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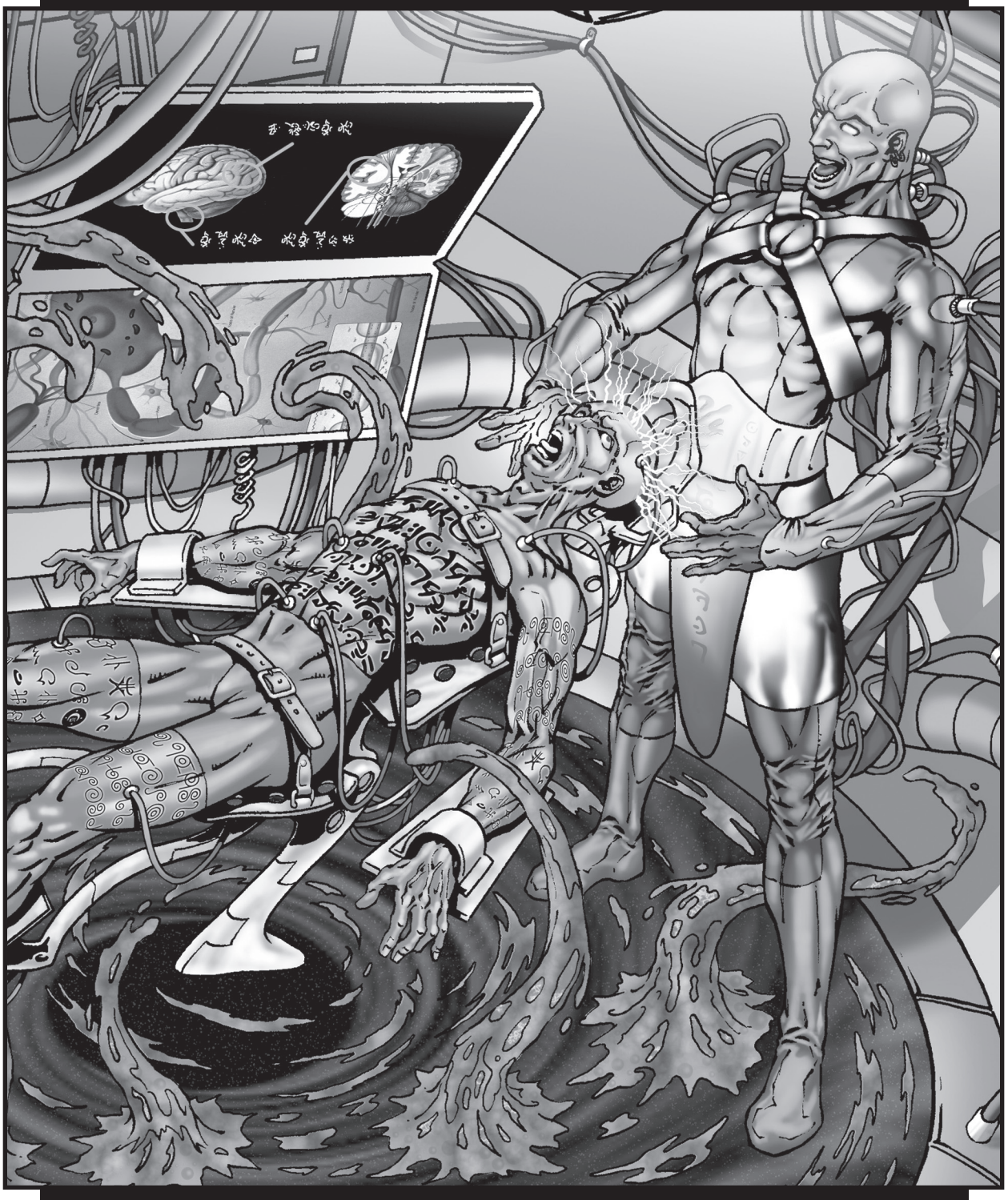
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HERO SYSTEM
FIFTH EDITION



