can bolster courage or create a sense of invulnerability or just lead to frenetic action. Such drugs include co-

caine and its cousins, amphetamines, ecstasy and even humble caffeine.

Running Away: Drugs that relax energy and turn awareness inward help in meditation but lead to inability to act. "Running away" drugs can leave the Cultist a morass of unmoving, uncaring flesh. These sorts of drugs include Quaaludes, depressants, ether, morphine, heroin, alcohol and marijuana.

Bad Shit: "Bad shit" drugs are so uncontrollable that they cause dangerous side effects and mental states, without any sort of high that can channel into ecstasy. Such drugs don't help with magic at all; they just cause problems. This category includes angel dust, certain strong heroin or cocaine derivatives, and just about any drug that induces raving psychosis.

THE ECSTASY QUANDARY

A few Cultists claim the invention of X as a victory of the Cult itself. It's a drug that fosters a high of sensation. The flesh becomes hyper-aware, and sexuality and desire are enhanced, which often leads the user into exploration of sexuality and even just simple tactile pleasure.

Ecstasy, however, often runs counter to the Cult's drive in the long run (like any drug use). The ideal is to achieve a state of heightened awareness through personal knowledge and to remove the shackles of fear through choice. X pushes the individual into such a state, but, like many drugs, it grants only diminishing returns. Nothing feels as good again as the first high. Dependence upon X can actually lead to a burnout of passion as it cuts the individual off from any sort of ecstatic experience.

...AND THE USUAL WAIVER

Once again, just to make it clear, we reiterate that this isn't a guidebook to drugs nor a categorical endorsement of drug use. It's a game, dealing with a fantasy world, with people who aren't real and don't suffer real consequences from drug use. You are real. Drugs can fuck up your life.

Once wanted to learn some new ways to get in touch with my body. Things were getting serious with Ryan and myself to the point where, though he tried to understand, he wasn't really comfortable with me sleeping with other people. He and I talked about it, and I told him if I could find other ways to achieve the same results with others that didn't involve sex,

then I would do it. He agreed to be patient and understanding while I learned. I love him so much.

Well, our friend Dent was an Akashic who offered to teach me some things. He knew a few martial arts styles through, and then smidgens of things aside. He began teach-

ing them to me and how to show others to do them and how to combine them with others.

I will admit, it's not as fun as sex, but there are a few that are just "whoa!" when you do them with someone else, so that balances in the end. The end result is that I was able to learn ways to explore the body's limits without necessarily causing a lot of hard feelings, and Ryan and I learned something about working together and compromising too. It all turned out good.

Dent taught me things in four general areas: Combat, mind tricks, body development and mysticism.

COMBAT

All right, we divide combat into two areas, defensive and offensive. Most any martial art will teach you both, but Dent taught me some pretty key philosophies that really help you. The Aleashtics have a whole lifestyle built around their martial arts. For Cultists this isn't as pervasive, but a few good generalizations can go a long way.

DEFENSIVE POSTURES (INTERNAL FOCUS)

First key to defense is conservation of energy. Move as little as possible, but stay loose. Let your attacker waste energy. There are some really good postures from Jeet Kune Do that maximize this. If you take these positions, you can learn to focus Life and Prime arts through them, so as to draw strength from your opponent's exhaustion.

Blocks are another area that work well with a little magic. Again, focusing some Life and Prime with Forces this time can turn your opponent's own attack against him. Nasty, but effective. Dent has some tricks where he can spin out an entire group of people so that they're all hitting one another.

Dodges are the third area ripe for magical intervention. The command of Time arts common to the Cult means it's not too hard to just let your senses flow outward as you breathe out. Let your guard drop a little and look toward the next half-second. See where your opponent's moving, then don't be there. Tricker than it looks.

Defensive studies help with internal focus. Aside from the obvious benefits of learning some ass-kicking magically augmented martial arts, these sorts of techniques can work just like dance. Breathe out at the moment of impact. Learn to put pain aside. Move slowly and react to your surroundings. It's a great way to become hyper-aware by sending out your senses to feel every motion near you.



⊕FFENSIVE P⊕STURES (EXTERNAL F⊕CUS)

Okay, the key to successful offense is maximizing your energy. You want to get the greatest effect with the minimum expenditure of energy. It's the Yang to defense's Yin, right? That's Dent's impression, anyway. They're opposites, but each contains a little of the other at its core. Defense grows from an offense that changes back into a defense.

Focusing Life and Entropy into a hit can really mess up someone's life. You can make the damage small, or, if you have the ability, you can do that mythic hit that will cause someone to just keel over within a week or so. But for more immediate uses, Life and Entropy tossed into a hit will assure things like an effective bruising, nabbing muscle or nerve, or even breaking a bone. You can toss in Forces if you want, but that can actually be overkill.

The punches and kicks are your foci. Use them to deliver the damage you need. Dent mentioned that Bruce Lee even incorporated ballet into his fighting. It's not so farfetched: Capoeira is both a fighting art and a dance. It's the same concept. Move, feel your body's motion, keep aware of balance. Let go of timing and just use reflexes. If you do it right, time falls away and everything happens exactly when it needs to. You can hone your balance and touch so that when you connect, your body stays in motion and immediately moves on to the next maneuver. It's an awakening of instinct. Not quite as good as feeling the burn of total commitment to activity, but it's sort of like a constant, low-level threshold of ecstasy.

⊕ODY ARTS

There is body-building and body-healing. There is also body-doin'. Men like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan and Jet Li (mmmmmmmm) are my heroes. These men make fast moves and unbelievable stunts believable. You can use focusing poses and sometimes get away with some incredible moves, using Forces and Correspondence to help you jump, Time to move faster, etc. The Akashics are lucky — thanks to people like them and Steven Seagal and Bruce Lee, people want to believe in incredible martial arts feats.

Tantric exercises and Tai Chi combined with Life arts can really build your bod. The exercises become foci for the magic. You can even use Entropy combined with Life to slow the aging process — nei tan, the Akashics call it. These exercises can also be combined with Life magic to heal. Some Cultists I know of practice their moving meditation in concert with incense, or while they're tripping. It's a powerful expe-



rence, akin to dancing at a Pink Floyd concert while the lights are strobing and the acid's kicking in. On the one side, you have the usual Cult practices pushing awareness outward. On the flip side, you have the total internal concentration and dedication of the exercises.

MIND TRICKS

No mental exercise is better than martial arts, except maybe a Lewis Carroll puzzle. That is what Dent taught me. He had me sit up in a tree until I learned to be quiet as a mouse. I thought that this was annoying, but as I sat there needing something to do, I found something new. If I quieted myself, I could feel everything around me, the sentience of the plants and animals. It was quite the experience.

A story's told of a ship captain who found himself in Asia arguing the superiority of military discipline against the soft life of a monastery. The monks showed him one of their simple exercises. They took him to a wood-floored room and had him spend an hour on his hands and knees just following the grain of the wood with his eyes. After he broke, they explained that they sometimes did that for a full day as a concentration exercise. Maybe it's boring, yeah, but you ever just sit and watch the hands on a wall clock? If you watch long enough, you reach the point where you think you can almost see the minute and hour hands as they ever so slowly move. It's the same thing. Once you stop being worried about time, you can watch it speed by or slow it to a crawl.

The martial arts are full of similar exercises that help you tune to the world around you. They make an excellent focus for Mind magics because your head is still clear. It is its own rush, and it's great.

MYSTICISM

Dent taught me the movements of chi, which seems to resemble Quintessence. Maybe it's the same thing — Dent was pretty obtuse on the matter. Picture it this way. Everyone has Quintessence as a part of their existence. Exercises in chi kung are learning how to move that Quintessence around, and make it do things. For mages, it teaches us how to interact with the spiritual forces around us. These are great exercises to focus Prime energies, and they are especially good if you're learning to channel that energy to other people, or into objects to make Talismans.

Tai Chi is my favorite foci for directing chi energies. I like it because I can focus not only Prime through Tai Chi, but other Spheres as well. It makes for good health too.

All right, so, Dent, you did what you wanted.

You made a difference.

Rest in peace now.

PAIN AND AWARENESS

Pain has always been an excellent way to get attention. Is it an accident that the bad guy, to get attention, always inflicts some sort of emotional or physical pain? Whether it's directed toward a protagonist or a victim to draw us to his need for vengeance or pleasure or at his henchmen to get their attention or at the audience in the form of fear and hugging our heart strings.

Pain is powerful, and it is the unwise mage who forgets this.

For awakening senses, pleasure is the way to go. It is readily accepted. Even if it doesn't make us happy, we all like to be pleased. But pleasure makes us lazy. It is poor for focusing our attention.

That is where pain comes in. Pain should never be used to build awareness. Pleasure should fill that role. When it comes time to focus and direct, then bring in pain. Cutting or burning. Deprivation or humiliation. It is through pain that our higher aspects learn to focus and bring power to bear. As a bringer of pain, it is your responsibility to cultivate that power once it manifests. Once humiliation has brought about the higher aspect's power, encourage it, don't degrade it. There is no awaking in degradation.

You see, in working with pain, you tread a fine line. You can easily crush someone, which will never lead to enlightenment. You corrupt passion by making the person shy away from it. You only send the victim spiraling down into an oblivion of fears and regrets.

The first assurance to guard against this is a safety word between you and the one you work with, whether you are giving or receiving or both. The second is to obey it. The third is to listen. Work with them. Give to them, don't take from them. Do this, and you will create within each other powerful mages, capable of seeing and directing that which normal men can not see.

That's the final line between those who follow the Code of Ananda and those who don't — consent. You can never

push someone with pain (or pleasure) when they aren't ready. They have to be willing to open up to the experience. Otherwise, they won't learn from it — they'll only fear it.

Jessa looks up at Lee Ann a little sheepishly. She doesn't think she was supposed to be reading this book, but Lee Ann doesn't seem bothered. Jessa puts down the book and looks up at her friend.

"All right, so I've seen your foci. But how do you make it work in the real world?" Jessa asks.

Lee Ann holds out her hand and helps Jessa to her feet.

"You mean outside of grand rites from within Chantry walls?"

Jessa nods.

"Well, the same as any mage. The same as you do, I suppose. Some things are easy. If a mage is using drugs, some things he can access quickly. But that has its own risks. The extremes aren't meant to be performed at the time you need the focus, not always. The idea is to eventually recall the experience and use that recall as your mental foci. Generally, a scar from the act is placed somewhere that a mage can get to easily, though, just in case he can't get the mental focus together yet. A knife or scratch to open the scar, and he's in business. Sometimes simply burning the area does it, too."

"I think I like just going all trancy better."

"Yeah, but you don't always have time for that in the real world."

Jessa shrugs.

"You wanted to see what it was like for us to do magic. So, even our preparations are magic. When we're training ourselves to open our senses, we're both preparing to use magic and using magic."

Jessa nods and smiles.

"I notice I don't see you going and cutting yourself for your magic."

Lee Ann smiles. "Not that you can see, no. Life magic is good for some things, you know. If I went seeking out newly Awakened with scars all over my arms, I'd probably freak them out."

"And they're freaked enough as it is," Jessa finishes for her. Lee Ann offers her a smirk. "All right, so, you're out with Ryan, and some MiB's try to pick you up. What do you do?"

"Run," Lee Ann says. "I never do magic around MiB's if I can help it. There's been exceptions—"

"Like Milledgeville?"

Lee Ann nods and winces slightly. "Yeah. And that had its own ramifications, like owing a massive Paradox Spirit for longer than I care to admit. Or maybe he owed

us the favor? Either way, it's bad news, trust me. I don't mind that Milledgeville was my first experience with actual reality spirits. What I mind is that my first experience was a spirit that high on the totem pole. It was scary, and to be honest, it's really ruined the spirit world experience for me. I've experienced extra sharp cheddar cheese. Why do I want to deal with American cheese?"

"What are you going to do, look at God next time around and say 'This time I'd like to make my introduction to all things a little at a time so I can appreciate the pantheon of power'?"

Lee Ann shrugs. "It couldn't hurt."

"Has it ever occurred to you that there were signs all over the place that told you you were going into something that was way over your heads?"

Lee Ann looks perplexed.

"Didn't you get the hint when that writer kept turning into the plantation owner's wife right before your eyes?"

Lee Ann shrugs. "Ryan might have said something. But that's not the point."

Jessa gives a despairing grunt that ends that part of the conversation. She looks back up at Lee Ann.

"All right, you encounter something less high on the totem pole that is a problem. Say a kid's cat is stuck in a tree, and no one can find a ladder."

"Oh, I can find a ladder. I mean, the likelihood of no one having the ladder is slim to none. Why I can almost guarantee that one of the neighbors has one. Maybe it's just been so long since he had to use it that he forgot about it."

"You're not helping."

Lee Ann smiles. "Sure I am."

"If that annoying logical shepil is one of your rites, you've been spending too much time with Ryan," Jessa says with some distaste.

"It is. I have to get in touch with logic, too, you know. There's no better way to feel logic than to speak logic. Ryan being rather anal (though I have met worse, thank you) does help me on that."

"Finding a lost item," Jessa challenges.

"I pretend that I am using said item (which is interesting depending on the item lost). I do it to a point that I can feel it in my hands, see what it does, or hear the sound it makes. Then I remember where it got off to."

Jessa smiles. "All right, I get the idea. So what's the next lesson?"

Lee Ann shrugs. "What do you want to learn about?"

"How do you keep it all straight, the magic and foci?"

"Ah," Lee Ann smiles. "How do we make our magic? Excellent question. Come with me."

FACES OF ECSTASY

The Cult of Ecstasy acknowledges the Nine Spheres of Magic, as do the other Traditions, but their perception and approach of these spheres are distinctly Ecstatic. Although its fairly difficult to place blanket statements of philosophy on the Cult as a whole, a few generalizations can be made.

The Cult does not see the Spheres as independent entities in and of themselves. Nothing in the universe is an island, and all things are sympathetic to one another in some manner. To the Cultist, in contrast to the Akashic Brotherhood and Order of Hermes, there is no fundamental difference between the body, the body and the soul. Just as the ancient Greeks propose that illness stems from a personal imbalance, so too does the Cult see that an injured man does not think clearly, and that the individual who does not have the wits to choose correct action is accordingly spiritually crippled.

The Cult also believes that systems in motion tend to stay in motion. While some dress this assertion up in psychological or sociological terms (or even with godless science), it amounts to a belief in karma. Pain begets pain. Healing begets healing. Wisdom spreads wisdom. Therefore, the Ecstatic paradigm of magic is based mainly on the metaphysical principles of sympathy. Like affects like, type has power over type, and birds of a feather do indeed flock together. This is perhaps the oldest metaphysical principle. Our ancient ancestors used pictures of animals on a cave wall to increase the probability of capturing that animal. A simple and easily applied magical principle. Ecstatics call sympathy karma. The Traditions as a whole refer to it as Resonance.

Magically, these principles are applied to the elements of reality, the Spheres. Since all things are intertwined in an endless dance, changing one affects all others. When an Ecstatic changes Fate, so too does he change the placement of matter in the universe. With that change in distribution of matter, so changes the distribution of gravitational forces. And the change in forces allows a baby bird to be born that would have fallen out of its nest. Seeing the bird fly inspires a mage who then Awakens. This cycle could continue on endlessly, and (in the mind of the Ecstatic) every daily interaction, every thought and every sensation causes a number of changes in the world similar to these. The Ecstatic simply knows what effect his actions will have. This is what the un-Awakened refer to as "magic."

Correspondence — Illusion of Space

Because all things are connected within the universe and all things are reliant upon one another,

Cultists see distance as an illusion. Just as it is natural that the human mind can eventually perceive anything, it is natural that a person would be able to sense things in other locations. Indeed, the truly enlightened can be everywhere at once, communing with the whole of creation. In fact, some Cultists hold the belief that many Masters of Correspondence within the Cult did not "disappear" when the Avatar Storm made its debut. According to some, the Cultist Masters achieved a state that allows them to be absorbed back into existence itself, freed from their karmic bonds along with their earthly shells.

Cultists use a number of tools to influence spatial relationships. In many ways, Correspondence is a natural extension of the Ecstatic mastery over Time. Both are simply illusions of placement in a given continuum, and illusions that can be seen for what they are can be manipulated. Correspondence is most often achieved by attaining an altered state of mind. Music, exercise, drugs, sex, violence, pain, starvation and even magically induced madness can all be used pierce the illusion of space.

With Correspondence, a Cultist can speak across vast distances or send out mass communications. She can extend her senses beyond her own body, no longer limited by crude physical nerves. Eventually, the Ecstatic who masters Correspondence is no longer bound by the illusion of space, which enables him to exist anywhere. With Time, he can exist anywhere or anytime.

Entropy — Karmic Cycle

To the Ecstatic, Entropy is the force of Fate, momentum, karma, eventuality and probability. Karma demands that all things break down and eventually die and return to the endless cycle, captive by mortality. The Awakened Ecstatic can use this principle to either liberate people and objects from their karmic prisons, or to weigh them down and cause them to return to the cycle prematurely. While Ecstatics don't focus overmuch on destruction (they leave this to the Euthanatos), it occasionally becomes necessary.

Many Cultists find that meditation is the easiest tool with which to pierce the flow of karma. It allows the Cultist to, for the briefest second, move past the obvious and transcend the cycle. Outside the cycle, the Cultist can impose his will on karma. Others use more obvious methods. Of course sex and drugs can be used (as long as it is a matter of transcendence and not gratification), but focusing on a reoccurring cycle,

Greek formulae and even ritual blinding with red-hot metal can be used.

Cultists use Entropy often in conjunction with Time to gain very accurate readings of future events. Cultists rarely focus on Entropy's decaying effects, instead using it to uplift the whole of creation and preserve it. Entropy can be used to stem aging, decay and prevent harm to a person or object.

Forces — Illusion of Different States

Like Time and Correspondence, Ecstatics see Forces and Matter as two sides of one principle. Whereas Matter is the Illusion of Physicality, Forces is the state of that illusion. Movement, heat and electricity are just the properties of a given amount of material at a given time. Just as time and material are subject to the whims of the Ecstatic, so are its properties.

Again, no element of reality is an island. A change in one can yield a change in another. Thus the Ecstatic could change his perceptions of Forces, and it becomes so. Why? Because the mystic moves out of the realm of reason and physicality, into the spiritual and transcendent. By using drugs, trances, severe pain, near-death experiences or even complex mathematics, the Ecstatic can enforce his perceptions on others (and reality).

Thus, the Ecstatic can prevent fire from burning himself or icy water from freezing his flesh. He can meditate and float in midair, undisturbed by any unwanted sensory input. The Ecstatic could cause a foe to literally be overcome with the weight of his karmic debt.

Life — Lakashim

Lakashim... the pulse of life. Lakashim is synonymous with 'holy' to an Ecstatic. It is what is good and sacred about existence. It is the culmination of body, body and soul. It is a dynamic force, constantly shifting, beating, changing, flowing. In short, it is Life. Without Life, there can be no transcendence. Life is strength. Those who are physically weak are weighed down in pain and cannot hope to achieve Ecstasy. By strengthening Lakashim in an individual, that individual has the potential to achieve Ecstasy, breaking karmic illusions, and freeing the soul from bondage.

The Cult has many approaches to manipulating Lakashim. Some manipulate it as they would any aspect of reality. They break through to a level where rational relationships do not apply and change the world how they see fit. Others use more conventional means including herbalism, martial arts and the perennial favorite, Tantra.

It is said that Ecstatic Masters live for thousands of years through their manipulation of Lakashim, while others cut short the lives of those who harm the flow and rhythm of Lakashim. The Cultist can also purge himself and others of disease by aligning the Ojas of a sickened individual with the Ojas of a healthy individual. The Ecstatic can also increase sensitivity to pleasure in others by touch or, should he be so inclined, to pain.

Matter — Illusion of Physicality

Manipulating Matter, like Forces, is a matter of enforcing one's own perceptions of existence. The material world is a side effect of the self, the great falsehood. Therefore, by transcending the self, the Ecstatic can control his perception of the universe. Outside of the normal, physical, illusionary, malleable world, the mystic can shape existence to his desires.

Thus do Ecstatics use altered states to alter physicality. The Ecstatic can conjure objects out of thin air, make others disappear or multiply objects by taking hallucinogens. LSD is particularly prized in this respect for its ability to "make things melt." Some ascetics injure themselves to achieve similar effects. By mutilating his arm, the ascetic can mutilate an object in a similar manner.

Mind — Illusion of the Self

If one believes that all beings in the universe are one, then it's not a large logical leap to think that the thoughts of one affect the thoughts of all others. The greatest magic between selves is when two bodies connect as one. This is Love. Pure Love is the bonding of body, body and soul. When all of these principles are in unison, the illusion of the self is shattered, and the glory of unity is revealed. When the Mage becomes a part of everyone, he has power over everyone.

By far, Tantra is the most used tool for Mind magic, but modern followers use modern psychology to terrible effectiveness. Music alters the mood of those who hear it and marijuana smoke calms others. By inflicting extreme pain, the mystic can simply untether himself from his decaying body and move into the spiritual and abstract realm.

Prime — Ojas

The universe is pulsing, dancing, changing and retaining power within itself. These concentrations of power — Ojas — can be found in everything. Every object has centers of concentration. The human body has them. The earth has them. The universe itself has them. These Ojas are places of power. It is untapped potential. In Tantra, this principle is Kundalini, the

coiled serpent. Like Lakashim, it is tension, rhythm and pulse. However, instead of magnitude, the Ojas are set in space. They are physical locations where the illusion breaks down and pure possibility breaks through. And the Cult knows the power of potentiality.

Extreme exercise can strengthen and enlarge the Ojas, sex can bring them into alignment between partners allowing an exchange of power, and Tantric positioning can concentrate them. The energy from the Ojas, called Shakti or Kundalini, is the building block of the universe. It exists in all things in varying degrees of utility and abundance. All one has to do is focus it and tap into existing Ojas.

Spirit — Dreaming

The spirit is the reflection of the soul of mankind. While body is the misplaced perceptions and emanations of the self, the Spirit is the emanations of the soul. Where the soul of people and the land is corrupt, so is the spirit of the place corrupt. Where men dream of devouring spirits and bloodletting, their dreams creep into reality through spirit. When people dream of good things such as abundance, peace and love, these dreams also manifest in the spirit world.