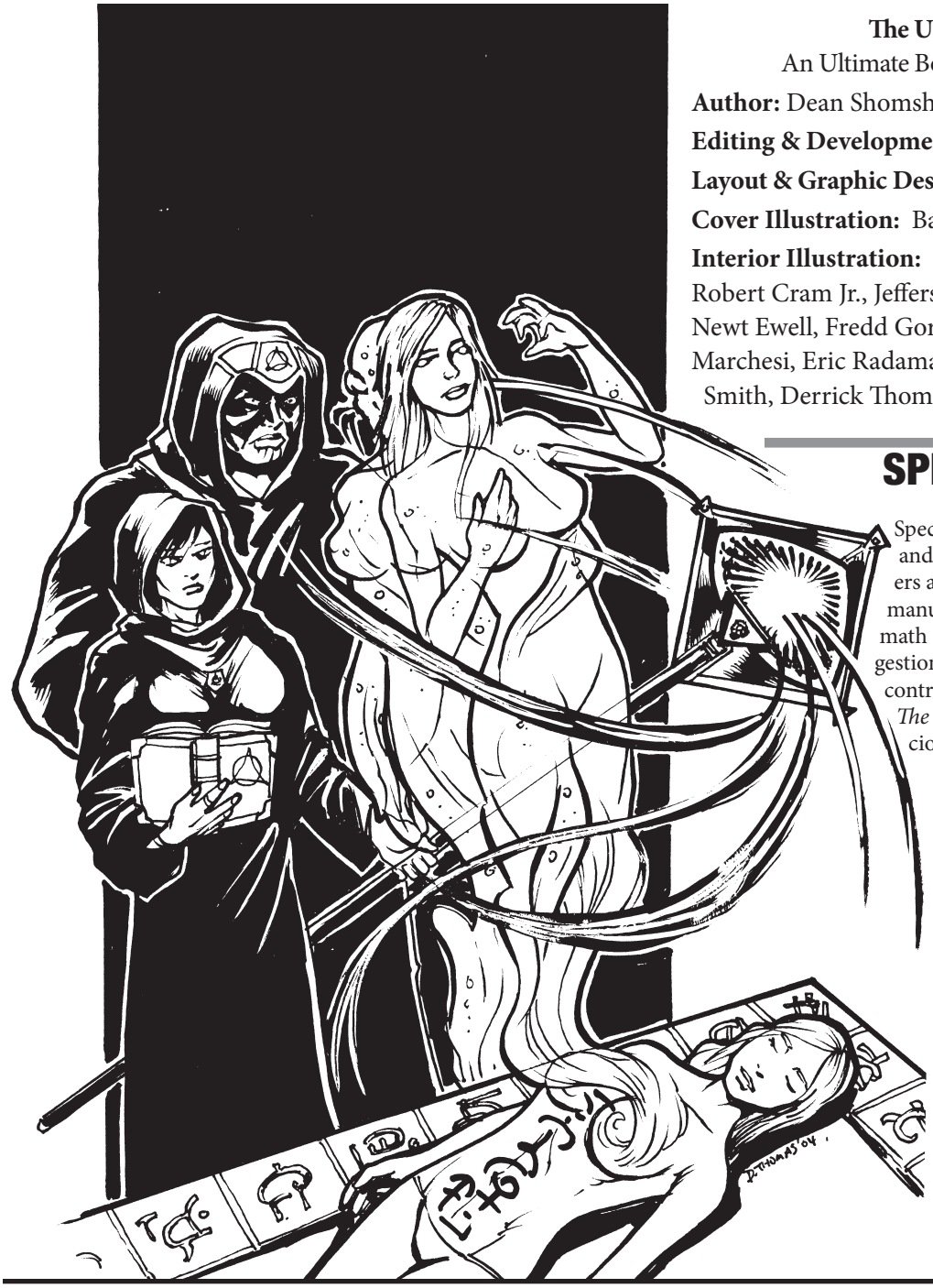
DEAN SHOMSHAK

THE ULTIMATE MYSTIC



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The Ultimate Mystic

An Ultimate Book for the *Hero System*

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INTRODUCTION



Exalt thyself: be more than man.
Be saint or be magician,
And where the burning Sword
awaits,
Defy the old seraphic ban.

Clark Ashton Smith, "Dominium in Excelsis"

GLOSSARY

The Ultimate Mystic uses a variety of unusual and esoteric terms relating to the mystical subjects it describes. You can find a Glossary of these terms on page 220, and the Index tells you where to find more information.

Humans have believed in magic as long as they've been human. One of the oldest pictures of a person, a painting on a cave wall, shows a man wearing the horns of a stag. Perhaps he's a shaman. Perhaps he's a god. He unmistakeably has some power over the animals around him. Collections of spells like the Egyptian *Pyramid Texts* are among the earliest examples of writing. To this day, every culture in the world has its magicians who try to control nature, destiny, and the spirit world through secret powers.

The magician is one of the oldest and most universal characters in stories, too. The world's first work of fiction — a story presented as such, rather than a myth — is about the Egyptian priest Setne Khamuas and his adventures with ghosts, gods, and a cursed book of magic. So it's no wonder that magic and magicians often appear in roleplaying games, too. Spellcasters are most common in Fantasy games, but they also appear in many other genres, from eerie horror stories to pulse-pounding, superhero action.

Many games treat magic only as a source of power. They define what spells a wizard can cast, how many times per day, for what particular effect. They don't pay much attention to how the character gained magical power, why the magic works the way it does, or how magic fits into the world at large. A fireball spell? It's just a rocket launcher you don't have to carry. There's no sense of awe or mystery; no sense that the magician touches secrets and dares to claim power denied to lesser men — but that's what *The Ultimate Mystic* is about.

The Ultimate Mystic differs a bit from other *Ultimate* books, because a *HERO System* mystic isn't defined by any particular Characteristic, Skill, or Powers — he's defined by the *reason* for his Powers. His magic connects him to aspects of reality most people never see. He meets gods and spirits face to face. He knows the world doesn't work the way most people think — and visits other worlds, too. He doesn't just use magic, he knows why it works. And that connection, that knowledge, sets him apart from other people. Even if a mystic flaunts his powers, most people cannot really understand him because they lack his knowledge and experiences.

That knowledge and experience distinguishes a mystic from a mutant, an alien, a soldier with a weapon, or any other sort of character. And that's what makes the character a *mystic,* not just a walking artillery piece whose attacks are labeled "spells."

What's In The Book

Chapter One, *Paths Of Power,* covers all the aspects of creating a mystical character. In addition to looking at Powers, Skills, and other game mechanics, it discusses various types of mystical characters. Although this chapter concentrates on true mystics — characters who cast spells — it also discusses gods, spirits, vampires, and other supernatural creatures as characters. They aren't spellcasters (at least, not usually, and not by the standard definition of "spellcaster"), but mystics interact with them a lot, and they fall within the "mystic" category as most gamers conceive of it. Mystics often move between the material, human world and supernatural Otherworlds. Chapter Two, *Realms Beyond,* describes the sorts of planes mystics may visit, and tells how to create a "Multiverse" of mystic dimensions.

Chapter Three, *The Arts Arcane,* is about magic. Though it includes many sample spells, this chapter is not primarily a source of pre-generated spells for characters. For that, see the *Fantasy Hero Grimoire* series, *The Mystic World,* and other books from Hero Games. Rather, Chapter Three focuses on how mystics believe their magic works. Several styles of magic from history and legend are described in detail, from the mystical theory behind the magic to sample spells for each style.

Chapter Four, *Magic, Genre By Genre,* shows how to use mystical characters in various gaming genres. Not every sort of mystic fits comfortably in every genre, and some genres include mystical character types all their own.

Chapter Five, *Mist And Shadows,* rounds out the book with a guide to the special subculture of mystics and supernatural creatures. Denizens of this Mystic World range from powerless charlatans to omnipotent gods. While this chapter concentrates on the Mystical World as a secret, magical side to the modern world, much of the chapter also applies to settings where the supernatural is an open, familiar part of life.