Therefore, Ecstatics consider the Spirit world as being somewhat more "truthful" than the physical world. Ecstatics can use a number of means to interact with the spirit world, but the easiest way is altered perceptions. As the mystic's vision becomes more and more abstract, he can see the abstractions of the spirit world.

Time — The Illusion of Fixed Time, The Ecstatic Principle

The question is always asked "Why does the Cult of Ecstasy focus on the Time Sphere?" The answer is simple but not obvious, like all things Ecstatic. The Cult views magic as a series of barriers that must be broken. Space, properties of matter, probability... these are all variables that can be manipulated by breaking barriers. Time though... that is the secret to break all barriers. Consider this: Given infinite time, anything is possible. The Cult seeks to master all things by transcending them; what better way than through Time? All things are dynamic, and all things change. This is not a property of Entropy, this is a property of Time. Without Time, there could be no Entropy. Without Time, there is total stasis. No change. No flux. No chance to surpass what has gone before, because nothing has gone before. Nothing improves. Nothing is gained or lost. Time is, therefore, the key to the universe itself, its Tapestry and its secrets.

This having been said, how does the Cult use Time to further its goals? The most obvious way it is used is

for divination. The Cult has always had roots in Greek divinatory magic and soothsaying. Interestingly enough, Time is a very dangerous art that requires subtle use. It has always been the Cult, in all its excess and flair, that has achieved the greatest results with it.

Time foci for the Cult tend to be similar to those used for Correspondence. By touching ecstasy, the Cultist moves consciousness outside of the fetters of time. The key to this ecstasy could be any number of things — a drug, a piece of music, a particularly vibrant dance. The Cultist focuses on the sensation to the exclusion of all else until the sensation itself encompasses all awareness. When everything's unchanging, time ceases to exist. The Cultist can move past time, change its speed or see beyond its barriers.

SORCERERS AND THE ECSTATIC PATH

Not all Ecstatics have the ability to fight karma on their own terms. Sorcerers have always been a part of the Cult of Ecstasy. For the most part, the Cult makes no distinction between those who achieve changes within the constraints of the karmic cycle and those who do so outside it. Rebellion against the established order of things can be done just as easily within the system as it can be without. In some cases, the inside man is preferable. Truth be told, Ecstatics accept sorcerers as they would any Ecstatic mage. In fact, they even refer to them as mages, even if this term causes some confusion among other more Awakened-centric Traditions.

Since both forms of Ecstatic magic are fairly subtle, sorcerers can spend their entire lives in Awakened society and share equal status. This statement assumes that those Awakened mages with whom he associates can even tell that his magic is different from Awakened magic.

Most Ecstatic sorcerers belong to the Hagalaz, Fellowship of Pan, Aghoris, and K'an Lu sects, mainly because these groups have established mythos and ritual. Hagalaz sorcerers are master rune-casters, and they administer berserker drugs to Hagalaz warriors. Sorcerers of the Fellowship of Pan enter the dreams of others and teach wisdom through immoderation. The dreaded Aghoris live hundreds of years and cut through the illusions of karma by harming themselves and others. Members of the K'an Lu sect perfect themselves and their families with their sorceries. The Acharne, Dissonance Society and Joybringers all have small amounts of sorcerers, and most who do belong to these factions borrow mystic practice from other established forms of magic, adapting them to suit their philosophies.

HISTORICAL FACTIONS

While some Cultists stand by the Code of Ananda and others blast it, there are those that follow it as a simple guideline, instead focusing on their own creed that neither contradicts nor supports the Code. These groups hail from ancient cultural traditions as they have been practiced for centuries. Most sorcerers from the Cult belong to these factions, as these factions have very stable, ancient and ritualized styles. Although they exhibit some measure of innovation, as all Ecstatic arts require, the main tenets of these crafts are set in stone. Rebellion does occur though, and modern adaptations spring up more and more. To the consternation of older practitioners, for every legitimate mystic practicing "The Old Ways" there are two crystal-waving New Agers who grasp the aesthetic of the ancient traditions without the discipline or schooling associated with them. Since many of these factions have existed before or around the time of the Code of Ananda, they were not created with its rules specifically in mind.

For instance, although the **K'an Lu** uphold the majority of the precepts of the Code, their arts are not geared toward healing others or moving others toward enlightenment. Instead, the K'an Lu mage attempts to perfect himself, Ascend and no longer worry about karmic matters. The K'an Lu seeks to unite the opposed Yin and Yang principles within himself to achieve immortality, which he sees as synonymous with perfection.

The K'an Lu are a Taoist sect in China. Many of their number claim descent from the Han

Emperors and keep relics from these ancient masters of the Tao. Unlike the Akashic Brotherhood, they are not ascetics. The K'an Lu practice unification of opposites through extreme sensory input. Eating remarkably spicy foods, immersion in near freezing water, forced celibacy by genital binding and even simple things like meditation and dance are their favored vehicles for the mystic arts.

While few mainstream Cultists could endure the rigid structure of K'an Lu practice, many Taoist practices have filtered into Western Ecstatic practice. Many Joybringers incorporate Taoist philosophy in their repertoire, as do a number of members of the Dissonance Society.

However, these practices are imperfect and have been translated into something other than what they were intended to be. This is aggravated by the fact that few K'an Lu are open about their practices or the fact that they even exist. The Chinese government has been quite thorough in removing what it sees as rebel elements of its society, associates and members of the K'an Lu being high on their list of dangerous dissidents. Consequently, K'an Lu have become scarce and are heard of less and less often by the Traditions. Whether they are leaving the physical world, going extinct or simply being silent is open to debate. A number have come to North America, but they have not seemed to form any sort of organization amongst each other thus far. Outsiders note that some associate exclusively with members of the Akashic Brotherhood, while others mainly keep company with other Ecstatics.

Long before the K'an Lu made love in their palaces in China, what would eventually become the

The Fellowship of Pan practiced its mysterious mix of intoxication, art and amorous behavior in the green fields and hills of ancient Greece. The Fellowship is rooted in the mystery cults of Dionysus



imported from the East. Reveling in the pure passions of human nature, the Fellowship was formed when humans and satyr, created out of the pure joy of human beings, coupled arms and laid down in the pristine wilderness of the countryside.

The Fellowship seeks for humanity to simply do what it does best, indulge in human nature. While their philosophy is somewhat similar to the modern Joybringers, the Fellowship acknowledges that mankind is capable of both pure love and pointless violence, but that mankind tends toward the virtuous. In many ways, the Fellowship regards mankind as at its purest when in the grip of its unconscious, such as when an individual is making love, making art or drunk to the point of senselessness. Like the Klubwerks faction, the Fellowship wishes to capture and harmonize with this unconscious beat of mankind, although the Fellowship uses very different means to do so.

The Fellowship excels at healing others, soothing angry heads and inspiring others. The Fellow can use drink to make others indulge in their human nature, whether it be a pursuit of love or the pursuit of spite. Dance unifies members of the Fellowship and binds them with powerful feelings of love for one another, whether the participant is human, spirit or fae.

In modern times, the Fellowship is organized loosely, but meetings are frequent. Meetings could be anything from a formal art opening to a spontaneous drum circle and accompanying orgy. In this age of mundane life and sorrow, the Fellowship tries to incorporate as many people as they can. But because of such perversions of human nature as rape, sexually transmitted diseases and sex laws, the Fellowship must operate very carefully or else die out as a result.

Recently, the Fellowship has seen an upsurge in membership. This is due in part to the absorption of the militant Maenad faction of Dionysian women and the pagan Kiss of Astarte. Both groups had lost the support of some obscure supernatural faction who had previously aided them. As these groups tell it, these strange allied factions has gone off on their own crusades, and no longer have time to deal with outsiders. The choice to join the Fellowship was a simple one for the violent Maenads and Earth Goddess cultist Astartites; find new allies or fade into obscurity like the sparks of their bonfires.

The **Erzuli Jingo** practice Voudoun faith within their spirit houses and sacred shrines. While they had once devoted themselves to healing the minds of others by clearing their dreams with the help of their spirit Loa, Madame Saint Erzuli, the Avatar Storm has made doing so next to impossible. Therefore, the faction has turned to more mundane things and magic that does not involve astral travel. While the Erzuli use ecstatic dance, frenzied religious experience and fire to coax spirits into them, most have instead turned their focus on their own families. Many simply are fighting to keep their ways alive in the face of modernity.

While the Jingo are healers and dream magicians of no small renown, they also practice curses and other sorts of black magic. Since the Jingo have lost a bit of their power recently, younger members are taking their loss out on others.

The mysterious and powerful **Vratyas** still remain secluded and enigmatic in their Nepal stronghold. While other crafts languish under modern society and obscurity, the Vratyas militantly defend their ways from outsiders. The Vratyas are the keepers of the most ancient, powerful and secret arts of the Tantra. Their arts are remarkably powerful, as the Vratyas are taught from birth (some say before birth or even conception, using Life, Time and Mind magic) the secrets of the human body and how to unlock its unlimited talent. It is said that the Vratyas are the core of the Cult of Ecstasy, that Sh'zar himself learned from the Vratyas, and that they perhaps hold information that could be used to unlock the secrets of traveling back in time. Few would be able to either refute or deny these rumors.

While most Ecstatics do not seek temporal power, the Vratyas keep their arts to themselves, instead opting to disseminate lesser version to others. This is not simply a matter of hoarding power. Should these techniques fall into the wrong hands (like, say, those of the Aghoris), the results could be dire.

It is said that the Vratyas encompass a love of humanity as great as the Joybringers and a willingness to destroy as great as any Euthanatoi. Still, the Vratyas remain a silent and stern enigma. Few are willing to try to pry their secrets from them.

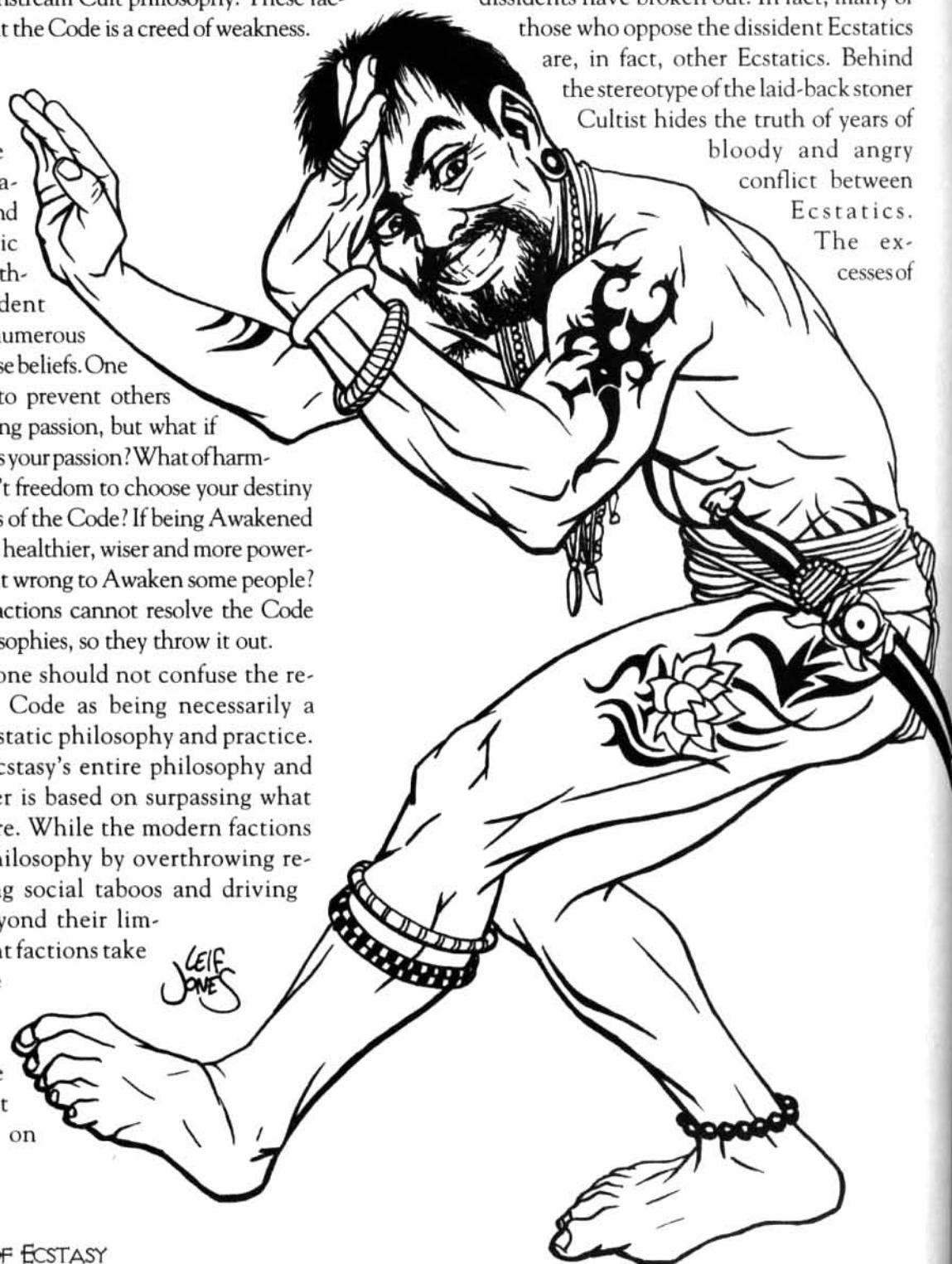
DISSIDENTS AGAINST ANANDA

While most factions either follow the Code of Ananda or pay it lip service, some factions stand in active defiance of it. These factions, the decadent Acharne, the dangerous Aghoris, and the frenzied Hagalaz are defined in Ecstatic society by their willful rejection of mainstream Cult philosophy. These factions believe that the Code is a creed of weakness.

The Code of Ananda's tenets are based on a belief that the world is fundamentally good and that an Ecstatic must not harm others. The dissident factions find numerous paradoxes in these beliefs. One is not allowed to prevent others from experiencing passion, but what if harming others is your passion? What of harming yourself? Isn't freedom to choose your destiny one of the tenets of the Code? If being Awakened is to be stronger, healthier, wiser and more powerful, why then is it wrong to Awaken some people? The dissident factions cannot resolve the Code with their philosophies, so they throw it out.

However, one should not confuse the rejection of the Code as being necessarily a rejection of Ecstatic philosophy and practice. The Cult of Ecstasy's entire philosophy and source of power is based on surpassing what has come before. While the modern factions express this philosophy by overthrowing regimes, breaking social taboos and driving themselves beyond their limits, the dissident factions take this principle one step further and surpass the limitations that the Cult sets on them.

Doing so makes the dissident Ecstatics extremists among extremists. The majority of the Traditions find these factions to be chaotic, dangerous types and try to keep them from becoming too powerful. More than a few skirmishes between other Traditions and dissidents have broken out. In fact, many of those who oppose the dissident Ecstatics are, in fact, other Ecstatics. Behind the stereotype of the laid-back stoner Cultist hides the truth of years of bloody and angry conflict between Ecstatics. The excesses of



these factions disgust the mainstream Cultists (especially Joybringers). It's not hard to see why, especially since none of the dissidents seek to hide or water down their creeds.

However, desperate times call for desperate measures, and while the Cult finds these groups distasteful and brutal, they have become a necessity. The Aghoris and Hagalaz have been longtime members of the Cult but have always used more brutal and extreme methods than the more moderate Ecstatic standard. The Acharne joined the Cult of Ecstasy shortly after World War I in an attempt to legitimize themselves as an occult society, at first hiding their more extreme practices.

However different or outright contrary these factions are, in modern times, especially recently, the Tradition has needed members willing to commit atrocities and call it enlightenment. Even after the Acharne revealed the full extent of their practices, they had already insinuated themselves in Cult society. The Hagalaz responded to the original call when Sh'zar created the Cult. They have always been fairly loosely associated with the Cult, but members are fiercely loyal to their Traditionmates, even if the Tradition moderates find their presence a necessary evil. The Aghoris, masters of right-hand Tantra, have followed the Path of Ecstasy for thousands of years, even if their pursuits are a bit alien.

Acharne are the most recent dissident faction to rise to prominence. The Acharne seek to perfect their personal will by beating it into submission. While the Acharne focus on mental suffering, their philosophy has always had a soft spot for personal and deliberate mutilation. Acharne practices alternate between the downright occult to the rituals specifically designed to degrade the participants as much as can be humanly withstood. Their Chapter Houses serve as meeting places, dens of iniquity, halls of the occult and macho bloodsport arenas.

The Acharne originate in 19th-century stoic cults in Greece. These cults accepted members of the British romantic aristocracy who traveled to fight for Greek independence against the Ottoman Turks. When the aristocrats returned to Britain, they brought back marbles, stories and occult practices the likes of which Britain had never seen. Eventually, these

secret societies infiltrated the fraternity system in Britain, forming into the "Hellfire Clubs" of the 1920s. While these clubs served as places of ill repute for mundane society, the back rooms were devoted to the decadent rites of the nascent Acharne.

The practice continues to this day. The modern Acharne are still a mystery cult. Each level of advancement in rank is accompanied by the revelation of a new mystery to the initiate. Initiation is separated into two parts. The first initiation is a rite, which ends in the initiate branding the omega symbol into his own member. If he cannot muster the will to do this, his mind is tormented into madness and then let free to live with his shame. The second part involves the Acharne ruining an aspect of the initiate's life to see if he can survive the turmoil. Previous initiations have involved loss of jobs, death of lovers and sensory deprivation. Once inducted, the Acharne drinks the blood of his Cabal, forging powerful emotional bonds between them. The Acharne accept only men. Their secretive and violent clubs have earned the Acharne the nickname, Durdenites.

Acharne focus on the Mind Sphere instead of the Time Sphere, as most of their magic focuses on personal will and mental endurance. While torture and suffering are favored foci, a number use Greek symbols, hard-core drugs and blood drinking.

Aghoris are the oldest of the dissident factions, and they are ironically masters of the Ecstatic Arts. While they are masters of Tantra, they do not indulge in sexual ecstasy, using only right-hand Tantra. The Aghoris preach a certain amount of restraint, although their philosophy is one of total self-destruction. The Aghoris believe that one may only break the illusions of karma by destroying the biggest illusion of all, the falsehood of "The Self." Unfortunately for those around them — because they believe that all beings are, in fact, one — one must harm others as one harms oneself in order to reach the most perfect state of enlightenment.

These "Unterrified" mystics descend from ancient Shakti cults outside of Bengal. When Sh'zar sent out the call to all Ecstatics, the Aghoris were among the first to trickle into the alliance. As the Order of Reason colonized their homeland, the Aghoris turned more and more to the Traditions

for support. Eventually, both the Akashic Brotherhood and the Euthanatoi joined sides with the Aghoris, cementing their place amongst the Traditions, despite their extreme practices.

Modern times have not been kind to the Aghoris. While they still have the numbers necessary to be factors among the Traditions and the Cult, their Masters are gone. For a group with no political or material power, this loss has crippled them. The members are now scrambling to break the karmic bonds, at the expense of their conscience and the consciences of others.

Aghoris practice is not for the faint of heart. Their whole philosophy is about negating the self. Nor are they limited to harming... that is... enlightening themselves. A rumor has surfaced of a militant Aghoris who traps American tourists and prunes their flesh away, only to re-grow it magically.

The Aghoris use Tantra, blood loss, human ash, flagellation, castration, whirling and physical exhaustion. They generally live in crematoriums in rural areas or other place of death. Almost all are vegetarian, and a few go so far as to only eat what is offered to them.

In Norway, the militant and chaotic **Hagalaz** faction wages an ideological war on modernity and Christianity. Descending from the ancient cults of Loki, Freyja and Odin, the Hagalaz live in a state of perpetual battle. Hagalaz seek a return to ancient Norse culture and religion, which they see as stronger, more flexible, fairer and more productive. Since

the Hagalaz formed as a result of the encroachment of Christianity, they seek to overthrow both its practice and its moral code, which they see as an alien creed imported from Hebrew slave culture.

Hagalaz encompass several diverse forms of magic into one faction. Some act as Loki priests, Sutr, and use rune carving and traps to defeat their enemies. The Sons of Wotan are necromantic berserkers *par excellence*, and they throw themselves in a near suicidal manner against the Technocracy and mundane institutions knowing well that Valhalla awaits those who die. It is said that these warriors can fight while headless or take down a dozen men for every one of their own casualties. The Freyji worship the female deity Freyja and turn to her to call down curses and reveal the future.

Modern Hagalaz move within the heavy-metal subcultures, as they generally value strength over humility and paganism over monotheism, just as the Hagalaz themselves do. Many have connections to the drug industry in order to obtain their "berserker herbs," be they the traditional hydromel or PCP variant.

The Hagalaz have ties to some Verbena, although they have a difficult time relating to one another. While Verbena may be fairly pessimistic, they are often left disgusted with the Hagalaz fatalistic outlook. Hagalaz are also allies with powerful wolf spirits, the vargr, who nurtured and organized the Hagalaz when the Christians had cast them out.



PROGRESSIVISTS

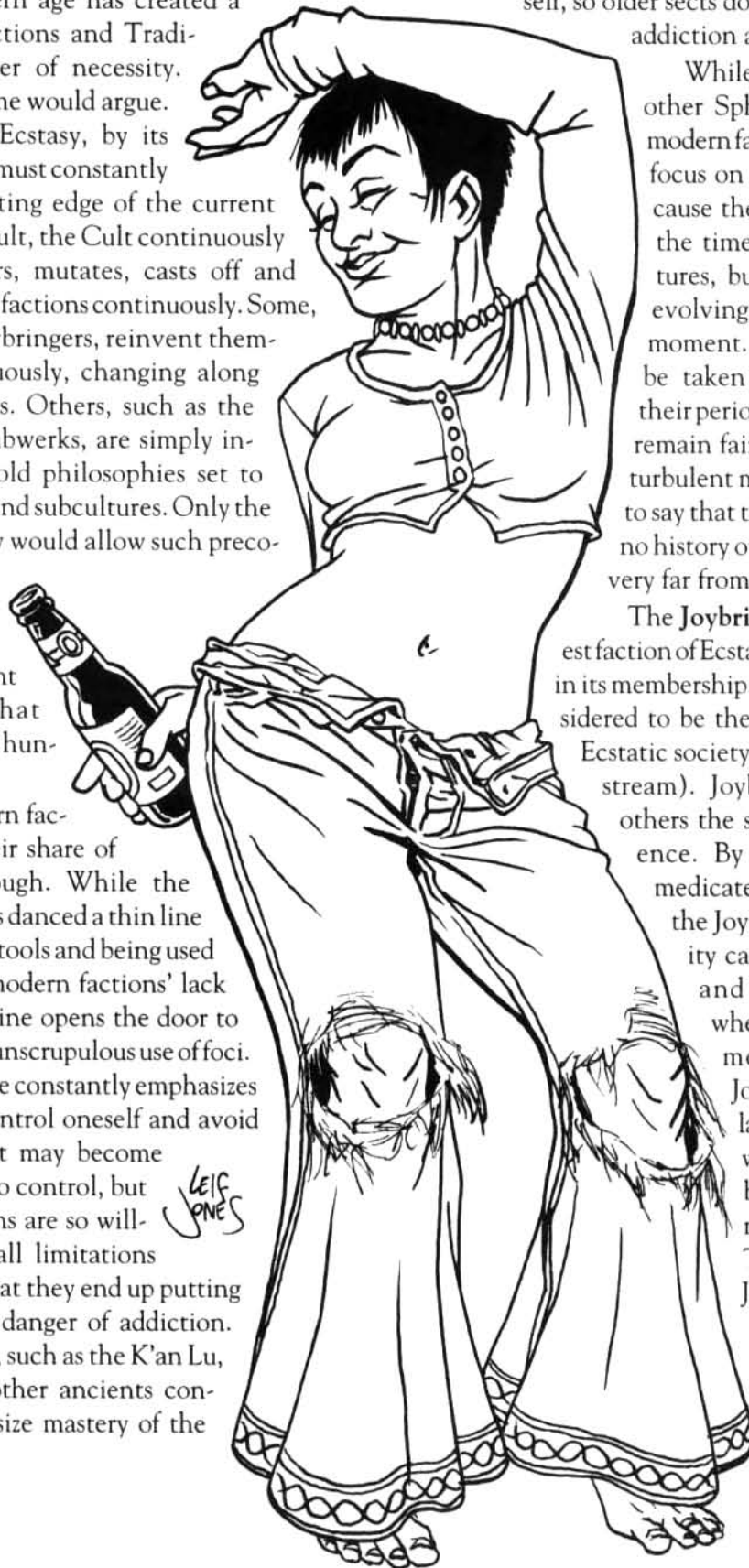
The modern age has created a number of factions and Traditions as matter of necessity. Evolution, some would argue. The Cult of Ecstasy, by its own precepts, must constantly be on the cutting edge of the current times. As a result, the Cult continuously births, devours, mutates, casts off and kills off its own factions continuously. Some, such as the Joybringers, reinvent themselves continuously, changing along with the times. Others, such as the boisterous Klubwerks, are simply innovations of old philosophies set to modern tools and subcultures. Only the Cult of Ecstasy would allow such precocious groups to be given equal standing with ancient traditions that have lasted for hundreds of years.

The modern factions have their share of problems, though. While the Cult has always danced a thin line between using tools and being used by tools, the modern factions' lack of solid discipline opens the door to addiction and unscrupulous use of foci. Cultist doctrine constantly emphasizes the need to control oneself and avoid sensations that may become too addictive to control, but modern factions are so willing to throw all limitations out the door that they end up putting themselves in danger of addiction. Other factions, such as the K'an Lu, Aghoris and other ancients constantly emphasize mastery of the

self, so older sects do not have battles against addiction as often.

While other factions may study other Spheres as much as Time, modern factions almost universally focus on Time. This is partly because these factions so not study the timeless arts of ancient cultures, but rather the constantly evolving fads and politics of the moment. These factions can only be taken within the context of their period in history, while others remain fairly constant even in the turbulent modern times. This is not to say that the modern factions have no history or legitimacy. The truth is very far from that.

The Joybringers comprise the largest faction of Ecstasies. Remarkably diverse in its membership, the Joybringers are considered to be the mainstream of modern Ecstatic society (if one can call it mainstream). Joybringers seek to teach others the simple pleasure of existence. By allowing mankind to medicate itself in pure pleasure, the Joybringers reason, humanity can achieve perfect peace and eventually Ascend, whether metaphorically or metaphysically. The Joybringers are quite popular with younger Ecstasies, who see the Joybringers a bit like high school seniors see a party college. They see that the Joybringers indulge in drugs and sex, but most do not grasp the significance of these practices.



The Joybringers are an evolution of the Cult of Bacchus, which reached its height in the 19th century. When the Cult of Bacchus lost its relevance amid the theories of Nietzsche, Freud, Darwin and Marx, the Cult did not try to salvage what it didn't need. Some of the more mystically inclined joined the Fellowship of Pan, while the majority created the Joybringers who incorporated modern theory and a hodge-podge of mystical practices as they filtered in from other cultures and archeological discoveries. The Joybringers comprise a sizable faction, and, to this day, they are considered the "normal" or "average" faction within the Cult.

The Joybringers attempt as best they can to stick to the letter of the Code of Ananda. To this end, they seek to improve humanity's lot. While they do not use the tactics of the Dissonance Society, the Joybringers do a number of things to help others. Members have done a lot of work with the homeless, HIV-positive patients, the mentally ill, political prisoners, the poor and refugees, and they have even helped to persuade military leaders to use non-lethal weaponry. But while the Joybringers have done a great deal of good in the world, they lose ground on a number of fronts. Joybringers who do not monitor their indulgences quickly find themselves addicted to their own foci and crippled because of this fact. Oftentimes, a Joybringer who has become addicted is more a part of the problem than a cure for it.

Even those who have enough restraint and foresight to avoid addiction often fall prey to their own naïveté. Because Joybringers believe that mankind is essentially good, they often accidentally create situations that allow others to take advantage of them or those they are trying to help. The story is told to newly Awakened Cultists about a Joybringer who opened a coed homeless shelter, unlike most shelters, which are usually separated by gender. While the shelter improved the lives of hundreds of locals, there were several cases of rape within the shelter, and men and women had to be separated for safety reasons.

Joybringers use a number of means to perform their brand of magic. Tantra is very popular, but it is not the traditional style of Tantra practiced in

India. Often times, it is a simple variation of a very difficult position of practice. This does not mean that this practice of Tantra is "incorrect" or in any way diluted in power. Joybringers often use hallucinogens in their sensory magic, to perceive what is not readily visible. Even religious trance has found regular use among certain Joybringers.

The **Dissonance Society** shares many of the same aims of the Joybringers, but its members' methods are entirely different. While the Joybringers seek a fairly peaceful means to advance beyond what has come before, the Dissonance Society wants to overthrow society as a whole and start again. To achieve this, the Dissonance Society has become part anarchist revolution, part philosophical club. The Society uses various methods to fight the establishment, ranging from public debate and litigation to violence in the street and terrorism.

The Dissonance Society has its roots in the Joybringers, but its methods quickly became too extreme to stay within the confines of their devotion to the Code of Ananda. This is not to say that the Society rejects the Code of Ananda, but it does bend the rules on occasion, to the consternation of the Joybringers.

Despite its punk image and ideology, the Dissonance Society are very much philosophers and warriors second. The Society borrows numerous theories and observations from Aristotle and other ancient Greek philosophies. Many are Marxists, Socialists and anarchists, but, regardless of their political affiliation, they can all defend their points. You will never find a Dissonancer chanting, "Anarchy!" in the street unless he really does desire total social breakdown. You will never find a Dissonancer who is not willing to stand up and explain exactly what he believes in and argue the point to the last man. You will never find a Dissonancer who doesn't understand what he preaches. Even the most apathetic member of the Society is well read and able to get his point across.

However, when others cannot be convinced, the Dissonance Society has no problems with using other means to change the world. Deleting corporate bank accounts, staging massive and violent

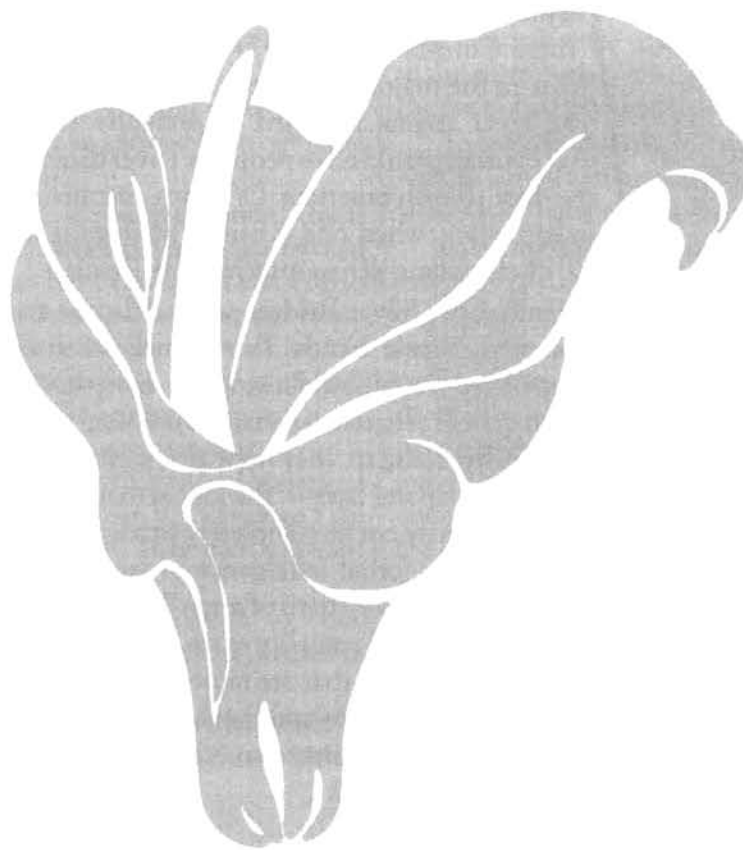
protests, beating up officials, pirating television signals, even hijacking planes are common methods of "getting the point across." Don't be fooled, though. For every anarchist punk wearing a ski mask and a coat covered in patches of his favorite hardcore thrashpunk groups who goes out in the field beating cops with a cracked baseball bat, there is someone inside the system taking it apart. Lawyers, programmers, even career politicians belong to the Society.

The Society uses fairly mundane and coincidental magic compared to other groups. Psychology, doublespeak, fast talk, probability, violence, herbalism, blood (as in, blood of the working man), and mass protest are all common foci, but the Dissonance Society is nothing if not pragmatic.

Klubwerks is the most recent addition to the Cult of Ecstasy, and it has yet to achieve legitimacy among other Traditions. It has a familiar aim: to unify humanity in the endless beat of human expression.

While many would argue that this philosophy would fall under the purview of the Fellowship of Pan, the Klubwerks — or Klubkids, or Clubbies, or Clubbers, or one of any other endless string of names — have a very different take on how this beat of humanity should be expressed and what kind of magic it creates.

Klubwerks seeks to unify mankind under the auspice of total abandon through music. Their shows and concerts are not simply dance tunes and cycled digital beats. Their rhythm is the rhythm of human existence. The music unifies the audience into a single entity communing with, healing and loving itself. Even the music-maker is swept up in the magic of mass consciousness, and the musician can transcend the mundane. With hundreds of people all under the sway of the Klubwerker, the musician can create powerful effects all while under the strictures of consensual reality.



POLITICAL FACTIONS

A few small groups within the Cult of Ecstasy form not out of a unified set of practices, but out of a sense of political expedience. Cultists are activists, after all; they take people to the boundaries and beyond, which by nature thrusts them in conflict with the status quo. Some Cultists see that act of rebellion as more important than the tools used to reach beyond the barrier.

The strong and growing **Children's Crusade** formed out of Cultists concerned over issues of children's safety. The Cult does practice and promote drug trade, prostitution and pornography. But when those practices find their way to children — who don't have the experience to deal with such strong and dangerous elements of life — the results are broken emotions, psychological scars and even death. The crusaders fight to stamp out child slavery (in Third-World countries), child pornography, drug trade in schools and underage prostitution. Even the Technocracy turns a blind eye to this group, which has allies in nearly every Tradition.

The **Cult of Acceptance** is a small political movement designed to "clean up" the Cult's image, primarily by pushing for greater acceptance of their methodologies. These Cultists aren't as concerned with personal ecstasy as with legalizing and spreading the tools used by other factions. Pushes to legalize marijuana, attempts to decriminalize variant sex acts, education about consensual S&M, even opening dance and music schools — like the Joybringers, the Cult of Acceptance hopes to offer new possibilities to the public while doing some good. Unlike the Joybringers and other Cultists, these Cultists constantly try to push for widespread social change. One of the major barriers to Cultists in many Westernized nations is the great stigma attached to sexuality and drug use. The Cult of Acceptance would have people get over their uptight notions and open the door to such practices. Of course, membership in this group can be embarrassing, when one is caught smuggling a briefcase of porn and a kilo of marijuana across international borders.

Finally, the **Silver Bridges** seek to "bridge the gulf" between religion and ecstasy. While Hindu Tantra makes for a fine basic focus, many religions have trouble swallowing the Ecstatic credo. These Ecstatics see conservatism in religion as a major stumbling block and hope to bust apart orthodoxy. In doing so, they hope that a change in spirituality will lead to a change in temporal laws — the idea is to make society follow a change in religion. They may not be completely wrong: The harsh Sharia laws of some Muslim countries forbid indulgence in any sort of ecstatic state, and the hyper-conservative Christians of some Western countries denounce any sort of dancing, singing and sexuality as sin. To counter this, the Bridges point up other aspects of religion that are more tolerant. The Cult has within its own ranks flagellant Christians and Sufi Muslims. Through these practices, they hope to encourage mainstream religions to accept the ecstatic practices within their own ranks.




WOODSTOCK, THE SUITIFIER OF LOVE AND OTHER THINGS POLITICAL AND LIBIDINOUS

The Cult often claims credit for events like Woodstock (naturally). In this, they're probably not exaggerating. The Cult's members almost certainly helped to "grease the wheels" by inspiring various artists and helping out with the set-up of events that led to free love, the hippie era and the widespread (if brief) acceptance of LSD.

Such events aren't really "history" *per se* to the Cult. Rather, they're works in progress. Just as the Cult's factions try to foster political change, they try to promote social movements that'll open the doors of perception. The Cult continues to keep such activities alive by promoting repeat performances, aid concerts and peaceful demonstrations that recall the activists of the '60s and '70s. For a time-spanning group of seers, this isn't history at all; it's society in motion.

AND THAT'S THE WAY IT IS



It's two months ago, early spring, and it's raining cats and dogs. The smell of some ungodly spicy curry comes through the whole 10th-story apartment. An orange cat curls on a couch with a Thai design. In the kitchen, Kyle winces as he takes the first bite of lentils and vindaloo. He coughs, Lee Ann stifles a laugh.

"Jesus god, Ann.... Anything other than destroying my taste buds on the agenda tonight?"

"I thought I'd teach you about the others. You know, what they think about the Cult, and what the Cult thinks about them. In a world based on perception, this is important to know."

"Yeah, but wouldn't it just be better to find out on my own? I mean, shouldn't I be allowed to go out there and make my own opinions?"

"Yes, but I'm going to feed you propaganda. This is stuff you need to know. If it was three years ago, I would agree with you, but things have changed. I can't lie to you and say things are good out on the streets out there. I can't say our allies are our friends, or that the Cult has no enemies, even within itself. You can take what I tell with you with a grain of salt to be sure, because it's not like my perceptions are worth more than anyone else's. I think it goes without saying that I have my biases and I'm more than a little partial to the VA's because I see a bit more of them than most of us. Take what you want to believe and discard the rest.

Kyle nodded and allowed Lee Ann to continue, poking his red, red rice with his fork, dreading another bite.

"Now I've been thinking about this little theory I have about the Traditions for a while. My theory is this:

Each Tradition and faction of mages can be summed up by a bumper sticker slogan."

Kyle raised an eyebrow. He was obviously skeptical, and Lee Ann quickly became defensive.

"No, seriously. Hear me out on this. See, bumper stickers are catchy, easily remembered, and they convey a lot of information without using a lot of words. Its quite effective. I guarantee you tell someone from another Tradition my bumper sticker slogans, and they will remember it. Hell, it might even influence their own beliefs and actions. That's the nature of the beast. It gets in your psyche and sits. It lies dormant. And the next day, you wake up and the whole time you shower in the morning you have some silly phrase repeating in the back of your mind over and over again. Great stuff."

Kyle's skeptical look disappeared to be replaced with an aura of challenge. "All right, I see your point. So what's your bumper sticker for the Virtual Inepts?"

"*Save the World, Throw Away Your Cell Phones.* You see, the VA's have a lot going for them. For some reason, their cough-magic-cough just works for them. I mean, it borders on magic. It works within the illusion of the world, and it works well. This is great because they really do want to help bring humanity into a better age. They understand that wisdom has to be disseminated to the masses and that nothing holy or great should be kept under wraps. They also want to help move mankind pass the shadowy illusions of the physical.

"Here lies the problem, though. They don't want us to move past the physical into the spiritual. They want us to move past the physical into the digital. Which could be cool, I guess, but it's like trading one illusion for another. And while the near future belongs to the Virtual Adepts, the far, far future... and the far, far

past... belongs only to us. Which brings me to our other Technomancer friends, the Sons... now there's a joke... of Ether.

"*He Who Dies With the Most Toys Still Dies.* That's the problem with the Etherites. They are quite firmly entrenched in the Here and the Now, with a heaping helping of nostalgia thrown in. I see virtue in their quest for Pure Imagination or whatever it is they're trying to achieve, but it's so ritualized and set in such a defined form its kind of an impotent dream. Their imaginations are anchored in physical machines, which is fine if you realize that the magic lies outside of the machine, but most of them don't."

Lee Ann sips a bit of Thai iced coffee.

"I'm told they have time machines. I find the very idea absurd, but I guess anything is possible.

"And speaking of absurdities... the Celestial Chorus. This one works so perfectly...

"*My Karma Ran Over Your Dogma.* Ironically, we are so closely related it makes us resent each other. They believe that there is an all-powerful 'One' in the universe who has somehow shattered into a million forms. This isn't a far stretch from what we believe, that everyone and everything is simply one.

"The problem lies in the conclusion we make about this 'One.' They see the need to make everyone believe that they are isolated in space and time, and that we should somehow feel guilty about it. No... not just guilty... we should repent and act like something other than what we are, human beings. We should deny ourselves what we enjoy and stick to a narrowly defined set of rules as set down by this 'One.'

"Here's how I see it. The 'One' isn't some far-off being. It's us. It's humanity. And it has to be healed, just as the Chorus says, so it can be One again. Problem is, it can't be healed by being selfish. It can't be healed by being self-centered. Being an ascetic is as self-centered as being a thief, because at its heart is the need for the ego to feel secure in its redemption. That's why we're at odds and likely will be for a long while."

Kyle opened his mouth to say something, but his teacher preempted him.

"And yes, there are Atheist Choristers, Bacchanalian Choristers and Hindu Choristers. They acknowledge multiple paths, which in my opinion, is their redemption. Likewise, we have charismatic Christians, far off Islamic ascetics, and I know at least one devout Jew who calls herself a member of the Cult of Ecstasy. It's not religion that separates us. It's philosophy."



"Speaking of differences of philosophy, let me tell you about the Order of Hermes. Don't hate them off the bat, though. They have their virtues... although they may not be apparent.

"*My Kid Had Sex With Your Honor Student*. All right, the Hermetics aren't a bad idea. At the core of their philosophy is mastery of the self. That's something I think any Ecstatic can sink their teeth into. I think it's ultimately what all Awakened want. The question then is *why* the mage wants to master herself.

"For us, we do it to liberate ourselves. We don't really seek to gain anything other than a bit of freedom from the constraints of karma and physicality. When was the last time you saw a Cultist throw fire from his hands or call down a lightning bolt from the sky? But the Hermetics, they would rather have their fire and lightning. That's what the whole thing is for them. Perfecting their ability to rule over a charred husk of a world. Being able to point and make something move one way, and to blink and make something else do another.

"But you want to know what's so funny about all of this? We actually beat them at their game on occasion."

Lee Ann stands and walks over to a cupboard and takes out a plastic bag.

"See, they work from within the system, and quite frankly, the system sucks. A funny thing happens when an Ecstatic works with a Hermetic. You get something greater than the whole. You get a marriage of the practical and the spiritual. It doesn't happen often... no, I take that back... it's happening a lot more frequently than it used to. Strange days, eh?"

"I guess... they sound like bastards."

"Well, they can be, but let's not make generalizations. I mean, they are on our side. Sort of. But the Akashics. They are on our side for sure.

"*Clap One Hand if You Love Buddha*. Akashic Brothers want to master themselves and then move beyond. Mind you, we have had conflicts in the past, but most of them are over. For the most part, at least. Some of their methods are like ours. Perfection of the body, mind and soul for example. They are quite adept at this, as are we."

Lee Ann takes out a small bit of tobacco-y something and begins rolling it into a paper.

"Did you know that, at some point back in the 1500s, a group of our folks ran across some Akashics and formed an entire new Tradition? The Ahl-i-Batin, I'm told, owe their existence to a merging of Akashic martial arts with Cultist sensibilities. So we're not that far apart.

"But, they aren't us. And, in a lot of ways, they aren't as effective as us. Many try to kill or yoke their

passions in an attempt to control themselves, which is basically taking the path of most resistance. Some make it, but it's an unnecessary burden. And like clapping with one hand, it's harder than it needs to be. Too much focus on life-negating instead of life-reaffirming.

"Which brings me to the ultimate life-negaters. I don't even need to say their name for you to know who I'm talking about.