"Realism"

The Ultimate Mystic frequently refers to real styles of magic, real people from history who claimed they were mystics, and real supernatural beliefs. This treatment doesn't arise from any conviction that magic itself is real and that gamers need to respect that reality (though Hero Games certainly respects legitimate religious beliefs, which may have a mystic component). *The Ultimate Mystic* isn't a guide for aspiring wizards and witches. It's all make-believe. Good make-believe, however, needs material to work from. Mythology and legend offer you more source material than you could possibly make up by yourself… and it's material with a proven ability to arouse the imagination and emotions. The myths of magic *feel* true, in a way no invented lore ever could. Knowing those legends gives your characters, your settings, and your campaigns greater intensity.

Admittedly, you shouldn't worry too much about staying true to the details of some grimoire or folktale. The people who invented the lore of magic didn't care how well their spells and legends would adapt to a game. This is especially true with books that claim to impart "real magic": they can be incredibly tedious. When you research folklore or occultism in search of inspiration, look for the essential idea hiding behind the details. For instance, no one but a hopeless pedant could care whether your fictional mystic summons his fictional demon using an authentic magic circle cribbed from a grimoire. What matters is the *idea* of the magic circle — the ritual space that protects the mystic from what he summons, where any mistake or damage to the circle could free the spirit and expose the character to danger. That's what goes in the game.

Some gamers don't like even this much realism. Nobody believes in mutants who fire energy blasts from their eyes, but millions of people around the world believe in real magicians who cast real spells or summon real spirits. Almost everyone believes in a god, too, and you can't discuss magic and mysticism without touching on religious beliefs. Some players may be insulted to see their own supernatural beliefs treated as fictions. Others may think that some supernatural beliefs or practices are blasphemous, even when treated as fiction. Know your players' limits before you bring mysticism into your campaign, because it's not a joke to them. For its part, *The Ultimate Mystic* does not set out to insult anyone's mystical beliefs — but no religion or occult doctrine receives special favors, either. The book is written with the assumption that readers are mentally and emotionally stable enough to tell the difference between reality and make-believe.



OTHER HERO SYSTEM BOOKS OF INTEREST

These books also cover the subject of magic and the mystical in the *HERO System,* though you don't need them to read and use *The Ultimate Mystic.*

Fantasy Hero discusses the nuts and bolts of magic and spellcasting characters in Fantasy campaigns. Its extensive chapter on how to create Fantasy magic systems and spells is too long to reprint in this book.

Fantasy Hero Grimoires I and II supply thousands of pre-generated spells. Though they're designed for Fantasy campaigns, players and GMs can adapt them to other genres, too.

The Mystic World shows the supernatural side of the contemporary Champions Universe, from cults to cosmic entities. Gamemasters may find it useful as an example of putting *The Ultimate Mystic*'s guidelines into practice. Its companion book, *Arcane Adversaries*, offers a selection of mystical villains ranging from minor sorcerers to world-destroying Horrors From Beyond.

DEMON presents an entire mystical organization for *Champions,* complete with its own cosmology, beliefs, and ritual practices, which again may prove useful as an example of applying the information you'll find in this book.

chapter one:



MYSTICAL CHARACTER CREATION

PATHS TO POWER

TYPES OF MYSTICS



As the mind of God creates by His word, so man by his mind and speech can procreate immortal progeny.

—Lodovico Lazarelli

Creating a mystical character involves a lot more than selecting Powers and Skills. This chapter begins with a guide to various sorts of mystical or supernatural characters, and makes general suggestions about representing them in *HERO System* terms. The next section covers the backgrounds and motivations of mystics. It includes the archetypal career path of a mystic, found in legends and fiction alike. The rest of the chapter discusses *HERO System* game mechanics: mystics might not be defined by any particular game mechanic, but they do have their own style. It includes several new Perks for mystics.

Fiction and folklore describe many sorts of mystical characters. *The Ultimate Mystic* concentrates on "true mystics": people who know how to cast spells or otherwise wield supernatural power, but who remain ordinary human beings in every other way. Other supernatural creatures receive mention as well, but human mystics (including occult investigators and the like) usually receive the most attention in fiction and gaming.

TRUE MYSTICS

Somewhere, somehow, the true mystic learned to cast spells. Strictly speaking, a true mystic has no innate powers, only very unusual skills. Even in settings where magic is an inborn talent, mystics typically need special training to use "the Power." Because of a mystic's special knowledge and training, he controls energies unknown to most people — whether personal psychic powers or energies channeled from trans-cosmic gods. Mystics fall into three general categories: scholar-mages; wild talents and "mad mages"; and priests, pacters, and Servants of Higher Powers.

Scholar-Mages

But to me my mother Themis, and not once only,
And Gaia, one person beneath the varied names,
Had foretold what was the future dispensation
That the way of fate was not by strength or force of might:
Victory and power proceeded from intelligence.

—Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*

In many traditions, people gain mystical power through long study of occult lore and spiritual exercises. Perhaps anyone can use magic but, as with nuclear physics, poetry, and other intellectual disciplines, few people possess the talent to become really good at it. In settings where characters need a special "Gift" to work magic, they still may have to develop that power through study, meditation, asceticism, or ritual.

Scholarly mystics most obviously fit in literate societies. Long ago, just being able to read and write seemed magical. Nowadays, the savant retains a hint of mystical power: there's a touch of magic in the respect granted to consultants, trend-watchers, and other self-styled experts. Illiterate societies have their intellectuals too, though. The druids' legendary twenty-year program of study and memorization filled Roman writers with awe, while modern pharmaceutical researchers tap tribal healers' knowledge of medicinal herbs. A shaman or witch-doctor can be as much a scholar-mage as any wizard in a tower or post-modern cybermage.

Truly powerful scholar-mages tend to be elderly. In fact, they might be centuries old, using their magic to stave off their own aging. Gaining and keeping magic power through scholarship demands years of training in meditation, visualization, and other mental disciplines.

Scholar-mages gain power more slowly than other sorts of mystics, but most depictions of magic agree they acquire the greatest flexibility in the long run. Their power also comes with fewer strings attached. Scholar-mages can learn any number of

spells, and no god or spirit has a veto over their powers. Indeed, some occult traditions say a sufficiently learned mystic can command the gods.

PLAYING A SCHOLAR-MAGE

No character is defined by just one facet of his background, but mystic study and training consumes a *lot* of a scholar-mage's life. People don't make such commitments casually. Give thought to why your scholar-mage character spent years becoming a mystic. What does he want from magic? These characters range from ascetics seeking spiritual advancement (who regard the powers they wield as unnecessary distractions) to haunted, vengeance-driven souls who turn to the study of magic to supply the weapons they need to achieve their goals, to power-hungry warlocks eager to rule the world. Many scholar-mages are intellectuals who use their powers neither for good nor evil, and just want to be left alone to continue their research. Of course, such introverts tend not to be the ones who have adventures.

What's your character's attitude to his knowledge and powers? In fiction, scholar-mages often adopt an aloof, mysterious manner. It's easy to think you're better than other people when you know so much more, wield powers they can barely imagine, and it's all through your own hard work. That doesn't limit the possibilities for scholar-mages (fortunately, since an "I know everything but I'm not going to tell you" attitude becomes very annoying in a game). You could just as plausibly play your scholar-mage as an erudite babbler eager to share what he knows because it's *so cool;* a wise and kindly mentor to younger characters; or any other personality you feel suitable for a smart and highly learned person.

CHARACTERISTICS

A scholar-mage's power depends on mental ability and discipline. STR doesn't matter much for mages. They can have lower PD, ED, and STUN than most characters, too. Superheroic scholar-mages may show great physical competence compared to normal humans, but they remain within human limits. For instance, ordinary thugs with blackjacks have cold-cocked comic-book wizards like Dr. Strange, and more than one mighty-thewed barbarian has hacked a powerful wizard in twain with a sweep of his enormous broadsword. Scholar-mages rely on magical defense, not innate toughness.