"*I'd Rather be Over the Hill than Under It*. Yeah, I'm talking about the Euthanatos. Our Traditions come in contact with each other all the time. Why? Because if we didn't then they would all be *barabbi*. Think of it this way, we help to keep them from bringing their work home with them, so to speak. They are so caught up in their karmic crusade, and it takes literally everything they have to muster just to keep sane. Humans were never meant to kill humans. To kill someone, that's... I mean... you know... it changes you."

Kyle fidgets nervously. Lee Ann pauses, and Kyle thinks he sees a dark sword with a hilt resembling a lotus blossom. He breaks the silence before it goes on long enough to be awkward.

"Hey, it's fine. I understand. No need to continue, all right? You want to move on to the next one? What about the Verbena?"

"Oh yeah, the Verbena..."

"*Compost Happens*. They are really good at looking at things from a purely biological perspective. The body is capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. All things die. Nature is cruel. Children die on occasion. Predators roam the world. These are the truths the Verbena cling to. And while they acknowledge the legitimacy of some of our methods... sex and drug use to name a few... they also have also fallen in love with mutilating themselves. Whereas the Cult of Ecstasy has two eyes open and the Order of Hermes has two eyes closed, the Verbena has one open eye and one blinded eye. They will only see so much, never more.

"Similar in a way to the Dreamspeakers, which will round out all the Traditions.

"*Native Americans Discovered America*. Hey, it's true. Native people all over the world have been marginalized and killed... er... mistreated... at the hands of Westerners. Not only have we ignored their culture, their claim to their land, their right to live, their right to live well, their religion, their heritage, their wonderful art, but we have also ignored their magic.

"That was a big mistake. To this day, it is still a big mistake. I feel like the Traditions threw a whole lot of spirit magicians together and out of some pangs of conscience allowed them to call themselves a

Tradition. And to think the Order of Hermes tried to claim each of its Houses as a separate Tradition. How ridiculously arrogant."

She finishes her rolling and lights the end of the cigarillo.

"Here's why I mention this. The Dreamspeakers have a whole lot of magic that the West doesn't really know about. The varied types and natures of spirits are a mystery to most Western mages, including us, but not to the Dreamspeakers. Not only that, but they don't have the angst of the Verbena or the blind focus of the Akashics. In fact, we use a lot of the same methods. Dance, peyote, trances, dreaming... the list goes on and on."

Lee Ann passes to Kyle who takes a drag and half speaks, half coughs.

"So that's how we feel about everyone?"

"Far from it, hon.... I mean, first of all, these are just rough snapshots of my own interpretation. I painted the Order of Hermes as bastards, but they could be our salvation. Who knows? Anyways, that's not it... there's a lot more mages out there. I mean, let's not forget that the Traditions aren't the be-all end-all.

"I mean Jesus, there's the Hollow Ones.

"*Don't Blame Me, I Didn't Vote.* I chose this one because, although they are technically 'with us' they aren't one of us. They don't get a say and they just don't count. Which is sad, really, because they have their place. Mind you, a lot of them think of us as dealers and a good lay, which I guess some of us are. Come to think of it, I can't say I agree with them much. They think the world is alternately dead or dying and that there is nothing we can do. Personally, if that were the case, I'd definitely go about enjoying myself a whole lot more than I do."

Lee Ann takes a drag.

"*If You're Close Enough to Read This, Back Off.* Marauders. There is something seriously wrong with these guys. They are in serious need of some healing. I don't claim to be an expert, but from what I've heard about these... people? things? beings?... they were once either rational mages or that they are normal people who Awakened so violently, that their magic continuously drives them insane, while whipping the world around them at the same time as if it were in a blender. One part paranoid schizophrenic, one part force of nature, three parts powerful willworker, your best bet is to stay away from these sickos. I'm serious. They will turn you inside out."

"*Mean People Suck.* Nephandi. Sickos par excellence. To say these guys worship death is a cop-out. I

have no idea what they serve, but it wants to take us all down. I don't know how the Nephandi fit into the Grande Scheme and the turning of karma, but I don't really care. Cut them down. No... that's not right action... stay away from them."

Lee Ann takes another drag and passes it to Kyle, who does the same.

"If there's one thing you learn from me, I hope it's to not have anything to do with these guys. Take a rapist. Multiply his sin a hundredfold. Give it a human... ok... not quite human... give it a semi-human form. Give it magical powers granted by something that makes the Hebraic devil look tame. Give it one thought, to bring down creation. Now you have a fairly weak Nephandus. Get my point?"

Kyle nods, coughing, perhaps not even realizing what is being said.

"You totally forgot about the Technocracy, Lee Ann."

"Yeah... okay... right... the Technocracy..."

"*Flying Saucers are Real, the Air Force Doesn't Exist.* See, it's a lot of fun to break barriers and rebel against the government and stick it to the man, but the man is only a symptom of the real problem. The Machine. Technocracy. Rule by technae.

"See, the Virtual Adepts... they see the world as mutable. They see that there is more to life than what is obvious and easy. Sons of Ether... they get it, too. The Technocracy doesn't. They are blindness given form. A very boring form. They are out there trying to gouge your eyes out since the day you come into this world. They want what is easy. They want what is obvious. Why? Its a comforting lie they live in. Serve the guy above you. Nod politely to the police. Get a meaningless job. Settle down to the suburbs and retire and die in obscurity. Never look at the world, and for god sakes, don't look at who you are. That's the Technocratic way. Never analyze who you are. Never try for anything more than what is guaranteed. Efficiency. Dependability. No room for emotion. No room for love. No room..."

Kyle chimes in.

"...for human expression. No room for decency. No room for growth. No room for salvation."

Lee Ann nods and stands to empty the ashtray.

"There's only one group that's really worth a damn among them. That's the Void Engineers. They're space explorers, astronauts charting the deep. We have a lot in common, in some ways."

Kyle blinks a couple of times and looks confused. "How do you mean? Astronauts and Tantric Hindus?"

Lee Ann chuckles. "No, not like that alien astronauts thing. We're both explorers. Neither of us is comfortable with boundaries. We want to experience for ourselves what's on the other side. The problem is that they're misdirected. They think they can climb the next hill, go to the next planet over, slide into the next dimension and find all the answers. Answers aren't out there. They're in here. The Void Engineers have a

longing and they're trying to fill it, but they're doing it by running away. That's why they don't get along with the rest of the Union, either. They have, at heart, a spiritual calling, but they've papered it over in technology and science. They're mystics and travelers who've convinced everyone else that they're not."

"And that about breaks it down. Now, for dessert...."

PROBLETTIS AND POWERS



Besides its own internal conflict, the Cult has other problems — and benefits, as well. Cultists commonly fall into the traps of their own vices, which should come as no great surprise. Some just don't have the acuity to dodge the pull of their vices. Others are so busy looking at the finger pointing at the moon that they never see the moon itself.

HYPERSENSITIVITY (3-POINT PHYSICAL MERIT)

Your mage has very keen senses of touch and taste. Indeed, the Cultist can often sense minute motions, and she absolutely *adores* the touch of silk or the taste of wine. This Merit is different from just an *Acute Sense*; it's a qualitative difference. The Cultist derives a greater quality of satisfaction and pleasure from all manner of indulgences and carnal activities. The Cultist tastes subtle hints in drinks and can tell the most minute, soft touches. With a Perception + Alertness roll, your Cultist can often perform feats such as telling the exact vintage of a wine by a tiny taste or use a simple swatch of silk or a soft caress as a suitable focus, instead of indulging in more extreme measures.

MET: You can perform any Cult focus of taste, touch or similar indulgence without having to "go all the way." A gentle kiss is as sufficient as steamy sex, and a few sips of wine as useful as bingeing through several bottles. This Merit can allow you to perform a focus more quickly and with less risk.

RESONANT PASSION (3-POINT SUPERNATURAL MERIT)

One of your mage's areas of Resonance also reflects a strong internal tie to one of the Nine Sacred Passions (p. 39). Choose one of your character's

Resonance Traits. Whenever your mage performs magic that gains a bonus from that Resonance, you gain a two-point difficulty break instead of one.

MET: You gain a two-Trait difficulty break when your one chosen Resonance type matches up to the magic you're performing, instead of the usual one-Trait break.

VICE GRIP (2-POINT MENTAL FLAW)

Some Cultists are addicts, but your character takes it a step further. One of his vices is so intense that you simply can't do any magic for which you normally use it unless your mage is blasted out of his mind. Typically, the mage has a two-die penalty to all actions, being drunk, stoned, spaced out or totally immersed in something else. It's only under such a circumstance — which usually lasts for a while and impacts *everything* the character does — that the Cultist can use magic for which that vice is a specialty focus. Fortunately, the specialty focus bonus still applies.

You must, of course, take the vice as a specialty focus for at least one Sphere that your character knows.

MET: Pick one Sphere that you have and a vice to go with it. You can only use that Sphere when in the depths of that vice's thrall. Typically, this means you're hallucinating, drunk or just whacked out. You suffer a two-Trait resolution penalty under such conditions on *all* challenges, even the magical ones.

DEAD PASSION (4-POINT MENTAL FLAW)

Some terrible trauma has scarred your Cultist permanently. Pick one of the Nine Sacred Passions (p. 39). Whenever your character experiences that passion (Storyteller's discretion), even in passing, you must expend a Willpower point for any magic that the character performs. Perhaps with lots of work and therapy the character might overcome this

scarred passion, but this terrible victimization will always follow him.

MET: Choose one passion. Whenever you feel that passion in the course of play — whether artificially or as a course of events — you must spend a Willpower Trait to perform any feat of magic, and you gain no special bonus from that Willpower. If you ignore this Flaw, a Storyteller may deduct Willpower from your character or even cause you to lose *permanent* Willpower because of your obvious attempt to fight head-on against your past traumas.

ROTES

TRUE FORM (• ENTROPY, • MIND,
• SPIRIT, OPTIONAL • LIFE)

Practitioners of the Ecstatic arts often claim that chemically induced hallucinations reveal the truth of things. By their reasoning, this altered state allows one to see past the mundane and obvious, into the realm of pure truth. By taking a hit of acid, the Ecstatic can see people as they truly are. Those who are wicked are revealed to be wicked, those who are victims are shown to be the weak wispy things they are, and powerful men appear like beaming behemoths.

How the mage actually sees the true form of others largely depends on the mage's perceptions. A staunchly anti-establishment Cultist might see a police officer as a Gestapo enforcer. If the cop was corrupt, perhaps the Cultist would see money falling out of his pockets. Sometimes, the images are deeply personal. A Cultist might pick out the hidden Technocracy agent, thinking that he is, in actuality, a large bully from her childhood.

System: The mage can get small bits of information about those around herself, although this information is somewhat shrouded in metaphor and layers of symbolism. The sort of information generally involves the target's Nature. These images should be very archetypal and tailored to the individual mage's outlook. Two people using this rote at once rarely agree on what they see. To the mage sensing True Forms, it is as if he is participating in a filming of Frank Zappa's *2000 Motels*, with nuns, djinns, strippers, black shrouded executioners and adult sized children interacting with one another. Adding Life 1 to this rote also allows the mage to tell the physical state of those she per-



ceives. This perception could manifest as a visible tumor, a missing limb or, if the target is very close to death, as a feebly animate corpse.

MET: *Apprentice Entropy, Apprentice Mind, Apprentice Spirit, optional Apprentice Life.* With a Static Mental Challenge, you can often “see” a form around people indicative of how you’d judge the individual’s character. If you win the Static Mental Challenge against a subject, you can “see” the subject’s Nature. This has a base duration of one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade affects a different person or adds one grade to duration.

NOSTALGIA (•• ⊕ OR ••• MIND,
••• TIME, ⊕ OPTIONAL • LIFE)

The Dissonance Society, a faction of the Cult devoted to creation of an utopia based around the ideal of self mastery and enlightenment, is said to use magically induced stimuli as negative and positive reinforcement. However, the use of *Nostalgia* is far more effective and sophisticated than a mere waking of a few nerves. The Cultist actually conjures up her target’s memory of some overwhelming stimulus he felt in the past, forcing the target to feel the sensation again as if it had just happened, which makes the experience a very personal one. This Effect is useful for a number of reasons. First off, the effect of *Nostalgia* is not some random sensation, its root lie in the target’s memory. One tends to respond more to, say, a spanking given as a child, than to a random application of pain. Secondly, the mage can use these associations and tie them to something unrelated. For instance, if an Ecstatic wishes to teach a hard-hearted corporate executive some compassion, she could tie the joy of his wedding night to the act of donating money. Therefore, whenever the corporate executive is generous, he feels the elation of just being married.

System: The Ecstatic has no control over when sensations are conjured when she uses *Nostalgia*, but she may set it as either “positive” (pleasure) or “negative” (pain) stimulus. Doing so generates memories of stimuli, it does not engender full activation of the nervous system. However, using *Life 2*, the mystic could conjure not only the memory of the stimulus, but the actual stimulus itself. In conjunction with *Mind 3*, the mystic can “tie” the stimulus to a trigger. By doing so, the mage can encourage or discourage certain behavior.

MET: *Initiate or Disciple Mind, Disciple Time, optional Initiate Life.* You gain memories of various

stimuli and tie them in a subject to certain events. Thus, you can make someone feel happy when you arrive, or feel afraid when you brandish a simple lollipop, by tying the action to a different memory emotion. You must best the target in a Social Challenge to make one such connection. This Effect lasts for a base time of one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade adds one grade to duration or affects an additional target.

GRAND STYLE (•• MIND, • MATTER,
OPTIONAL •• PRIME)

A variation of a *Mind 2* Effect known as *Mood Swing, Grand Style* allows the Ecstatic to use mass communication on an intuitive level. To do so, the Ecstatic must use some form of art. Although live music is the most common vessel for this Effect, it can also be placed on visual art pieces. This Effect causes those who perceive the artistic display to feel a certain way. Predominantly, this rote is used to bring about feelings of well being, joy, pride, contentment and reverence, although other factions use it for less altruistic purposes. The militant Hagalaz faction uses *Grand Style* to create riots, militant vigilante activism and good old-fashioned chaos. The occult Acharne use it to fuse brotherhood among its members and create feelings of having been raped for those unlucky enough to learn of their existence. Klubwerks DJs excel at its use and use it create an atmosphere of pure human impulse. Even the Dissonance Society ties emotions into its pamphlets.

System: The *Grand Style* Effect is generally achieved through music. By using *Prime 2* and *Matter 1*, the mystic may “tie” the effect to a visual work of art. Obviously, the type of art that the Effect is based on decides the emotion it conjures. A *Lords of Acid* fast pumping dance track would be ideal for increasing people’s libidos, but the medieval painter Hieronymous Bosch’s “Temptation of Saint Anthony” triptych would not be able to get a similar effect. But, whereas the dance track would not put the fear of damnation into its listeners, those beholding the triptych would be left shaken and questioning their place in God’s Kingdom.

MET: *Initiate Mind, optional Initiate Prime, Apprentice Matter.* You place emotional context into a piece of art or clothing. Place a card indicating the effect and your number of current Social Traits on the item. Anyone who interacts with the item (reads a book, views a painting, etc.) must make a static



Social challenge. If the individual loses, the sensation comes out through the item in question. You can only amplify an item's actual traits, which has primarily a role-playing effect. This Effect lasts for a base of one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success adds one grade to duration.

TOLERANCE (•• LIFE, • MIND)

Cultists have an amazing survival record in spite of their brushes with overindulgence, and luck's only part of it. Those who dabble too much in damaging habits — drugs, sleep deprivation, asceticism, whatever — generally learn to use meditative techniques and chakra-channeling to focus themselves and overcome the aftereffects of their foci. Simple methods to prevent overdosing, flush body toxins and focus the mind all help to keep the Cultist alive. Often, this requires a specific regimen combining yoga or meditation with a lot of water and the occasional herbal additive.

System: Use of the **Tolerance** rote mitigates some of the potential problems of nasty drugs or other habits. A Cultist might suffer bashing or even lethal damage from a particularly foul overdose; this rote's successes grant extra soak dice against that damage, if the rote's prepared in advance. This isn't a sure defense, but it'll probably help avoid using the adrenaline plunger.

MET: Initiate Life, Apprentice Mind. You prepare your body in advance for the rigors of drugs, deprivation or ritual exhaustion. You gain one "armor" health level against any aftereffects of such, so long as they're some act you take on for yourself (that is, you can resist the aftereffects of your own heroin overdose, but you don't gain a bonus if you're suddenly snatched up and tortured by the New World Order). You must perform this effect immediately prior to the act in question, and it helps to mitigate problems during the entire course of your indulgence. *Grades of Success:* Every two grades grants one extra health level.

CRITIC AND CONSEQUENCE (•• MIND, •• TIME)

As modern Cultists have learned, responsibility for the aftereffects of ecstasy are just as important as the ecstatic experiences themselves.

Some people refuse to recognize the consequences of their actions, though, and foolishly endanger themselves and others. Cultists use this rote as a sort of warning, to engender a sense of responsibility in others. The Cultist projects ahead the possible outcome of an ill-conceived decision and then sends the emotional impulse of everything that goes wrong into the mind of the subject.

System: The player must score enough successes to see forward in time to the point of consequences (this might be only a few minutes ahead for a drug overdose, or months ahead for an ill-considered pregnancy or other life-changing event). The Cultist must also gain a success to project this moment empathically to the subject. If successful, the subject experiences all of the frustration and remorse of this badly chosen course of action as a series of flashes of anger and disappointment, with premonitions of things to come. For instance, a drug abuser might feel his body contracting in spasms, then see himself from the outside as he's dying and convulsing. A careless sexhound might feel the pain of labor and sense the terrible burden of unassisted, life-crushing poverty for a victim he plans to love and leave. Often, such a flash is enough to at least give pause to the target. This doesn't necessarily give concrete flashes of the true future; it simply provides concentrated glimpses at things that could go horribly wrong due to someone's bad judgment or lack of responsibility.

MET: Initiate Mind, Initiate Time. You cause your target to suffer pangs of misgiving and doubt over a potentially disastrous course of action. This only works if the action really *would* have clear negative consequences. You may engage the victim in a Social Challenge to cause him to hesitate and reconsider his action. This won't work on someone in the heat of battle; flashes of remorse and visions of anguish won't stop self-defense when a fire's raging! It could, however, cause someone to hesitate or put off a decision for a scene. The subject might reconsider and go ahead anyway, but would not do so for at least an hour. **Grades of Success:** Every two extra grades extends the duration by one grade.

ZEITGEIST (•• MIND, •• SPIRIT, •• TIME)

Sometimes, an element of an age carries Resonance so powerful that it ripples through time in a memory carried by a huge mass of humanity. People

establish pictures of an era so vivid that just a simple phrase conjures bright pictures and strong emotions — “The Summer of Love,” “The Burning Times,” “Black Tuesday.” As the masters of time and passion, Cultists can call forth these spirits of ages, these zeitgeists, to make manifest all the wonder — or terror — of a given point in time.

The Cultist simply associates an ecstatic practice with trappings that call forth the spirit of the age itself. This might mean listening to certain music, putting on specific clothes, burning incenses or smoke of a particular type, maybe even playing a movie or going to a specific place. The more the Cultist does to make the mundane surroundings match up with the zeitgeist, the more powerful the manifestation. At the completion of the rite, the Cultist unleashes the spirit's Resonance to touch everyone's emotions in the area. Anyone in the right place, who can see the Cultist and recognize the things she does, feels a sudden surge of that era.

System: Successes apply to the range and to the strength of the effect. The Cultist doesn't necessarily need successes to affect other people; in this case, the Cultist calls forth a spirit, which then does the work of generating the spirit of the age, and the Cultist simply uses magic to help project that spirit. This could provoke actual memories or just passive emotions regarding a specific scene, so a character might feel the unbounded sense of love and heedless joy from the Summer of Love, or the soaring pride and wonder of the Age of Reason. It helps if the Cultist was personally there (as per arcane connections), but it's not absolutely necessary.

MET: Initiate Mind, Initiate Spirit, Initiate Time. You generate, in an area, a remembrance of the emotions from a particular era. Picture in your mind something symbolic of a given era, something easily uttered in a single phrase. You get across the impression of that phrase and all associated imagery and memories to anyone within the sound of your normal, unaugmented voice (just speak it out normally). For instance, if you say “The joy of the Summer of Love,” you immediately trigger a reminiscence of that emotion in everyone who hears you. This may not have a direct mechanical effect but can subtly play on emotions as a role-playing tool, and *might* trigger or soothe specific Derangements and/ or Natures. **Grades of Success:** No effect.



CHAPTER THREE: SHOOTING STARS

Grammarians, orators, geometricians; painters, gymnastic teachers, physicians; fortune-tellers, rope-dancers, conjurers — he knew everything.

—Juvenal, *Satire iii*. line 76.



Ecstasies often find themselves pigeonholed by the rest of the Traditions — something that happens to all groups to some degree, of course. In the Cult's case, though, the stereotype usually isn't very flattering. As far as most mages are concerned, the Cult's a mob of smackheads, spaced-out lunatics and irresponsible hedonistic mages who'd rather pursue pleasure than enlightenment, and whose mystic power probably stems only from poor coincidence.

To the Cultists, of course, this image can actually be useful. Having a reputation as the life of the party means that other mages come to Cultists to swap information and rumors, just because they're sure that hanging around Cultists promises a good time. Potential rivals rarely take the Cult seriously, which opens the door to surprise strikes. And, of course, the Cultists are invited to all of the best parties.

Internally, the Cult does have some members who play up the whole reckless pleasure-seeker stereotype. Most often, though, these few are the young and newly Awakened. After a few brushes with death and crisis, the majority of Cultists wise up at least a little.

Over time, Cultists realize that they, too, must grow up, but that doesn't mean leaving behind the joys of youth. Therefore, it's not impossible to find experienced Cultists among business, high technology, industry or other sectors where one wouldn't expect them. Lakashim can be felt *everywhere*, the Cult teaches. It's easy to take joy in pleasurable things. The magic lies in finding ecstasy even in tasks that one might find onerous and mundane. Through the Cult's teachings, one can take pleasure even in repetitive work, hard labor and the simplest menial tasks. So it is that outsiders see the Cult as little more than scoundrels while the Cult tries to teach everyone how to live a full and satisfying life, where *nothing* is wasted.