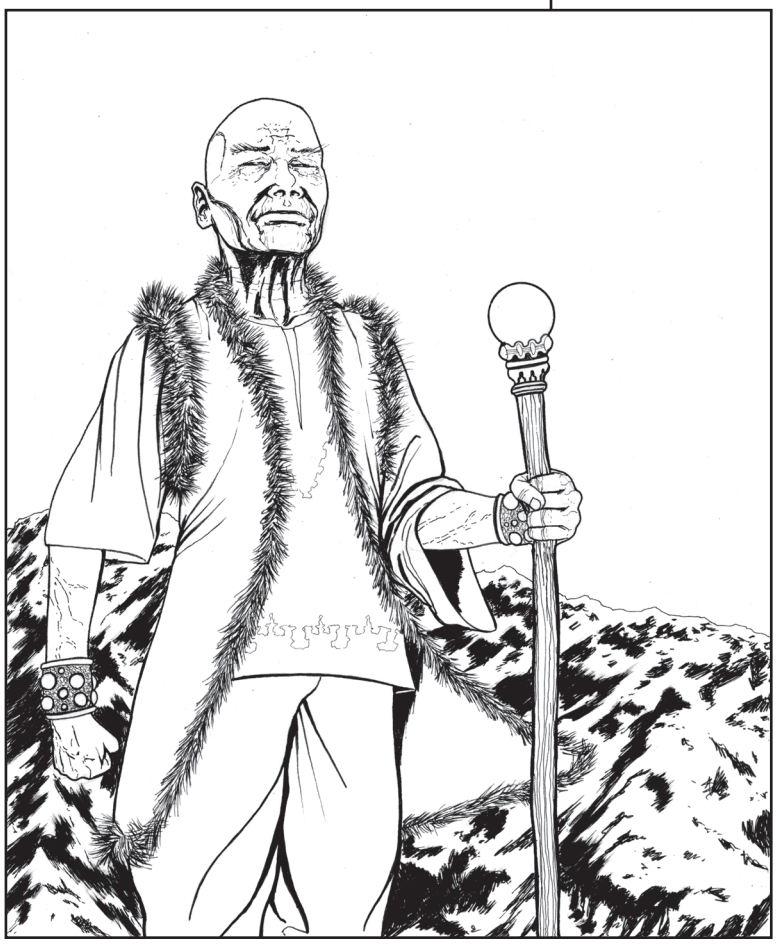
This is not to say they can't display great endurance. Mystics do yoga meditations for hours, work around the clock researching a demon lord's secret name, and then pop off to a battle in Polkadot Hell without even grabbing a sandwich first. CON, REC, and END could actually be high by normal human standards.

Mental characteristics form the cornerstone of the scholar-mage. INT is vital: sorcerers emphasize Intellect Skills. EGO matters too, to reflect general mental discipline and gain a high ECV for mental powers. A high PRE reflects a sorcerer's willpower, ability to face Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, and the charisma that comes from confidence, power, and will. Socially inept sorcerers might buy PRE with the -1 Limitation *Only To Protect Against Presence Attacks.*

Of course, these rules have exceptions. A scholar-mage could also be a barbell boy or a skilled martial artist. An elder sage might know kick-ass magic but be so slow and fragile that he dare not enter combat at all. Some mystics might not be extraordinarily intelligent or strong-willed; these would need great patience and diligence to gain their magic, or use some of the "shortcuts" described in the Disadvantages section. Such a lack of innate talent could explain why a scholar-mage turns to evil: he sees stealing artifacts, sacrificing virgins, and cutting deals with terrible Powers and Principalities as a way to acquire magical power beyond his real competence.