FLEETING ECSTASY: NOTABLE CULTISTS



Fame is a fleeting thing in the Cult of Ecstasy: Today's darling is tomorrow's has-been. Modern media-consciousness ensures that Cultists must constantly be on the move to find the "next big thing." After all, what's the point in seeking experience if there's nothing new to discover?

Some Cultists acquire renown through their great sacrifices and dedication to the cause. Others achieve a certain level of notoriety by pursuing kamamarga that fly wildly in the face of the Tradition's historic practices. While this pursuit is not a bad thing in itself, famous Cultists who engage in it most often have or had... shall we say... *problems*.

Then again, those who burn brightest burn out, too. As the comedians note, most people's music collections owe quite a debt to heroin. So, too, the Cultists. Those with the greatest achievements often overcame — or succumbed to — the greatest vices.

LEE ANN MILNER

Background: Lee Ann was a military brat, born to an Army officer and his wife. She spent most of her childhood traveling, so she never accustomed herself to setting roots. Her relationship with her father had never been normal — the man was abusive, both physically and emotionally. By the time she was 16, her father's abuse had evolved from battery into rape. When she discovered this, Lee Ann's mother kicked *her* out, leaving Lee Ann to her own designs. She eventually ended up in New York, strung out on any drug she could afford and selling her body. To her mind, she didn't deserve any better life. Years of abuse conditioned her into self-destructive behavior.

Charlie, the Ecstatic who would mentor her through her early Awakening, found her and cleaned her up. At the time, he considered her another case in need of help, but her unexpected Awakening turned his motivation from charity to a chance at giving a new mage new hope. Charlie

didn't have a prohibition against drugs himself, but he did have the common sense to understand addiction. Once Lee Ann straightened herself out, she decided to put the addictions behind her completely, regardless of what the Cult taught — not because she was brainwashed or scared, but because she understands that putting drugs back in her system could take her back to where she was.

She met Ryan — a cocky Virtual Adept — by chance only a few years before the turn of the millennium. She had angered some Technocrats, and he was a target for assimilation, and, to this day, each claims to have rescued the other. Truth is, they're both right. They both knew "Larry" (Sir Lawrence White of the Euthanatos) separately, but they didn't realize it until Larry put his cabal together. Indeed, if not for Lee Ann's boundless enthusiasm, such a disjointed cabal might never have come together. Instead, the exuberant Cultists managed to cajole the quirky Virtual Adept and dour Euthanatos into an alliance that persists to this day. From these early Ascension War experiences, Lee Ann gathered a picture of Tradition society as a fractured puzzle that seriously needed to be put back together — starting with the abandoned and under-educated novices who sometimes didn't even survive the weeks after their own Awakenings.



Lee Ann has long had a passion for helping newly Awakened mages find their path. With the help of her beau, Ryan, she fleshes out ideas of the Traditions that include both technology and mysticism. Oddly enough, the two manage to complement each other. Ryan's information network helps Lee Ann place newly Awakened mages with cabals that can help them, who, in turn, go on to improve the network as they take on important roles in mage society. If Lee Ann's network continues to grow, in fact, she could become one of the best-known mages in the world, able to call upon dozens of allies who've found their magical praxes through her compassionate intervention. Much like a military commander or politician who can call up favors from old school friends, Lee Ann could conceivably draw upon the united talents of a sizable chunk of modern Tradition mages.

When the Avatar Storm hit, Lee Ann suffered an unusual transformation. In the process of crossing the Gauntlet only shortly after the arrival of the Storm — ironically, because her Time senses had detected the approach of some disaster on the spirit plane — she spent several months in Quiet and nearly lost her magic. Her Avatar did survive, but it was buried somewhere deeper in her sub-consciousness. Separated now from her Avatar's occasional whispers and urgings, Lee Ann finds that her guide expresses itself through her ecstatic practices. In moments when she draws on her magic, the Avatar's impulses become clear. Sometimes, while in a dazed, half-dream state, she finds herself humming fragments of ancient tunes or performing small gestures of supplication that she's never learned.

Image: Slender and compact, Lee Ann's a few inches over five feet in height. With her bright eyes and constant smile, she makes friends easily. She affects a sort of "hippie chic," preferring casual baggy pants and loose-fitting tops. Occasionally, she'll switch out to a dress for a change of pace, though. (She doesn't like to become too predictable.) Often, she festoons her attire with small tokens of her studies: anything from travel patches garnered in another state or country to small mandalas or images of Hindu deities.

Roleplaying Hints: Good cheer, smiles and chuckles follow wherever you travel. Long ago, you resolved most of your problems with your past, and, although talk of such abuses still makes you wistful and angry, you've put the scars behind you. Now, you dedicate yourself to making other people feel happy and wanted. It's important for you to make sure that the people with whom you interact can discover new ways to make their own lives satisfying and to break self-destructive cycles. To that end, you're helpful but not smothering; insistent but not overly pushy. Occasionally you'll shock someone into change by taking a contrary stance and forcing him to acknowledge his errors of judgment. You also feel strongly that human beings need to sense and be aware of one another, so you're a very tactile person. You're quick to offer hugs, and you often touch people you're addressing, in order to emphasize your point.

Faction: Joybringer

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Pedagogue

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

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 1, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Investigation 2, Meditation 3, Melee 2, Occult 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2, Technology 1

Backgrounds: Avatar 4, Arcane 4, Contacts 3, Resources 1

Arete: 5

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

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 4

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Excitable 2, (Entropic) Renewing 2



WILLIAM ETHRAC, THE TWISTED ECSTASY

Background: The dapper gentleman known as William Ethrac hails from turn-of-the-century England. As a dashing Londoner with a soft accent and a compelling voice, slick black hair with distinguished gray at the temples, a sharp nose and brilliant ice-blue eyes, he exudes charisma. He writes biting poetry and satire, debates politics with amusing acumen, plays a good game of chess and smiles when bested. He's also a thoroughly violent man, given to fits of rage in private, and a secretive follower of the Hagalaz.

William traces his heritage to the Scandinavian settlers of England who became part of the feudal system at the end of the Viking era. Considering himself a true son of pain, he embraces wholeheartedly the ethic of personal sacrifice and enlightenment through pain. Worse still, he believes that mundane people can be opened to such sensations only through the auspices of the enlightened. To William, Sleepers aren't potential mages, they're people trapped in perceptions that can only be shattered through the intervention of the "magically superior." Working with the underground Hellfire Clubs, William takes great pleasure in that work — all from the belief that only in liberating Sleepers through pain can the Cult return a vision of ecstasy to the mind-numbed, bleating masses.

What is perhaps most frustratingly to Cultists who hunt this flouter of the Code of Ananda is the fact that William seems to delight in reshaping victims into pale images of himself. Conditioned with his magic as he sends them through torturous sessions of branding and flaying, he even overwrites their personalities, so any given "William Ethrac" might well be nothing but an imposter with a few simple magical tricks layered on. Since people who are twisted in this fashion bear William's Resonance and some measure of his surface thoughts, it's not easy to immediately tell a fake from the real issue — and William is too clever to be easily caught in person.

Runic scars and brands line the inside of William's arms. Through mortification, he induces ecstatic trances that allow him to connect to the power of the runes and manifest magic. Naturally, he gives a bad name both to the Cult and to Scandinavian magical heritage, and many Cultists who have heard his name would show him no quarter. Of course, few would dare face him, either. His legendary skill in torture and endurance to pain place him as, perhaps, one of the most frightening opponents of Lakashim that a Cultist could face. Some Disciples theorize that he will only be bested if a Cultist that he tortures manages to reach Lakashim through the haze of pain, touch the center of William's magic and overtake it.

Image: With pale blue eyes, fair skin, firm and sharp features, distinguished middle age and a fit body, William's an outstanding specimen of handsome form. With his political connections and money, he can also afford the best in tailored wear, and he tends to favor very classical suits with splashes of color in the form of lapel flowers or kerchiefs. He carries himself with absolute confidence, and he has the refined politeness of well-mannered high society, though he's capable of slumming with the best drinkers in town. His voice is soothingly resonant, and it sets people at ease. In short, he seems like an utterly respectable, pleasant fellow.

Roleplaying Hints: Schmooze, laugh and indulge in light chit-chat. Most people of this world aren't ready to face the trials of pain and come through changed. Your light verbal sparring just

provides a cover so that you can ferret out the few who are most in need of your attentions, or who might prove problematic later. In private, you're a raging storm. When you don't have to care what other people think, you don't shirk from true emotion and painful expression.

Faction: Hagalaz

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Masochist

Demeanor: Gallant

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Pain-Resistant), Charisma 4 (Winning Smile), Manipulation 4 (Persuasive), Appearance 4 (Respectable), Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Cosmology 1, Crafts (Rune-Carving) 3, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 4 (Fearlessness), Law 1, Linguistics 1 (Old Norse), Medicine 4 (Torture), Meditation 1, Melee 4 (Axes), Occult 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Arcane 1, Avatar 1, Contacts 5, Destiny 1, Influence 4, Library 1, Resources 4

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Entropy 4, Forces 2, Life 3, Mind 2, Time 4

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Runic 2

MARIANNA ⊕ BALADØR

The so-called Queen of Pleasure was an archmistress of famous skill and infamous appetites. Beautiful, ageless and witty, Marianna commanded great loyalties through her force of personality, her calm and charming manner and her skill with prophecy. By foreseeing potential conflicts, she disarmed them; by setting her adversaries at ease and offering them hospitality, she converted suspicious parties into allies.

Marianna's skills came partly from natural talent and partly from long experience. By rumor, she studied and loved Lord Byron, and with her phenomenal Time magic, she remained youthful and vigorous for the following centuries, always

hovering at the edge of notable visionaries and performers of each decade. From her youth in 1800s Venice to her prime in the late 1900s, she offered pleasures for the taking to all comers, and set an example of endless sexual appetites and mutable forms of beauty. Indeed, she's noted for having shifted her visage as much as other people might change their clothes, to suit whatever tastes or events caught her fancy at the time.

In spite of her strong passions (or perhaps because of them), Marianna was no simple hedonist. She championed the Code of Ananda and crusaded for free love, sensuality and satisfaction for all people. Through her efforts, she's destroyed cults of sexual predators, blunted Syndicate attempts to eradicate or marginalize sexual expression and championed the beauty of the human form.

By 1976, Marianna took the keys to Balador, legendary Pleasuredome of the Cult of Ecstasy. As the overseer, she continued to provide experiences both sensual and ecstatic for all visitors. For some, this place was essentially a magical vacation resort; for others, it was the spiritual pinnacle of Ecstatic wisdom. Her tenure saw the realm's continued stability even as Technocratic pressures and censorship turned the United States population away from the "free love" movements of the '60s.

Like many Masters of the Traditions, Marianna has met an uncertain fate. Not only did many



Masters and Archmasters die or vanish in the destruction of Concordia, the Horizon Chantry, but with the destruction of Balador itself, it would seem that the Queen of Pleasure has either died or fled to some more hidden recess of the Umbra.

Whether the famous prophetic visions of Marianna saved her from destruction has yet to be seen... but nobody claiming to be Marianna has since surfaced among the Traditions.

ALL-CULTIST CHRONICLES



The notable tendency among Cultists to thrive as slackers and anti-authoritarians might make an all-Cultist game seem impossible, at first blush. If every character's moving in a different direction, where does the group wind up?

Cultists like to hang out together because no two people's life experiences are the same, so different Cultists present new kamamarga. Ecstatic practices also have greater power when experienced by groups than they would for an individual. Congrex is, after all, a potent focus. Look at the results of massive gatherings such as Woodstock, and it's easy to see that Cultists can do a great deal when they put their heads together.

As to the problems inherent in Cult groups... those are more fodder for story arcs. Cultist egos often clash or run afoul of divergent beliefs about kamamarga. Different Cultists could take the Code of Ananda at different levels of importance. The clash of ideals can be just as fierce with this internal code as with any fight between different Traditions. Given the Cult's fairly tolerant attitude, though, these fights will be conflicts of ideology, not physical battles. And, as the saying goes, making up is the best part of any heated relationship.

WHAT CULTIST CABALS DO

It's easy to fall into the trap of seeing Cultist cabals as little more than garage bands or loose groups of potheads who sit around quoting movies and arguing over who's paying for snacks. Heck, such a cabal might even be fun to play — once. Real mages, though, need action, conflict and motion.

Cultist cabals can and do involve themselves in all sorts of worldly conflicts. Many Cult practices are only marginally legal in most localities. Cult groups can take on the uphill battle of

changing those laws, and more difficult still, changing the social mores that foster such laws. Cabals face legal persecution and chilly receptions from people who consider them "immoral" or "destructive social influences."

THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

The internal and external conflict for Cultist cabals often focuses on exactly where the cabal should draw its line of tolerance. Some Cultists believe that each individual must approach ecstasy in a personal, unique fashion. Others want to bring awareness of Lakashim to the Sleepers, even if doing so means tricking or forcing the Sleepers into actions that they don't want to undertake. Most Cultists fall somewhere in the middle. The differences lie in extremes and in methods.

Those Cultists who try to push their methods on to the Sleepers by kidnapping people and drugging them, holding torture parties with their victims or going out and doing reckless things in order to force people to react violate the Code of Ananda grossly. Other Cultists shun such bad influences and sometimes even hunt them down. What makes a Cultist do such destructive things?

What motivates a Cultist to behave thus is the clear conviction that he's right. A Cultist doesn't slip X into someone's drink just for laughs, he does so because he believes that changing the individual's worldview and forcing the subject beyond comfortable boundaries will eventually open that subject to wider experiences. Change enough people thus, and the world changes, too. Those who don't survive or who break down as a result are removed from the equation, of course, but they probably needed the experience anyway. The key is that the experience is uncontrolled. To the Cultists, a Sleeper undergoing ecstatic experiences that are controlled defeats the purpose. Only truly

wild outside experiences can force someone to move in a new direction. Therefore, such a Cultist feels that he's actually doing people a favor by breaking them out of their molds to experience Lakashim (or insanity or death).

Reactionary Cultists are much rarer than extremists, just by the nature of the Cult, but a few do exist. Some Cultists take their view of enlightenment to an internalized extreme. As Aristotle posited, the work of the intellectual may be the most satisfying and highest calling of humanity. Inward-focusing Cultists look to their own thoughts and dreams to form their visions of ecstasy. In so doing, they cut themselves off from humanity. These Cultists can't feel the full pulse of Lakashim because they lose their ties to the world around them. Fortunately, their behaviors tend to be less dangerous than those of extremists. On the down side, noticing that a Cultist has become increasingly more withdrawn isn't usually taken as a "bad sign" by cabal-mates, who may just think that their fellow's taking a breather or settling down a bit from the craziness.

It's easy to portray a middle-ground Cultist, one who believes whole-heartedly in the ecstatic experience but who won't violate the precepts of other people. Such characters form the backbone of the Cult, but that doesn't make them boring or identical. Each Cultist's kamamarga is a personal truth. Through that truth, the Cultist transcends human boundaries. As a result, while moderate Cultists often don't pursue the excesses of their extremist brethren, they are notably defensive about their practices. In some cases — such as that of a Cultist junkie who destroys himself with badly moderated use of the very substances that help to promote ecstasy — the conflict is personal. In other cases — such as that of the Cult activist who loudly and publicly proclaims support for free sex even among rabidly conservative communities — the problem is more visible.

So, for an Ecstatic cabal, the dichotomy lies in how far some Cultists will take their practices and which practices each member espouses. A cabal could have one Cultist who's very internalized and who frowns upon the excesses of the other members, as well as conflicts over the "right" ecstatic

GATIE BOUNDARIES

It bears repeating: Just as different Cultists have different thresholds of experience, so too do different players have individual limits to what they will and won't do in a game.

One of the more difficult aspects of playing a Cultist of Ecstasy is the wisdom to know when to stop for *player* reasons instead of *story* reasons. A Cultist may believe that spiking a reservoir with GHB is the only way to loosen up a square town, but when that same character starts sneaking into other (players') mages' bedrooms and juicing them up with heroin against their will, the Cultist's player is doing something very selfish. He's forcing other players' characters into his conception. People choose to play their characters so that they can experience **Mag**e on their terms. Pushing someone's character into an unwanted situation is de-empowering, and, while it's sometimes a necessary tool of the story, it's undesirable if it serves only as ego-gratification for the pusher.

Some people are comfortable having their characters explore themes like addiction, sexuality and tragedy. Other players aren't so keen on doing so. A Cultist character may be irresponsible, but the player shouldn't be. Know when to stop. Other players may not want to crawl through the mire of your Cultist's deranged subconscious. There are still plenty of people to interact with, without having to wreck the players' characters without their consent.

paths. Cultists also tend to relax the standards of the Code of Ananda among one another, so a Cultist with a phobia of drugs might find one of his cabal-mates dosing him up "for his own good."

EXPLOITATION VS. ENLIGHTENMENT

A strongly Cult-related motif is the conflict of exploitation versus enlightenment. If the Sleepers are incapable of achieving enlightenment on their own (a chancy proposition at best, given the fact that theoretically anyone could Awaken at any time), then someone must foster that enlightenment within them. Even assuming that Sleepers

could become enlightened on their own, many Cultists feel a duty to help the process along.

Where's the boundary between exploitation and enlightenment? There's no simple answer, nor should there be. Cultists should never feel "safe" about their practices — that flies in the face of their tenets. Instead, every act of rebellion, every cause designed to bring further Awakening to the Sleepers, should be a moral quandary. The easy, simple path doesn't work. It *hasn't* worked, because people haven't woken up. Perhaps only extreme measures will do the trick. But are the Cultists ready to follow in the footsteps of the Euthanatos, shouldering a terrible burden for an arguably greater good?

Cult characters aren't meant to be comfortable, constantly sunny characters. Often they're running toward or away from a specific goal. Many

times, they have only their own instincts to trust. Any major Cult action could be something that goes horribly wrong and finds the Cultist a villain. This isn't to say that Cultist characters are all going to eventually become crazed torturing maniacs, but that playing a Cultist should be an experience in walking on the edge.

A quick side note: While the exploration of a Cultist's decision to foist enlightenment on other people may be interesting, it's far less interesting if it creates disharmony in the game group. Ruining the game experience by having some character drug the entire cabal just doesn't make for a good time. Remember to cut a little slack for other players who may not want to explore the same depths as the Cultist. (Hey, they didn't choose to play Cult of Ecstasy characters, right?)

CULT: CHERRY BLOSSOMS



The Cherry Blossoms don't fit most mages' conception of a Cultist cabal. A band? Nope. Pornography ring? Not quite. They're gardeners.

Most mages look askance at the Cherry Blossoms' goals. They're not fighters, and they don't really push against the boundaries of society. While pleasant company, they just don't seem to have the constant crises that other mage groups often face. That's their secret. They're not out to save the world or blast some faceless enemies to smithereens. They simply want to live a good life and spread that novel concept to the people around them.

HISTORY

The Cherry Blossoms started under the aegis of Rebecca Moreau, a young Cultist with a green thumb. Both smart and charismatic, Rebecca decided that it would be enough for her to simply live an exemplary life, so as to show people how to find happiness in their own personal daily tasks. Combining her love of botany with the sketchy Cult ethics she'd learned, she set out to do something that she loved, and do it well.

Rebecca's tender care of her garden attracted the notice of other mages. Many were curious at first, and

later dismissive. It was a rather dismal day in Boston when Paolo came into her shop. The dejected and downtrodden Cultist had long since lost his joy in life. He'd been ground under the heel of constant fighting. Rebecca's cheerful demeanor and the humming joy she took in the care of her plants made him stop to think — and eventually, stop to stay. Paolo joined Rebecca's enterprise as a "retirement," to find some soft pleasures in a life that he'd mostly squandered.

Rebecca's shop, popular as it was, came under particular scrutiny after a terrible accident on the front streets catapulted a car through the front window. Her insurance company refused to pay, and her creditors, smelling blood in the water, started clamoring for her to pay all of her debts. Hemorrhaging cash, Rebecca feared that she'd lose her tiny paradise until Andrew Titus stepped in. Andrew had too much money and too many vices. He'd only sought a chance to let his latest excesses blow over, but something brought him to his senses when he stopped by the wreckage of the store to contemplate its shattered glass panes and crushed flowers while under the influence of hallucinogens. Andrew helped to pick up the flowers and, handing them to Rebecca, found himself ensnared in the vision of a simpler kamamarga.

Now, the tiny shop is repaired and renewed. Catering to local interests, the gardeners encour-

age people to stop in not only for flowers but also for conversation or for a break from the grind of daily life. The next-door café, decorated with Rebecca's perfumed vines, does brisk business in couples looking for a romantic setting along the sidewalks of Boston. Through tiny efforts, the Cherry Blossoms bring an atmosphere of renewal to an otherwise bleak neighborhood.

AGENDA

The Cherry Blossoms have a simple goal: live a happy life. Each member follows this credo through the observance of daily tasks as a kamamarga. Instead of treating their labors as chores, the Cultists try to see the pleasures that come with work well done. They live by a code of excellence.

The Cherry Blossoms don't follow the vicissitudes of the now-defunct Ascension War. (Indeed, Rebecca's pretty clear that she considers the entire enterprise foolish vanity.) Their store excels as a place to relax and unwind. Visiting cabals traveling through Boston make a point of stopping by for a latte next door and a flower at Rebecca's. In this, the Cherry Blossoms are successful. Every flower that a visitor carries away spreads a little bit of brightness and cheer.

Inadvertently, the Cherry Blossoms have become something of an information brokerage, as well. In the process of talking people through their woes and encouraging happiness, the Cherry Blossoms often hear of what ails individuals, corporations, groups and clubs. Traveling mages or cabals share news from other places when they visit. Rebecca has become the best-informed mage in Boston without even trying, and chances are that she has fairly recent news on just about any major cabal or movement in magical society.

As the will behind the operation, Rebecca's goals are simple. She wants only to experience joy through the simple beauty of life, and to help others to do the same.

USING THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Player cabals probably won't encounter the Cherry Blossoms outside of Boston since this cabal doesn't travel — aside from Andrew's occasional peccadilloes. However, the group could easily come to the Cherry Blossoms for advice or sanctuary.