SKILLS

Every scholar-mage needs a lot of Knowledge Skills about magic and mystic lore. Languages are also valuable, since arcane scholarship usually requires reading ancient tomes in obscure or archaic languages (Cryptography with the *Translation Only* (-½) Limitation, described on page 57 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook, also works well for this). Scholar-mages excel at magic-oriented Skills such as Analyze (Magic), Spell Research, and Power: Magic. Other Skills are optional; select them to represent the character's background and interests. At least a few miscellaneous Skills help define a mage as a unique character instead of a heap of game mechanics.



SCHOLAR-MAGE: ZONTAR BOK, WARRIOR-MAGE OF SHAMBALLAH

Zontar Bok of Shamballah spent his boyhood years herding sheep and learning horsemanship. While still a teenager, he survived a few battles against raiders from the dark empire of Agharti. At 17, his wits and diligence brought him to the attention of a wizard, who took him as an apprentice.

After many adventurous years as a warrior-mage, Zontar Bok retired from field duty to study deeper secrets of magic from Shamballah's spiritual leaders, the enigmatic, serpentine Nagas. He took a subtler part in the war against Agharti: divining Aghartan plans, breaking curses sent by the empire's foul priests, and teaching the next generation of warrior-mages. Eventually, Zontar decided he'd lived long enough. Surrounded by his students, he cast the Rite of Transcendence and dissolved in light.

But death did not end of Zontar Bok's story. Somehow, the crystal orb from the top of his staff of power survived the millennia. By devious routes it came to America, where a young psychic found it — and Zontar's spirit, sleeping within it. Now Zontar Bok lives again, if only for short periods in a borrowed body, and he continues the fight against evil.

Though other mystics find Zontar pompous in his assumption of seniority and leadership, mystical heroes appreciate the old wizard's power and tactical experience. Zontar Bok combines a wide knowledge of combat Thaumaturgy with a knack for improvising minor spells for any purpose.

PERKS

Scholar-mages follow the usual mystical guidelines for Perks. Mystical Contacts, Favors, and the *Membership* Fringe Benefit are common. Scholar-mages often have a Base, their sanctum where they keep their books and conduct arcane experiments. Great scholar-mages acquire a Reputation in the Mystic World for their erudition as well as their power, while perhaps remaining unknown to the public.

TALENTS

Mental Talents such as Eidetic Memory and Speed Reading are very appropriate for scholar-mages. Universal Translator generally takes the form of a "spell of comprehension," rather than an innate Talent. Other Talents are as appropriate — or not — for scholar-mages as for any mystic.

POWERS

A pure scholar-mage can have only minor innate Powers that come from training, such as extra Running or Mental Defense. Powers bought as spells form the core of the scholar-mage and other true mystics. Scholar-mages stand out for the wide range of powers they can use, and their use of Mental Powers and even more unusual ranged attacks.

Scholar-mages may supplement their innate spell powers with magic items. These range from mere Foci to potent Independent artifacts of elder wizardry. Keep in mind, though, that a scholar-mage should retain at least a little power even if he loses all his magic items. This character type is based on knowledge, not hardware.

DISADVANTAGES

More than any other character type, scholar-mages adhere strictly to the "mystical" style for Disadvantages. They emphasize Psychological Limitations and social Disadvantages such as DNPC, Hunted, Rivalry, and Social Limitation. The "physical" Disadvantages — Physical Limitation, Dependency, Vulnerability, and Susceptibility — require special versions such as Vows and Prohibitions, or a curse (see pages 67-68).

Wild Talents And Mad Mages

Not all mystics need to study their magic. Fiction and folklore also describe a strong tradition of mystics born with the ability to work magic. In some tales, magic is an innate power: you have it or you don't, and training merely grants greater power and control. In other stories, magic still requires scholarship but a few rare people have a natural genius for spellcasting, the way Mozart had a genius for music. These prodigies can be called *Wild Talents,* as good a name as any for all mystics who owe their power to inborn ability rather than long, patient study.