Mages traveling through Boston know that Rebecca won't necessarily put them up for the night, but she can offer information about who to go to and where to find a safe house. Cabals and chantries recruiting new members often put the word out through Rebecca, and she dutifully spreads this information to mages traveling alone or in small groups.

Die-hard Ascension warriors or mages on the run put the Cherry Blossoms at risk. Ever since the fateful accident that crystallized the cabal, they've kept a low profile to avoid attention. Inconsiderate mages could find themselves dragging disaster along behind them. Cabals that think that the Cherry Blossoms are doing nothing more than putting up a pacifistic front are in for a surprise; the cabal isn't prepared for protracted warfare.

The Cherry Blossoms also excel as a counterpoint piece. Groups who are used to thinking of Cultists as extremists may find the Blossoms a refreshing change of pace. The voice of experience rings through each of the members, who can act as mentors or advisors to players' characters, at least for a short time.

Intuitive players may learn a bit about the Cherry Blossoms just by stopping and listening. The store's music tends to reflect the person on shift. Rebecca prefers the soft strains of Enya and Loreena McKennit; Paolo chooses lilting and precise classical works, such as those by Bach and Brahms; Andrew throws in '60s rock and roll.

REBECCA MOREAU

Background: Directionless and filled with ennui, Rebecca wasn't sure what to make of her life. She'd pursued a degree in botany half-heartedly, but she had no driving passions. Her life simply didn't fulfill her.

Rebecca's life changed and she Awakened when she met a Cultist of Ecstasy by the name of Andrew. He taught her to take joy in what she did, and instructed her to "follow her bliss" — to make time for the things she wanted to do most. Fired by his passions, she found her own. She quit school and took a loan out to start her small store, Cherry Blossoms, and she and Andrew eventually married.

Over the next couple of years, Rebecca continued her training in Ecstatic philosophy and thought without embracing the heedless and wild side of



the Cult. She and Andrew shared a smoldering romance that other mages could only envy. It was a sunny summer day when Paolo showed up at the store, looking haggard and world-worn. Rebecca recognized in him the same burnout that had plagued her for so long, and when he wandered about listlessly without direction, she gave him a flower and asked him to come back the next day. He did, and did again the day after that. Rebecca hired him on to help her expanding business and helped him to find the kamamarga he'd lost.

It was a bizarre coincidence that, after several successful years of operation, the careening car smashed through the front window of her store. In the ensuing collision, her husband was struck and killed. In shock, Rebecca wandered about the broken front, heedless of the glass and blood, picking up the strewn flowers, which is how she met the other Andrew. When she was taken with the ambulance to the hospital and lost her husband, Andrew sent some of her own flowers with her.

Now, Rebecca nominally heads the small cabal that's really just a store and its employees. Since the death of her husband, she's never taken another lover, and she's become a bit more wistful than she was in her first days of passionate Awakening.

Image: Of medium height and a bit over the slender side, Rebecca has dancing eyes and brown hair, which she keeps in a neat bun or braid. Her magnetism comes less from her simple, earthy

appearance than from the exuberance that she radiates. Whether at the store or at home, she favors long dresses in earth tones, crossed with rugged shirts suitable for gardening.

Roleplaying Hints: You're light-hearted, friendly, always ready with a laugh, a smile, a joke or an astute observation. People fascinate you and you love to listen. When the favor's returned, you'll talk about anything that strikes your fancy, be it the beauty of the flower you're tending, the pleasant state of the weather or the latest news to trickle in. Honestly, you don't *have* a dark side.

Faction: Joybringers

Essence: Questing

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Trickster

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

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Computer 1, Crafts (Flower Arranging) 4, Drive 1, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 2, Expression 3, Leadership 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 2, Occult 2, Performance (Dance) 2, Subterfuge 1, Technology 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Avatar 1, Contacts 5, Resources 3

Arete: 3

Spheres: Life 3, Time 3

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Peaceful 2

PAOLO

Background: Hailing from an Italian-American family, Paolo's the gloomy one of the bunch. His family observed the Bacchanalia in their own way, through drunken festivals and tremendously extravagant birthday parties. Paolo learned to enjoy ecstasy through these affairs, and, indeed, it was on a birthday party drunken binge that he Awakened.

After Awakening, Paolo went on to hop across the US on his family's money, and he also visited Italy for several years. He avoided conflicts and focused mostly on his own vices. By the time he was 30, he was burned out, physically wrecked and not long for this world.

The Ascension War kicked in. Paolo found some of his friends and supporters dying off in the ubiquitous conflict between Technocracy and Traditions. At first confused by the mess and not really understanding how it could possibly have come to affect *him* — since he didn't bother anyone — he turned to rage. He channeled his anger against the Technocracy, for, if they'd decided to take his friends, then, by goodness, they'd made an enemy!

By the time of the Reckoning, Paolo had straightened out his irresponsible abuse of Cult practices and substances, but he'd turned into a fighting machine. He'd lost the passion of the Cult, directing all of his energies to the battle instead. When the Traditions and Technocracy mutually gave up, he almost lost the will to live. Unsure of himself or his direction, he stumbled into Rebecca's store.

A short conversation with Rebecca showed him that other Ecstatics still had sources of joy and made him wonder why it was that he did not. At first, a sense of morbidly lonely curiosity brought him back again and again. Over time, though, he came to see the beauty of Rebecca's approach and the appreciation of simple things. A man born to grandiose tastes, he'd never stopped to just smile at something small and pleasant.

Paolo is still a man of grand design, but he's taking a break for now. He enjoys his work at the Cherry Blossom, and he's a source of information and keen

insight into the magely warfare of the '70s and '80s for other Ascension War veterans. He still enjoys a good glass of wine and the booming crescendo of classical music, but he's learning to relax instead of struggling and racing constantly to find the highest highs.

Image: A swarthy, long-nosed man of southern Italian descent but American upbringing. Paolo has thinning black hair and small eyes, a generous mouth and craggy features. He prefers well-tailored suits, comfortable sweaters and accoutrements of wealth. When speaking, he has a booming voice that he supplements with furious gestures and braggadocio. Relaxing with a glass of wine and some music, the years seem to strip away, and he's a young man enjoying the sunshine of a pleasant day once more.

Roleplaying Hints: Gesture fervently, speak loudly and confidently, and give a knowing smile every once in a while. If you're caught in a boring patch with nothing to do, you can seem dour, but that's rare these days. You have only just started to really appreciate the joys of living, even though you spent so long pursuing them. You have a soft spot for Rebecca, which is probably what keeps you at the store, but you'd never push it.

Faction: Fellowship of Pan

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Curmudgeon

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Cosmology 2, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Meditation 2, Occult 3, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Avatar 2, Dream 2, Resources 4

Arete: 4

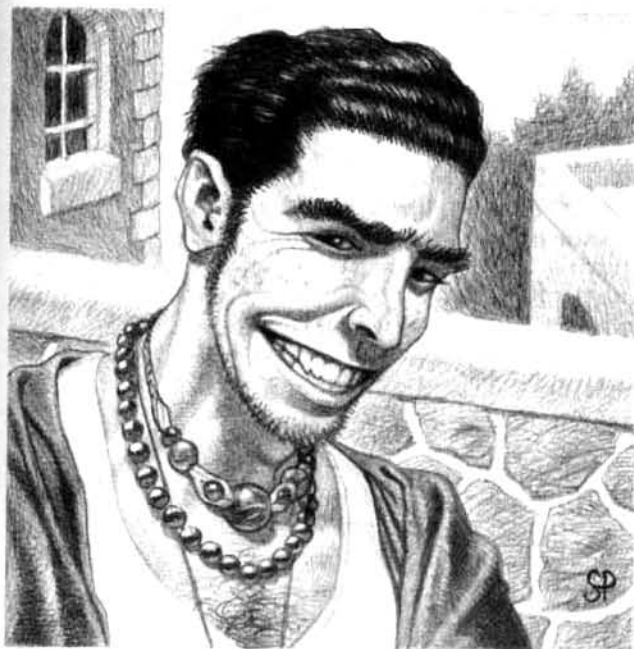
Spheres: Forces 2, Life 1, Mind 2, Spirit 3, Time 3

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 2

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Frenetic 1, (Entropic) Excessive 2



ANDREW TITUS

Background: With a big grin, leather jacket and colored hair, it's easy to see Andrew's origins. From a lower middle-class family, he made the best out of life as a prankster and a rock aficionado. He'd always hoped to become a musician, and although it didn't pan out, he managed to stumble, literally, into his job with the Cherry Blossoms.

As it happens, Andrew's presence is good for him, but not so much for the cabal. Rebecca and Paolo have taught Andrew the virtues of patience and of alternative practices of kamamarga. Their influence on his Cult style probably halted a slide into self-destructiveness and instead balanced his club-goings with steady responsibility. Unfortunately, his youthful enthusiasm — especially for very loud music and counterculture — grates on Paolo, and his desire to be constantly *doing something* rarely sits well with Rebecca's peaceable nature.

Andrew claims that he Awakened at his first rave, a claim that nobody's bothered to refute. He still organizes the occasional party or club scene, but, more often, he simply participates so that he can be part of the crowd.

Image: A young punk with slightly chubby features, an eyebrow ring, short multicolored hair and an ever-present leather jacket. Andrew also sometimes blends in with other scenes, donning the huge shoes of ravers or the additional chains and gear of an industrial fetishist. He's almost always grinning at something, and he has a caustic reply to any comment.

Roleplaying Hints: You're not entirely sure how you stumbled into this job as a flower manager at a shop of fogies, but hey, you get paid, and it's actually pretty cool. It's easy, too, and you still have time to slip out clubbing, which is a plus. You still exude the sensibilities of a jaded young club-goer trying to look impressive, but Rebecca and Paolo are starting to grind that out of you by bits and turns. Heck, sometimes, when nobody's looking, you actually stop and smell the flowers.



Faction: Klubwerks

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Trickster

Demeanor: Bravo

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Computer 1, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Enigmas 1, Expression 1, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Linguistics (Spanish) 1, Melee 2, Occult 2, Performance (Guitar) 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 2, Technology 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arcane 2, Contacts 3, Mentor 1, Resources 2

Arete: 2

Spheres: Entropy 2, Mind 2, Time 2

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 0

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Shouting 1

AN ARITY OF VICE



Modern Cultists come in a multitude of forms, and all share the singular passion of their Tradition. The question is, how many ways can that passion take shape? As the march of progress opens new doors to experience, the Cult broadens. Instead of collapsing under the weight of the scientific world, the Cult's members incorporate

and expand upon sensations created by the pace of millennial development.

The children of Lakashim proclaim that there are eight million kamamarga and that most of them haven't even been discovered yet. Here are just a few. More will doubtless appear every day and every time someone realizes the ecstasy in discovery.

MODERN DIONYSIAN

Quote: *What is human, is holy. The divine order is revealed in passion, whether through hunger, fury or lust. Now please... be quiet and lick...*

Prelude: You grew up in a small town, where everyone knew everyone and the local church was the center of the town's activity. Few ever moved in, even fewer ever actually moved out. Your life wasn't terribly different from those going on around you, although you didn't feel that you belonged. You didn't feel right in church. Many times you felt like the preacher was directly accusing you during his sermons. At home, your very religious parents didn't understand you at all, sometimes fearing that their daughter was not as faithful as they were. You weren't motivated the same way as others. As a child, you would sit in the local bookstore and simply read whatever you could find. You understood

A Midsummer Night's Dream before anyone your age had even heard of it. In high school, you found your true calling: the theater.

While the plays you put on were inane, you simply enjoyed the spotlight. However, even then, you understood that you were quite out of place. While others were content to live out their lives as farmers or refinery workers, you had higher aspirations. You planned to go to a good college in a big city, get a degree in theater, and maybe some day, create your own theater company.

Acting on your dreams, you moved to a large city. You were enrolled in a modest acting school at the time. You found that you could do literally anything you wanted to do in the city. You could indulge any desire you wished and whatever passions struck you. No cultural stigma stood in your way. You attended

parties with friends constantly, engaged in all types of drug use and even took a few lovers. One night, you and several of your

friends returned to your dorm room to wind down after a long night of dancing. After hours of talking, some of your friends started taking their clothes off and becoming amorous. Slowly, each member of the group joined in the orgy. You were the last to join. You were shocked by the experience, not so much from its unrestrained sexual expression, but from the unselfish acts of pure human emotion and experience. In one instant, an entire group felt unconditional love for one another, regardless of gender or station. It was enlightenment on a grand scale, and you realized that humanity could, in fact, become more than the sum of its parts.

For weeks afterward, you spent every day in the library, studying the works of ancient mystery religions, which seemed to share a common philosophy. When you were not in the library, you attended drum circles in the woods and en-



CULT OF ECSTASY

NAME: _____ **NATURE:** Celebrant **FACTION:** Fellowship of Pan
PLAYER: _____ **ESSENCE:** Dynamic **CONCEPT:** Modern Dionysian
CHRONICLE: _____ **DEITY/ANTR:** Bon Vivant **CABAL:** _____

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SPECIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●○○	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●○○
Dexterity: ●●●○○	Manipulation: ●●●○○	Intelligence: ●●●○○
Stamina: ●●●○○	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wisdom: ●●●○○

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●○○	Crafts: ●●●○○	Academics: ●●●○○
Athletics: ●●●○○	Drive: ●●●○○	Computers: ●●●○○
Awareness: ●●●○○	Etiquette: ●●●○○	Conology: ●●●○○
Brawl: ●●●○○	Firearms: ●●●○○	Enigmas: ●●●○○
Deceit: ●●●○○	Meditation: ●●●○○	Investigation: ●●●○○
Expression: ●●●○○	Melody: ●●●○○	Law: ●●●○○
Intimidation: ●●●○○	Performance: ●●●○○	Linguistics: ●●●○○
Leadership: ●●●○○	Sleight: ●●●○○	Medicine: ●●●○○
Streetwise: ●●●○○	Survival: ●●●○○	Occult: ●●●○○
Subterfuge: ●●●○○	Technology: ●●●○○	Science: ●●●○○

SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●○○	Life: ●●●○○	Prime: ●●●○○
Entropy: ●●●○○	Master: ●●●○○	Spirit: ●●●○○
Force: ●●●○○	Mind: ●●●○○	Time: ●●●○○

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Allies: ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -1 0 0
Avatar: ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Hurt: -1 0 0
Dream: ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured: -1 0 0
Mentor: ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: -2 0 0
Resources: ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Maimed: -3 0 0
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Crippled: -3 0 0
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Incapacitated: -4 0 0

RESONANCE		QUINTESSENCE	
Dynamic: ●●●○○	Leap: ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
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Static: ●●●○○	●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

EXPERIENCE []

PARADES []

GENTBAT	
Range	Wound Damage

couraged spontaneous *orgia* among your friends. Eventually, at one drum circle, you found another like you. She offered to take you in and teach you the ancient ways, as they have always been. So far, you have learned a great deal, but you are starting to suspect that perhaps your mentor's philosophy is too selfish and focused on the individual. Perhaps, you reason, you can show her the error in her way.

Concept: You are an innovator of a philosophy based on innovation. While Cultists and Bacchante frequently focus on loss of inhibition through drug use, you advocate love as a means to transcend the illusion of the self. You see identity as an illusion, one that is broken down by the *orgia* rite. However, you are not simply a hedonist. You are quite religious, and human nature is your god. You find modern culture corrupt, especially corporations that commercialize sex appeal.

Roleplaying Tips: Your dress alternates between hippie chick and preacher's daughter. You are devout in your beliefs, and you seek to bring others to your point of view. You dislike Roman culture a great deal because of its perverse obsession with elderly men, and you resent any comparison of yourself to followers of Bacchus. You also dislike those followers of Dionysus who perform bloody orgies and other violent practices.

Magic: Unlike many Ecstasies, you rarely use your Time magic to see the future. You focus on the past, particularly to further understand the mysteries of Dionysus. You use Mind, sometimes perhaps not even consciously, to reduce others' inhibitions. You use Life and Spirit to unlock the complex mysteries of the inner world and outer world, respectively.

Equipment: large quantity of herbal uppers, masks of your own design, acoustic guitar, decrepit Volvo, subscription to numerous trendy feminist magazines, numerous translations of the classical Greek tragedies

ARETE
 ●●○○○○○○○○○○
 W/ILLPØWER
 ●●●●●●○○○○○○
 ○□□□□□□□□□
 ⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADØX

RESØNANCE
 DYNAMITIC Loving _____
 ENTRØPIC _____
 STATC _____

BACKGØUNDS
 Allies x3
 Avatar x1
 Dream x2
 Mentor x2
 Resources x1

SPHERES
 Apprentice of Correspondence
 Initiate of Life
 Initiate of Mind
 Apprentice of Time

RØTES

NAME: _____
 CHARACTER: Modern Dionysian
 CHRONICLE: _____
 FACTØR: Fellowship of Pan
 ESSENCE: Dynamic
 CABAL: _____
 NATURE: Celebrant
 DETEANØR: Bon Vivant

PHYSICAL
 Quick
 Tireless
 Wiry

SØCIAL
 Alluring
 Commanding
 Beguiling
 Gorgeous
 Charismatic x2

MENTAL
 Magnetic
 Attentive
 Knowledgeable
 Clever
 Reflective
 Intuitive

ABILITIES
 Awareness
 Meditation
 Expression
 Performance
 Linguistics
 Occult

MERITS & FLAWS

ARETE
 ●●○○○○○○○○○○
 W/ILLPØWER
 ●●●●●●○○○○○○
 ○□□□□□□□□□
 ⊕QUINTESSENCE/PARADØX

RESØNANCE
 DYNAMITIC Flitting _____
 ENTRØPIC _____
 STATC _____

BACKGØUNDS
 Allies x3
 Avatar x1
 Dream x2
 Mentor x2
 Resources x1

SPHERES
 Initiate of Correspondence
 Initiate of Life
 Initiate of Time

RØTES

NAME: _____
 CHARACTER: Dance Instructor
 CHRONICLE: _____
 FACTØR: Joybringers
 ESSENCE: Dynamic
 CABAL: _____
 NATURE: Pedagogue
 DETEANØR: Director

PHYSICAL
 Agile x2
 Lithe x3
 Vigorous
 Wiry

SØCIAL
 Charming x2
 Elegant x2
 Seductive

MENTAL
 Alert
 Clever
 Dedicated

ABILITIES
 Athletics
 Dodge
 Etiquette
 Expression
 Leadership
 Performance

MERITS & FLAWS

DANCE INSTRUCTOR

Quote: *Just concentrate on the beat. The beat. The beat. One two, one two, one two... until it's like instinct.*

Prelude: Many parents would be overjoyed to have a child grow up as a dance prodigy, but not yours. Your stodgy physics professor father felt that your talent was a waste, and he feared that your lack of interest in the sciences constituted a failing on his part. Your corporate mother didn't have time to deal with it. She just threw money at whatever problem presented itself and went on her harried way. Their lack of support was never a problem, though. Whenever you danced, you lost yourself in the activity.

After you declared your intent to pursue dance as your college major, your parents had had enough: They cut you off. "When you find a *respectable* career," your father said, "you can come back." With your talents, though, you knew you could land a scholarship. You just *knew* it.

Three auditions and three failures later, you were desperate. Eventually, you turned to exotic dance to pay the bills. Heck, it paid a *lot*, and you were good at it, since you actually knew how to dance.

One night, a man in the audience asked — while slipping you a 20 — where you'd learned. At first, you figured it was a pick-up line, but you caved anyway. You met up after work one night for coffee and poured out your life story. Explaining that he'd danced professionally for a few years in Brazil, he asked if you'd like a couple of extra lessons. Again, you thought it was a pick-up line, but, even then, you still gave in.

Turns out it *was* a pick-up line, but a pick-up from a Cultist. Through private dance training you Awakened, and you learned to focus your talents with the power of movement and music. Now you teach a private clientele, but it's your fervent hope that you can be the mentor to another like yourself one day, and show that person all the beauty of the celestial pulse of Lakashim without any of the bitterness of your own past.

Concept: Somewhat naïve and still young, you focus almost exclusively on whirling, tiring dance as your kamamarga. While you've had to do some things you didn't like, overall you've come through unscathed and lacking many of the scars that plague other Cultists. Still, your rose-colored view of the world can be infectious, and you would make a good teacher, given the time and a student worthy of your skills.

Roleplaying Tips: Smile a lot, chatter about various styles of dance and basically do the little routine you learned working clubs — keep your clients happy by making them feel like they're interesting. People who show real interest in dance, especially in learning dance, get to know the real you: a caring, impassioned spirit who wants to touch some endless ecstasy through pure dance.

Magic: When you trance through your dance steps and your breath comes in harsh gasps, time slips away. The beat you keep in yourself is the only measure of true time. You can perform incredible feats of acrobatic expertise, augmented with Life, which also allows you to leap, pose for extended time and control your breathing. With Correspondence, you seem to flicker from place to place in a fluid motion that defies space.

Equipment: small apartment with hardwood floor and mirrored wall for private dance instruction, balance baton, various costume pieces for dance

CULT ECSTASY

NAME: _____		NATURE: Pedagogue	FACTINR: Joybringers
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Dynamic	CONCEPT: Dance Instructor
CHARACTER: _____		DETRIMANT: Director	CABAL: _____

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wisdom: ●●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Computers: ●●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Criminology: ●●●●●
Beast: ●●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●●	Engineering: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Performance: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Occlus: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●

SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●●	Life: ●●●●●	Prime: ●●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●●	Matter: ●●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●●
Force: ●●●●●	Mind: ●●●●●	Time: ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Alibi: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: _____
Contacts: ●●●●●	Willpower: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Hurt: _____
Resources: ●●●●●	Willpower: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured: _____
Dynamic: ●●●●●	Resonance: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: _____
Entropy: ●●●●●	Resonance: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled: _____
Static: ●●●●●	Resonance: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Crippled: _____
Experience: _____	Resonance: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Incapacitated: _____

CIBTIBA	
Power: _____	Pat: _____

EXTREME ATHLETE

Quote: *Feel the burn!*

Prelude: Track, weightlifting, gymnastics, swimming — none of it was ever enough. You lived for the adrenal thrill of pushing your physical limits. Sure, you could hold down a job and all that, but you spent your weekends in races, triathlons, bicycling, hiking, anything to feel that buzz.

As sports evolved, so did your tastes. You took to snowboarding easily, crashing your way down rocky slopes and loving every second of freefall. Bungee jumping? A quick buzz. Sun dances? Iron man weight exhibitions? Two, please.

You never stopped to think that maybe with all of your running, you were running from something. Running from mundane life, perhaps — from a lifestyle so dull that it made your teeth ache. Burning your way through every barrier made you feel truly alive.

During a trip to Australia, where you indulged in long-duration SCUBA diving, you nearly died. While floating inside an undersea cave, actually sleeping underwater, the valve where your regulator connected to your tank started to leak. Although you woke up when you started choking, you only barely managed to surface before you suffered brain damage. Gasping for air, you saw nothing but sparkling lights at the corners of your eyes, contrasting the infinite ocean all around you, broken only occasionally by passing sea life. You made it to the surface at last, but you almost felt like you could sense hands on your back, pulling you upward as you struggled. When you broke through and cast your gaze on the water's sunny, reflective surface, the sparkling lights didn't fade, and neither did the rush.

After experimenting with some other forms of exertion to see what had happened, you came to realize that your whole outlook had finally changed. At first,



CULT OF ECSTASY

NATURE: Perfectionist
 PLAYER: Esbice Dynamic
 CHRONICLE: DETERMINED, Thrill-Seeker
 FACTION: CABAL
 CONCEPT: Extreme Athlete

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Will: ●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academia: ●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●	Enigma: ●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●	Search: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●
Stealth: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●
SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●
Forces: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Avatar: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: 0
Dream: ●●●●	WILLIS/WER	Hurt: 1
Mentor: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured: 1
Resources: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: 2
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled: 2
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Crippled: 3
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Incapacitated: 5
RESONANCE	QUINTESSENCE	CIBITBAT
Dynamic: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Empire: [] [] [] []
Entropy: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Dedication: [] [] [] []
Stark: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Usage: [] [] [] []
EXPERIENCE	PARADEIX	
[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	

you feared neurological damage, but when you met and got to know a traveling circus performer who specialized in piercings and stunts of pain, you came to realize that you'd broken through that last barrier of gasping struggle and Awakened. From the prince of pain, you learned a bit about the Cult of Ecstasy and of your own state. Now, no barriers can hold you back.

Concept: You're a superlative athlete, although you drive yourself to dangerous extremes sometimes. Mitigated with Cultist practices, you can keep yourself in one piece and recover quickly from your exertions. Much of your experiences revolve around trying to find and sustain the rush from your athletics, but now that you're part of the Cult, you're starting to broaden your tastes a little. Eventually, you might become a good traveling mentor or a powerful Cult warrior.

Roleplaying Tips: Always push people to exert themselves. Try to convince your friends to come with you when you go running or swimming. Carry exercise gear everywhere. Fashion? Bah! You always wear Spandex or sweats. Any time someone mentions a new sport or activity you haven't tried, your eyes sparkle with excitement, and you can barely contain your desire to try it out.

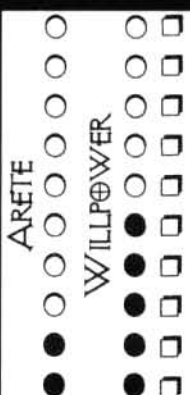
Magic: In the moments of moderated breath as you run, jump, climb or swim, you can lose track of time and touch the endless moment. Your physical acumen stays top-notch thanks to your Life magic. While you may not be a super martial-artist, you have incredible resilience. In your experiments with sports equipment, you've started to tinker with making your own gear and accessories, and when you mess around with tools or materials, you can sometimes come up with stuff better than simple Spandex and carbon rods, using your Matter skills.

Equipment: work-out outfits for all kinds of exertion, mountain bike, snowboard, SCUBA gear, duffel bag

ESSENCE OF THE

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: Extreme Athlete
CHRONICLE: _____
FACTION: _____
ESSENCE: Dynamic
CABAL: _____
NATURE: Perfectionist
DETREANOR: Thrill-Seeker

PHYSICAL
Brawny _____ Tough x2
Tenacious _____ Vigorous x2
Tireless _____
SOCIAL
Expressive _____
Friendly _____
Magnetic _____
MENTAL
Alert _____ Disciplined
Clever _____ Intuitive
Dedicated _____
ABILITIES
Athletics _____ Expression
Dodge _____ Leadership
Etiquette _____ Performance
MERITS & FLAWS



⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX
RESONANCE
DYNAMIC Unstoppable
ENTROPIC
STATIC

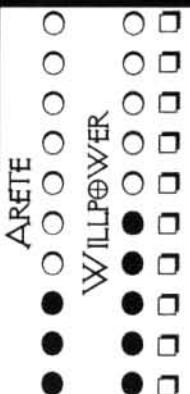
BACKGROUNDS
Avatar x2 _____
Dream x2 _____
Mentor x1 _____
Resources x2 _____

SPHERES
Initiate of Life _____
Initiate of Matter _____
Initiate of Time _____
ROTES

ESSENCE OF THE

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: Philosopher, Bruce
CHRONICLE: _____
FACTION: Dissonance Society
ESSENCE: Pattern
CABAL: _____
NATURE: Celebrant
DETREANOR: Curmudgeon

PHYSICAL
Dextrous _____
Enduring _____
Stalwart _____
SOCIAL
Alluring _____ Magnetic
Charismatic x2 _____
Expressive x2 _____
MENTAL
Alert _____ Reflective
Knowledgeable x2 _____
Rational x2 _____
ABILITIES
Academics _____ Cosmology
Alertness _____ Enigmas
Awareness _____ Expression
MERITS & FLAWS



⊕ UNTESSENCE/PARADOX
RESONANCE
DYNAMIC
ENTROPIC
STATIC Analytical

BACKGROUNDS
Allies x2 _____
Contacts x2 _____
Library x2 _____
Resources x2 _____

SPHERES
Disciple of Mind _____
Disciple of Time _____
ROTES

THE PHILOSOPHER, BRUCE

Quote: *A lovely little thinker, but a bugger when he's pissed.*

Prelude: You've always had a precocious mind. A voracious appetite for intellectualism fed your constant study, even at an early age, but it wasn't science, math, art or poetry that attracted most of your attention. You reveled in thinking about thinking.

Well, philosophy degrees don't pay the rent, but you always got by. From amateur philosophy club in high school to major in college to post-graduate study, you loved the thrill of debate and study. Best of all to you was tackling new ideas and seeing how to compare or combine different philosophies. If it had some philosopher's name on it, you read it. You didn't care if it was ancient or modern. To you, the human experience is a timeless one.

You discovered that you were right. At a coffee shop near your college, where you spent evenings reading philosophy, you met a kindred soul of sorts — a woman and poet who took your breath away. After some awkward back-and-forth, you discovered the beauty of her appreciation for life and love. You learned how philosophers became poets, as she brought out the best in you.

With a fulfilling (if somewhat poverty-stricken) life, you continue your search for philosophical thought. Some days, your mind turns to the moribund, as you think that humanity just isn't deserving of this world. Other times, you bubble with enthusiasm and love for your fellow man.

Awakening? What's that? As far as you're concerned, you've always been a thinker, and you'll always be a thinker. These days, you meet up with a small group of friends, just for the heck of it, and for the occasional debate of politics, philosophy or local events. You're also a champion drinker. Your friends might not understand your taste in window-cleaner-like substances, but when you're really tipsy, you're not only loud but free with

y o u r

CULT ECSTASY

NAME: Bruce
PLAYER:
CHARM:

NATURE: Celebrant
ESSENCE: Pattern
DETACHMENT: Curmudgeon

FACTION: Dissidence Society
CONCEPT: The Philosopher (Bruce)
CASUAL:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Will	●●○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	●●○○○
Awareness	●●○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigma	●●○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Strength	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Stealth	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	○○○○○
Matter	○○○○○	Master	○○○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	●●○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		ARETE		HEALTH	
Allies	●●○○○	●●○○○○○○		Bruised	0
Contacts	●●○○○			Hurt	-1
Library	●●○○○			Injured	1
Resources	●●○○○			Wounded	-2
	○○○○○			Mauled	-2
	○○○○○			Crippled	-5
	○○○○○			Incapacitated	0

RESONANCE

Dynamic	○○○○○	Quintessence	○○○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Paradox	○○○○○
Static	●●○○○		

EXPERIENCE

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CENTIBAT

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ideas. Like the Bacchanalian philosophers of yesteryear, you revel in the freedom to think and to express yourself.

Concept: Aside from the actual degree, you might as well be a college student — still hitting the pub every Thursday night with your friends and debating rounds of philosophy over cider. Most of the time, you're pretty jolly. Even when you get bellicose, you only say things like, "Kill everyone — I can deal with the stench," more to elicit reactions from people than out of any real spite. While you work a regular job as a human-resources consultant, you still wince at the fact that you basically sold out to a corporation in order to pay the bills. But heck, everyone's got to live somehow. Waiter, another round!

Roleplaying Tips: Expound upon the joys of pure thinking. You're the straight-up bar philosopher, always ready to debate a round of morality, current events, politics or whatever your friends care to discuss (or find currently annoying). You play the Devil's Advocate sometimes, but you're not honestly in this to annoy people. You just like to make people think. When you feel that you've connected with someone about an idea, you're incredibly enthusiastic, throwing around hugs and great cries of joy.

Magic: Most of your "magic" doesn't seem like magic at all. You have a good gauge of people's emotions, and you can generate a clear picture of their agendas and interests, even hidden ones, through your philosophical debates. Doing so focuses your powerful Mind arts. Like a true Dionysian, you unfocus Time while in a drunken state. Hours can pass by in seconds, or you can compress time and move through it easily — aside from the staggering and double vision, that is.

Equipment: station wagon full of odd knick-knacks, book of modern philosophy analysis, bottle of Manischewitz



HARLOT QUEEN

Quote: *I don't want your blow, and I don't need your money. But you have something else I need....*

Prelude: If you had been born to a more affluent family (or perhaps if your father had stayed around), you would not be what you are today. But that's just an excuse, and you're done making excuses. You thought of yourself as Cinderella when you were younger, but so did the other six children in your family. When your mother was around, she was abusive, and she usually medicated herself with street drugs that were cut so many ways that they yielded a more powerful headache than a high. You can only guess that that's why she treated you like she did.

By the time you were a teenager, you had seen each of your older sisters move in with older men, and you dreaded that possibility. Your mother taught you to look pretty. There was no doubt that you were better looking than your sisters were. However, you refused to be a resource for your family, so you took off into the unforgiving night.

Living on the streets was difficult, and worse than the life you would have endured at home, but you are resolved to keep your pride. You stayed in shelters when you could, and you found that others were quite willing to help you when they could. However, you also knew that you had to do something to get yourself off the streets. This became painfully evident when you caught an infection that landed you in a free clinic for half a year. Your fever lasted for weeks. At its height, you were told that you were delirious, but what you saw in the grip of the infection was solid.

You saw a man — no, a fairy tale figure. A man dressed in nearly all black entered the clinic and sat at your side. His dress was a total anachronism, perhaps from the 18th century. "I see a lily on thy brow/With anguish moist and fever dew/ And on thy cheeks a fading rose/ fast withereth too," is all he said, and he handed you an apple. You had no idea what he meant, but you knew what eating the apple meant. It meant no longer being a victim; it meant taking what you needed instead of begging. The apple's taste was a rush that washed over your body, cleansing you and taking something from you at the same time. You're not sure if you awoke covered in sweat or the apple's juices, but you did not waste time.

Concept: You have discovered the power inherent in human sexual congress, an exchange of human energies readily accessible to those who know how to tap them. Unfortunately, this exchange generally comes at the expense of your lovers, who all slowly become victims. You don't seem to mind though, because you get the rush from the distilled human spirit you consume. You use your place as a high priced prostitute to draw as many sources of life essence to you as you can, slowly discarding them as they yield less and less pleasure. Those who have been totally stripped of their essence tend to lose their creativity and generally fade into the lowest strata of society. Although you are a whore, you are not a victim. You are a force of nature.

Roleplaying Tips: Your actions are graceful, respectable and even seemingly innocent. You rarely flirt. You don't have to when you do your job correctly. The prey... make that paramours... usually come to you instead. Although you are devoted to your work, you are not a mindless predator. In fact, sex is not a means of self-debasement or even a profession. It is simply a tool. You enjoy your riches a great deal, and you enjoy a bit of poetry in your spare time.

Magic: You use sex to harness Life and Prime in order to devour your victim's health levels in exchange for Quintessence. You also use herbal concoctions mixed in with makeup and perfume to harness your power over Mind, enabling you to have power over the

CULT OF ECSTASY

NAME: PLAYER CHARM:	NATURE: Monster ESSENCE: Primordial DEITY/ANTR: Celebrant	FACTIBN: Harlot Queen CABAL:
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL Strength ●●●●● Dexterity ●●●●● Stamina ●●●●●	SOCIAL Charisma ●●●●● Manipulation ●●●●● Appearance ●●●●●	MENTAL Perception ●●●●● Intelligence ●●●●● Will ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS Athletics ●●●●● Awareness ●●●●● Brawl ●●●●● Dodge ●●●●● Expression ●●●●● Intimidation ●●●●● Leadership ●●●●● Streetwise ●●●●● Subterfuge ●●●●●	SKILLS Crafts ●●●●● Drive ●●●●● Etiquette ●●●●● Firearms ●●●●● Meditation ●●●●● Melee ●●●●● Performance ●●●●● Stealth ●●●●● Survival ●●●●● Technology ●●●●●	KNOWLEDGES Academics ●●●●● Computer ●●●●● Cosmology ●●●●● Enigmas ●●●●● Investigation ●●●●● Law ●●●●● Linguistics ●●●●● Medicine ●●●●● Occult ●●●●● Science ●●●●●
SPHERES		
Correspondence ●●●●● Entropy ●●●●● Forces ●●●●●	Life ●●●●● Matter ●●●●● Mind ●●●●●	Prime ●●●●● Spirit ●●●●● Time ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS Arcane ●●●●● Astute ●●●●● Resources ●●●●● ●●●●●	ARETE ●●●●●●●●●●	WILLPOWER ●●●●●●●●●●
RESONANCE Dynamic ●●●●● Entropic ●●●●● Static ●●●●●	QUINTESSENCE ●●●●●●●●●●	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
EXPERIENCE _____		

minds of others. It also allows you to see the dreams you devour, in a rush of pure exaltation. Eventually, you plan to hone your power enough to devour not only the life, but the will of others.

Equipment: a dozen platinum cards (coincidentally left by paramours who forgot to cancel them), swanky apartment with a room devoted to sexual tortures, a large scrap book of photos from your childhood, Saturday night special, soulless husks of previous dates who stalk you, volume of the complete works of John Keats



CLOCK-MAKER

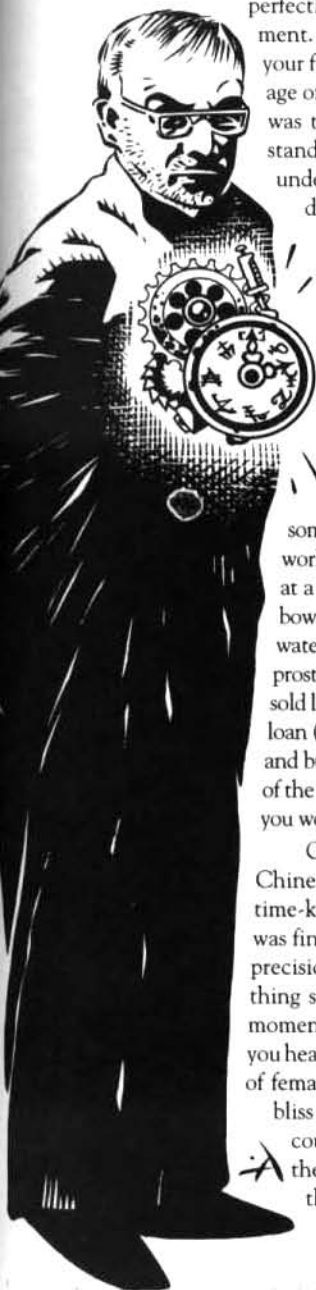
Quote: You will not be able to find the "truth" of this matter, for it simply does not exist. You have to understand that time is not a straight line, nor is it a perfect circular cycle. Time is the flickering flame within a dragon's mouth. The farther away it is from its source, the perceptions of the mind, the more it ceases to exist in a static form. Is it, therefore, so hard to believe that Emperor Cao was the child of a Ki-Rin?

Prelude: The second child born to Chinese immigrants living in a large Chinatown, you did not have much contact with Western culture until well after you were in your late teens. You were not going to inherit the family business, a local market, and so your family paid little attention to you. However, you watched them very carefully. Even at a young age, you began seeing patterns. You knew your older brother went to sleep at exactly 10 o' clock every night, and you could steal his radio. You saw that your father was quick tempered and unstable on Mondays, and that mother was more temperamental at the end of the month. So, when you brought home bad grades, you would time the moment you showed it to them

perfectly so as to receive pity instead of punishment. Since your family was quite insular, all your friends were Chinese. It was not until the age of nine that you began to study English. It was then that you realized that your understanding of cycles was unique. While you understand that cycles are flowing, finite and dynamic, everyone else is a slave to these cycles. You could master the turning of time. Even then, you knew that you would be something more some day.

You went to college as your parents wished, on what little money they had left over from your older brother's tuition. You dropped out after a few semesters, though. You were resolved to break the cycles and ultimately master them. You spent some time doing simple folk art, graffiti and working shit jobs that you kept for only weeks at a time. You began selling small cup clocks, bowl-shaped metal constructions that fill with water at a set time. Revealing that Chinese prostitutes used them to charge their johns, they sold like mad. You made enough money to get a loan (when interest rates were down, of course) and buy a boutique (placed in the trendiest part of the city, of course). Even then, you knew that you would be something more some day.

One late evening, you were assembling a Chinese water clock, perhaps the most ancient time-keeping device known to man. When it was finished, you sat there admiring its perfect precision, and you could have sworn that everything stood still in the cold ebb of time for a moment. Everything was perfect calm, but in it you heard a voice. You couldn't tell if it was male or female, but it told you that this moment of bliss was only the beginning of a journey that could very well transcend time itself. Even then, you knew that you would be something more some day.



CULT ECSTASY

NAME: _____	NATURE: Architect	FACTION: _____
PLAYER: _____	ESSENCE: Pattern	CONCEPT: ClockMaker
CHARICLE: _____	DESTINY: Architect	CATAL: _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength: ●●●●○	Charisma: ●●●●○	Perception: ●●●●○	Intelligence: ●●●●○	Wits: ●●●●○	
Dexterity: ●●●●○	Manipulation: ●●●●○				
Stamina: ●●●●○	Appearance: ●●●●○				

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness: ●●●●○	Crafts: ●●●●○	Academics: ●●●●○			
Athletics: ○○○○○	Drive: ○○○○○	Computer: ●●●●○			
Awareness: ●●●●○	Etiquette: ○○○○○	Cosmology: ●●●●○			
Brawl: ○○○○○	Firearms: ●●●●○	Enigmas: ●●●●○			
Dodge: ○○○○○	Meditation: ○○○○○	Investigation: ●●●●○			
Expression: ●●●●○	Miles: ○○○○○	Law: ○○○○○			
Intimidation: ○○○○○	Performance: ○○○○○	Linguistics: ●●●●○			
Leadership: ○○○○○	Stealth: ○○○○○	Medicine: ○○○○○			
Streetwise: ○○○○○	Survival: ○○○○○	Occult: ●●●●○			
Subterfuge: ○○○○○	Technology: ○○○○○	Science: ●●●●○			

SPHERES

Correspondence: ●●●●○	Life: ●●●●○	Prime: ●●●●○
Entropy: ●●●●○	Matter: ○○○○○	Spirit: ●●●●○
Force: ○○○○○	Mind: ●●●●○	Time: ●●●●○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		ARETE		HEALTH	
Avatar: ●●●●○	Destiny: ●●●●○	Willpower: ●●●●○	Bruised: <input type="checkbox"/>	Hurt: <input type="checkbox"/>	Injured: <input type="checkbox"/>
Resources: ○○○○○			Wounded: <input type="checkbox"/>	Mauled: <input type="checkbox"/>	Crippled: <input type="checkbox"/>
			Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>		

RESONANCE

Dynamic: ○○○○○	Static: ●●●●○
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EXPERIENCE

Dynamic: ○○○○○	Static: ●●●●○
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PARADEIX

Dynamic: ○○○○○	Static: ●●●●○
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CELESTIAL

Dynamic: ○○○○○	Static: ●●●●○
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Concept: You understand the cycles of time and event. You have an intuitive sense for these things, and you can manipulate them with eerie precision to your advantage. You have realized that the time is right to open an import shop specializing in timepieces. You see that reality — although it's too complex and infinite to define at times — follows a general set rhythm that can be exploited when it is at its weakest or strongest points. You do not think of history as fact, and you eschew ideas of "truth." If everything is mutable, you reason, you can change anything to your advantage.

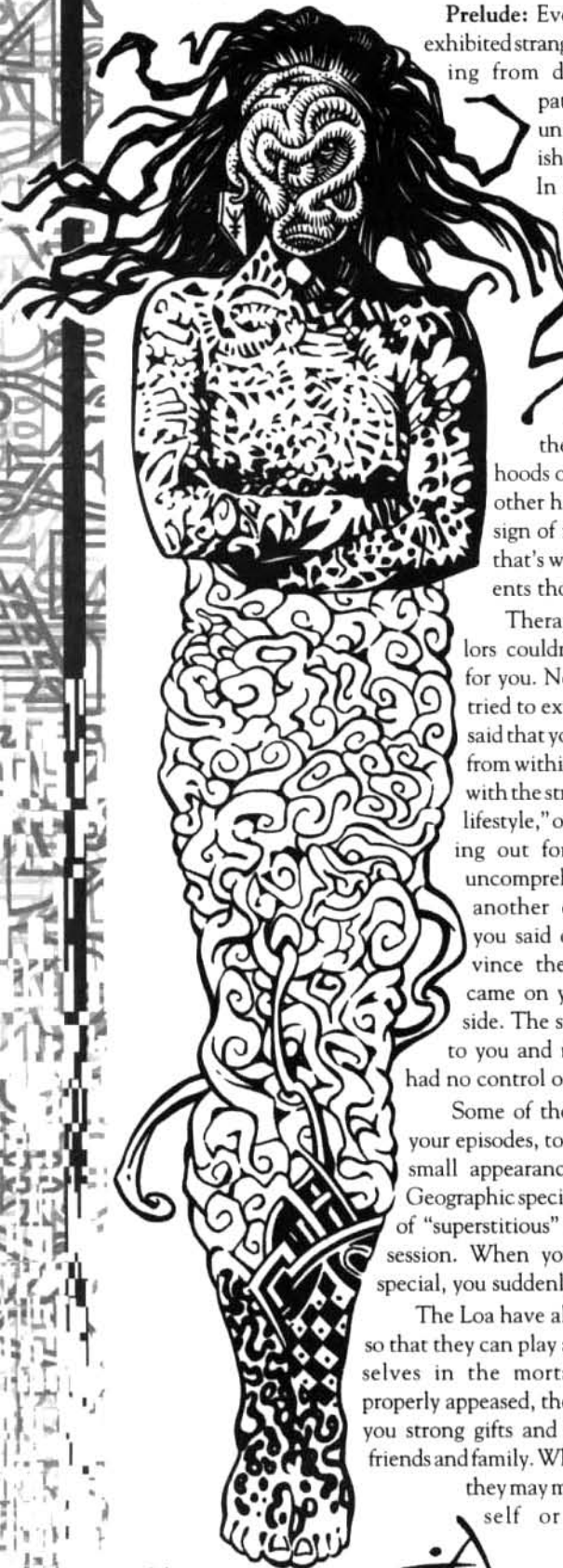
Roleplaying Tips: You are Chinese through and through, which makes many automatically put you in with the Akashic Brotherhood. Although deep down, you are more of a philosopher and scientist, you come off as a worldly and charismatic visionary. However, once you enter a discussion on the nature of perception and time, you reveal your calculating intellect. Despite your quick adaptation to Western society, you are Eastern through and through, and you still find American customs somewhat alien. You strive always to be on the cutting edge of what is fashionable, although you tend toward conservative dress.

Magic: Like many Ecstasies, you use altered perception to transcend the obvious, thereby extending your senses beyond the mundane. However, unlike more mainstream Ecstasies, you use simple meditation on the rhythm of clocks to enter an altered state. Each of your clocks serves a different purpose. In the dripping, chaotic beat of the water clock, you can see other places and other worlds. In your hourglass, you understand the shape of Time and the flow of Entropy. With your hand-crafted clockwork peacock timepiece, you can see the beating pulse of Life or the weave of Prime.

Equipment: a trendy import shop specializing in timepieces, clocks from all periods in history, day planners, laptop computers and various Chinese sexual devices

SPIRIT HORSE

Quote: *The Loa come whether we want them or not. Now they come for you.*



Prelude: Even as a child, you exhibited strange behaviors, ranging from dancing in briar patches to spouting unintelligible gibberish to eating staples. In a country with a strong spiritual heritage, this behavior wouldn't seem too unusual, it would just be chalked up to the influence of spirits. In the poor neighborhoods of Chicago, on the other hand, it was a clear sign of insanity. At least, that's what your poor parents thought.

Therapists and counselors couldn't change things for you. No matter how you tried to explain, they always said that your problems came from within. "Trying to cope with the stresses of the ghetto lifestyle," one reported. "Acting out for attention from uncomprehending parents," another opined. Nothing you said or did could convince them that your fits came on you from the outside. The spirits would come to you and ride you, and you had no control over them.

Some of the therapists taped your episodes, too. You even had a small appearance on a National Geographic special about the spread of "superstitious" instances of possession. When you saw the entire special, you suddenly understood.

The Loa have always come to you so that they can play and express themselves in the mortal world. When properly appeased, they may even grant you strong gifts and help you or your friends and family. When angry, though, they may make you hurt yourself or place you in

CULT ECOSYSY

NAME: _____ **NATURE:** Deviant **FACTORY:** Erzuli Jingo
PLAYER: _____ **ESSENCE:** Primordial **CONCEPT:** Spirit Horse
CHRONICLE: _____ **DETRIMENT:** Loner **CABAL:** _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●○○○	Charisma: ●●●○○○	Perception: ●●●○○○
Endurance: ●●●○○○	Manipulation: ●●●○○○	Intelligence: ●●●○○○
Stamina: ●●●○○○	Appearance: ●●●○○○	Wisdom: ●●●○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●○○○○○	Crafts: ●○○○○○	Academics: ●○○○○○
Athletics: ●○○○○○	Drive: ●○○○○○	Computers: ●○○○○○
Awareness: ●●●○○○	Etiquette: ●○○○○○	Cosmology: ●○○○○○
Brawl: ●○○○○○	Fuzarism: ●●●○○○	Enigmas: ●○○○○○
Dodge: ●○○○○○	Meditation: ●●●○○○	Investigation: ●○○○○○
Expression: ●○○○○○	Melee: ●○○○○○	Law: ●○○○○○
Intimidation: ●○○○○○	Performance: ●●●○○○	Linguistics: ●○○○○○
Leadership: ●○○○○○	Stealth: ●○○○○○	Medicine: ●○○○○○
Streetwise: ●○○○○○	Survival: ●○○○○○	Occult: ●○○○○○
Subterfuge: ●○○○○○	Technology: ●○○○○○	Science: ●○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence: ●○○○○○	Life: ●○○○○○	Prime: ●○○○○○
Entropy: ●○○○○○	Matter: ●○○○○○	Spirit: ●○○○○○
Focus: ●○○○○○	Mind: ●○○○○○	Time: ●○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Avatar: ●●●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -0 0
Dream: ●○○○○○		Hurt: -1 0
Resources: ●○○○○○	WELLBEING	Injured: -1 0
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: -2 0
		Mauled: -2 0
		Crippled: -3 0
		Incapacitated: -4 0

RESONANCE

Dynamic: ●○○○○○	QUINTESSENCE
Entropy: ●○○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Static: ●○○○○○	

EXPERIENCE

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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PARADOX

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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CELIBAT

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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unpleasant situations. Now that you know what those spirits are — especially the one that always stays right behind you — you're starting to learn how to deal with them. From their influence, you can feel when your mind blanks and your body enters a trance, and now you can even focus yourself into such a state without being ridden, sometimes.

Concept: Other Cultists don't quite understand you at first. The focus on spirit congress isn't a common one in the Cult, but it's a legitimate kamamarga. For your part, you half accept and half despise your role. Being a conduit for spirits is a lot of work, and it sometimes makes you feel like you don't have a life of your own. On the other hand, it can be rewarding, and it does enable you to do things you could never do on your own — that is, magic.

Roleplaying Tips: At first, you come across as a fairly normal young man, but one episode of riding or converse with spirits blows that impression away. You've learned to be reticent because people just don't want to believe you. Since the body is just a shell or horse, you don't shirk from worn clothing and a bit of dirt. People who get to know you think of you as intense.

Magic: Through communion with spirits, and through trances in which you touch the spirit world, you become capable of incredible feats. You lose track of time in such trances, but that's hardly your specialty. While ridden, you have incredible endurance, and you can perform such feats as eating glass, using Life magic. You can also channel spirits that wish to speak or call forth their powers with Spirit magic.

Equipment: box knife, skateboard, rusted tire iron, light bulb (the mundanes seem to love that trick when you eat them)

ECOSY™

NAME: _____
 CHARACTER: Spirit Horse
 CHRONICLE: _____
 FACTION: Erzuli Jingo
 ESSENCE: Primordial
 CABAL: _____
 NATURE: Deviant
 DEITY: Anor: Loner

PHYSICAL
 Agile _____
 Enduring _____
 Tenacious _____
 SOCIAL
 Charismatic _____
 Commanding x2 _____
 Fearsome _____
 MENTAL
 Cunning _____
 Intuitive x3 _____
 Reflective x3 _____
 ABILITIES
 Awareness _____
 Enigmas _____
 Meditation _____
 Performance _____
 Streetwise _____
 Subterfuge _____
 MERITS & FLAWS _____

RESONANCE

DYNAMIC
 ENTROPIC: Furious
 STATIC

⊕ QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

WILLPOWER

ARETE

BACKGROUNDS
 Avatar x4 _____
 Dream x2 _____
 Resources x1 _____
 SPHERES
 Initiate of Life _____
 Disciple of Spirit _____
 Apprentice of Time _____
 ROTES _____

ECOSY™

NAME: _____
 CHARACTER: Computer Game Designer
 CHRONICLE: _____
 FACTION: _____
 ESSENCE: Pattern
 CABAL: _____
 NATURE: Architect
 DEITY: Anor: Director

PHYSICAL
 Dextrous x2 _____
 Enduring _____
 Tireless _____
 SOCIAL
 Expressive x3 _____
 Genial _____
 Persuasive _____
 MENTAL
 Determined x2 _____
 Disciplined x2 _____
 Knowledgeable _____
 ABILITIES
 Academics _____
 Computer _____
 Enigmas _____
 Expression _____
 Science _____
 Technology _____
 MERITS & FLAWS _____

RESONANCE

DYNAMIC
 ENTROPIC
 STATIC: Logical

⊕ QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

WILLPOWER

ARETE

BACKGROUNDS
 Contacts x2 _____
 Dream x2 _____
 Resources x3 _____
 SPHERES
 Initiate of Mind _____
 Initiate of Prime _____
 Initiate of Time _____
 ROTES _____

COMPUTER GATIE DESIGNER

Quote: *I'm not just looking for "fun." I'm looking for something that draws you in for hours and hours and leaves you wondering what kept you coming back.*

Prelude: With a fine education, a happy home life and a whip-smart mind, you could've been anything you wanted: astronaut, maybe, or research scientist or city architect. You dabbled in various pastimes, but you always kept coming back to your computer.

After playing through Tellus' *Lords of the Crypt* for the third time and continuing to have fun with the level design and the characterization, you switched your schooling, finished up some work in creative writing and settled on computer game design. You never looked back.

It was a grueling job. Sixty-hour weeks and huge caffeine intakes left you poring over code at a keyboard into the wee hours of the morning. Every time you'd start to nod off, you'd prod yourself and remember that your deadline was shot and that Sales was already breathing down your neck. Not only was your job and career on the line, but so were those of most of your friends and co-workers. You'd be damned if your code would make you the Judas in that affair and send you off with a résumé that would never garner work in the industry again.

Thirty hours later and well into the weekend, you felt yourself floating as the code flowed down the screen. Your disconnected fingers moved of their own accord, placing an inclusion here, a tight function there. Somehow, you were asleep and awake at the same time. Dreams beckoned at the periphery of your consciousness, yet you wrote, coded and compiled at the same time.

Miracle of miracles, it ran. In what your baffled but proud supervisor referred to as your "40 hours of coding like some God come down in front of a computer," you'd quashed 108 bugs from the bug list, improved the front end, patched out a memory leak and finished updating the entire design document. Your scripting flowed like liquid gold, and the computer game itself told a compelling story from the dreams that you'd woven into it.

Too bad the market sells these things like crap. If it's not *Diablo II*, it's poison.

Well, on to the next project. As the deadline looms, you can feel that state coming on again, and you know that you'll find yourself floating over your computer keyboard in a half-remembered dream realm where your typing collides with possibilities and makes something wonderful.

Concept: A computer geek's geek, you know all the technobabble, and you're a fair hand at coding, *plus* you're a creative writer. You may not be the industry best in either, but with a little magic, you can complete projects in record time and find ways to make code run meaner and tighter than anything short of a Virtual Adept's work. Unlike Virtual Adepts, you don't code for the ego gratification; you do it for the rush that comes as you solve problems and let your brain play.

Roleplaying Tips: Shy and inward-thinking, your mind constantly works over puzzles and ideas. When engaged in conversation, you can be quiet, or you can suddenly burst out with strange ideas and half-formed dreams. You keep up a passing knowledge of many different areas of trivia — no telling when something will be useful in a game or story. You're painfully shy around members of the opposite gender, and you don't always mesh well with other Ecstasies and their practices. Still, live a little, learn a little.

Magic: As a techno-Ecstatic you rely on your computer devices for a lot of magic. Unlike the code-intensive Adepts, you also gain power from dream, from the trance of letting programs flow from your fingers unbidden and from the process of solving difficult

CULT ECSTASY

NAME: PLAYER: CHRONICLE	NATURE: Architect ESSENCE: Pattern DESIGNER: Director	FACTORY: CONCEPT: Computer Game Designer CABAL:
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ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●○○○	Charisma: ●●●○○○	Perception: ●●●○○○
Dexterity: ●●●○○○	Manipulation: ●●●○○○	Intelligence: Analytical: ●●●○○○
Stamina: ●●●○○○	Appearance: ●●●○○○	Wits: ●●●○○○

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●○○○	Crafts: ●●●○○○	Academics: ●●●○○○
Athletics: ●●●○○○	Drive: ●●●○○○	Computer: ●●●○○○
Awareness: ●●●○○○	Esquarts: ●●●○○○	Cosmology: ●●●○○○
Brawl: ●●●○○○	Firearms: ●●●○○○	Enigmas: ●●●○○○
Dodge: ●●●○○○	Meditation: ●●●○○○	Investigation: ●●●○○○
Expression: ●●●○○○	Melie: ●●●○○○	Law: ●●●○○○
Instigation: ●●●○○○	Performance: ●●●○○○	Linguistics: ●●●○○○
Leadership: ●●●○○○	Stealth: ●●●○○○	Medicine: ●●●○○○
Streetwise: ●●●○○○	Survival: ●●●○○○	Occult: ●●●○○○
Subterfuge: ●●●○○○	Technology: ●●●○○○	Science: ●●●○○○

SPHERES		
Compendence: ●●●○○○	Life: ●●●○○○	Prime: ●●●○○○
Entropy: ●●●○○○	Matter: ●●●○○○	Spirit: ●●●○○○
Form: ●●●○○○	Mana: ●●●○○○	Time: ●●●○○○

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Contacts: ●●●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: 0 □
Dream: ●●●○○○	WILLPOWER	Hurt: 1 □
Resources: ●●●○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	Injured: 1 □
Dynamic: ●●●○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	Wounded: 1 □
Entropy: ●●●○○○	QUINTESSENCE	Mauled: 2 □
State: Legal: ●●●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Crippled: 1 □
EXPERIENCE	PARA	Incapacitated: 1 □

problems. When you bend your entire mind to a problem, you can perform incredible feats of concentration (with Mind magic), and you can work faster than the clock (with Time). More rudimentary engineering enables you to touch the source of Prime through a wellspring of half-formed ideas and a welter of creativity that often looks like a bizarre scratch pad of notes on a computer screen and a paper pad that you keep nearby.

Equipment: Toshiba Portégé portable computer, E3 T-shirt, sheaf of game-design documents, pirated compiler and OS software

98 CULT OF ECSTASY

EPILOGUE: THE MOMENT, SHATTERED



It is the present. Lee Ann leans forward, a look of resignation upon her face. Strathma steadies his pistol to cover her advance. Sitting in the chair, heedless, the man frowns. Kyle feels his awareness slipping through his body, leaving chills behind. The man in the chair bends to one side, as if to stand and dodge out of the way of the blade. He's moving too fast: He seems to leave a double-image that Kyle can see only vaguely.

Lee Ann's lotus sword shines as it pushes toward the man's throat. The colorful kerchief at his neck gives way ever so slightly as the blade brushes against it, just barely shearing by. Kyle knows that Lee Ann has missed. The blade continues forward while the man leans to one side. A small bauble glitters on his kerchief as the sword passes by and snags it.

The blade presses forward to the chair itself. The stuffed backing parts, even as the point of the sword carries along a bit of colorful kerchief and the tiny locket from the man's throat. He steps to one side, moving

closer to Lee Ann and blocking any chance of Strathma making a clear shot.

The locket pushes through the plush at the end of the sword. The blade reaches the hard wooden back of the chair and slams home with a reverberating thud. Caught between the two, the locket is crushed.

Lee Ann yanks her blade free, and Kyle is aware that time has settled back into its petty pace. He can hear the ticking of clocks as they resume once more after the suspended moment.

The man goes pale. He turns and scrabbles at the chair, grasping for the shattered remnants of his locket.

Lee Ann speaks wearily. "The heart of your power... so simple. Gone, now. I suppose that now you're one of the un-Enlightened — or emasculated, rather — that your 'friends' won't have any reason to give you any consideration. You should probably run as quickly as you can. They'll find you, of course. You may have money and influence, but they have magic. They'll think you're a risk. You might say anything, tell anyone,

just for a chance to have the magic back. I doubt you'll survive their ministrations, but who knows? Some of your victims may have survived, as well.

"You're in their place. How does it feel? Does that rush of terror and horror bring you closer to ecstasy? Does it let you feel the magic? No... it just makes you a victim. You can't enlighten someone by breaking him. You have to make him better.

"Now, you know why we follow the Code of Ananda. You know why we never bring experience on people unbidden. We are not here to make victims. We are here to make gods."

Lee Ann steps back away from the frantic man as he tries to piece together the shattered fragments of his locket — his phylactery, his soul. With a gesture of her blade she indicates that their work is done for now.

Kyle and Strathma start their way up the stairs. Kyle pauses and asks, "What about others? Shouldn't we see..."

"No," Lee Ann cuts him off. "He knew we were coming; we won't find the others or their victims here. But we've tamed one more victimizer today. There may not be endings in time, Kyle, but this is a beginning."

SUGGESTED RESOURCES



We don't advocate that readers of this book actually go out and engage in a lot of the Cult practices herein. Drugs, pain trancing, extreme sports and casual sex can all be very dangerous! That's why *playing* through such activities is safer than trying them yourself. Of course, to have an idea of what you're playing, you might want to read some books or watch a few movies that help give you an idea of what your character's all about. The suggestions here are just a few minor ones; we're sure you'll think of more.

Bacchus, by Eddie Campbell — A graphic novel regarding the travails of the God of Merriment in the modern age, as he is brought low by his own venerable stature and his inability to control his excesses. Even so, he perseveres, but without understanding how or why.

The Kama Sutra — Once you're done snickering, check the actual book out. It's not just a work of erotic fiction, but rather a guide to pleasures and to the inherent power of different forms of sexuality.

The Vedas — The four Indian Vedas form the core of Hinduism. Since Tantric Hinduism comes from Hindu roots, it's useful to see the beginnings. A worthy

addition to any library, to complement other major religious texts such as the Bible or the Koran.

Anything by Carlos Castaneda — A great thinker, imaginer and challenger of mundane ideas. Try *Journey to Ixtlan* for a particularly Cult-inspirational book.

Food of the Gods, by Terence McKenna — An examination of foods and substances that bring on trance and ecstasy. Not something to be tried by amateurs, but a good resource on shamanic ecstasies.

Trainspotting — An ugly, ugly movie that provides insight into the flip side of the Cult: The crash of the hardcore junkie.

Dangerous Liaisons — The dance of innuendo and social stigma all ultimately revolves around desire. See the Cult of Ecstasy dancing at its wicked best in this movie.

Shall We Dance — A Japanese import that plays on the feeling of isolation that comes with being a practitioner of ecstasy in the middle of mundane society. A Japanese businessman by day takes lessons in dance by night, but he can't let anyone know, or he'll be ostracized and lose his job. He tiptoes through the business world until, one day, he sees another businessman and, from the man's walk, recognizes a fellow dancer.

Call of Ecstasy™

NAME:
 PLAYER:
 CHRONICLE:

NATURE:
 ESSENCE:
 DEITY/ANØR:

FACTION:
 CONCEPT:
 CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

SOCIAL

MENTAL

Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

SKILLS

KNOWLEDGES

Alertness	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	○○○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	●○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

ARETE

HEALTH

○○○○○	● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised	-0 □
○○○○○		Hurt	-1 □
○○○○○		Injured	-1 □
○○○○○		Wounded	-2 □
○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	Mauled	-2 □
○○○○○		Crippled	-5 □
○○○○○		Incapacitated	□

QUINTESSENCE



PARADOX

OTHER TRAITS

○○○○○
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○

RESONANCE

Dynamic	○○○○○
Entropic	○○○○○
Static	○○○○○

EXPERIENCE

Call of Cthulhu OF ECSTASY™

MERITS & FLAWS

MERIT	TYPE	COST	FLAW	TYPE	BONUS

MAGIC

PREFERRED EFFECTS	ROTES

COMBAT

Maneuver	Roll	Difficulty	Damage/Effect

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

ARTIØR: _____

Call of Cthulhy™

EXPANDED BACKGROUND

ALLIES

LIBRARY

CONTACTS

MENTOR

DESTINY

NODE

INFLUENCE

RESOURCES

POSSESSIONS

GEAR (CARRIED)

EQUIPMENT (OWNED)

FOCI

WONDERS

FAMILIAR

PAST INCARNATIONS

Call of Ecstasy™

HISTORY AWAKENING

GOALS/DESTINY

SEEKINGS: _____ QUIETS: _____

DESCRIPTION

Age: _____

Apparent Age: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Age of Awakening: _____

Hair: _____

Eyes: _____

Race: _____ Appearance/Nature of Avatar: _____

Nationality: _____

Height: _____

Weight: _____

Sex: _____

VISUALS

CABAL CHART

CHARACTER SKETCH



CULT OF ECSTASY™

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Alternatively shunned and courted, derided and admired, the Cult embodies the pioneering spirit of the Traditions, but also the dark underbelly of intemperance. In their quest to break through old preconceptions, they reach for tomorrow by dancing on the razor's edge of excess. But will this vision open new futures or trap them in sybaritic futility? The Cult's sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll can open new vistas, but only if tempered with direction and determination — hang on, it's going to be a wild ride.

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