Lunatics can become *very* Wild Talents. Madness itself carries a whiff of the supernatural, since it places people beyond the normal bounds of behavior. Many societies believe the mad are "touched by God." Some mystics say raw belief has magical power, and the mad may obtain special insights denied to the sane. One way or another, a lunatic with an aptitude for magic might learn to cast spells without knowing it. It's nearly impossible to wean such *Mad Mages* from their insanity, however, because they magically produce evidence to support their delusions. Mad Mages are more limited in their magic than other mystics, since they seldom grow beyond the powers set by their madness. Still, playing a total nut — who magically makes his delusions real — can be a lot of fun.

PLAYING A WILD TALENT

One important part of a Wild Talent's background is how he found he had mystical power. Did he deliberately try to find out? In a setting where Wild Talents are common, anyone might want to know. Did "the Power" come as a surprise? If so, was it a pleasant surprise or a nasty shock? Or did the character know all along he was a potential mystic? In some settings, magic power can run in families, or potential mystics might bear some distinctive features, such as an unusual hair or eye color, or a birthmark.

How does the character feel about being a mystic? A Wild Talent might feel superior to everyone else (an appropriate attitude for villains). At the other extreme, a Wild Talent might feel like a freak. A lot depends on the character's culture: a Wild Talent who comes from a long line of wizard-kings probably regards his mystic powers a bit differently than someone who faces death if people learn he was born with a witch-mark.

For Mad Mages, the challenge lies in creating a system of delusions to explain the character's powers. As a player, you also have to create a character that can function as part of a group. Bemuse and amuse the other players with your mad mage's nuttiness; try not to irritate them.

CHARACTERISTICS

Like scholar-mages, Mad Mages and Wild Talents tend to be physically normal (unless a Mad Mage's delusion happens to include super-strength or something like that). Unlike scholar-mages, they don't have to be especially intelligent or strong-willed — they *could* be, it isn't mandatory for the character type.

SKILLS

Wild Talents don't always need lots of Intellect or Background Skills, at least in the beginning. The whole point of these archetypes is that they don't *have* to know what they're doing. In many settings, though, characters with innate magic might still study a variety of mystic lore as they develop their powers. A Mad Mage may possess formidable Skills, but they have nothing to do with his magic.

PERKS

Depending on the setting, Wild Talents may acquire the same Perks as any scholar-mage, such as a sanctum Base, or Contacts with other mystics. In a setting where scholar-mages predominate, however, the *Membership* Fringe Benefit becomes

inappropriate, at least for starting characters. If they belonged to an arcane society, after all, they wouldn't be self-taught. Most occult groups wouldn't let a Mad Mage through the door, even if the nutcase wanted to join, but Mad Mages might have their own weird little groups.

TALENTS

Despite their name, nothing about Wild Talents demands they possess any sort of Talents. Nothing forbids it, either. In a setting where most or all mystics are Wild Talents, though, a Talent could be an interesting way to give all mystics a particular power. For instance, Perfect Pitch could indicate the potential to cast spells in a setting based on bardic magic, or Danger Sense might be yet another mystic ability a Wild Talent manifests.

POWERS

Wild Talents usually show the same range of Powers as other mystics, but with a narrower selection of Powers and fewer Limitations based on the trappings of spellcasting. There's no reason a self-taught Wild Talent wouldn't need the same spellcasting tools as a scholar-mage, but not using such tools makes it clearer the character draws on an innate talent. In some settings, a Wild Talent's magic looks very much like innate super-powers or psionic abilities.

Wild Talents and Mad Mages could have very strange special effects. Self-taught mystics may specialize in peculiar ways: imagine a wizard whose spells all involve food, or who plays his spells on an electric guitar. Mad Mages are all *sui generis,* with selections of powers based on their individual delusions. Any magic items owned by a Mad Mage or Wild Talent should likewise reflect their quirky, highly individual approaches to magic.

DISADVANTAGES

Wild Talents have the same range of Disadvantages as scholar-mages. Vows and Prohibitions are purely psychosomatic: no external power enforces them. Mad Mages could unconsciously impose any sort of bizarre weakness on themselves — and, of course, they are just plain crazy besides.

Priests, Pacters, And Servants Of Higher Powers

Mystics often invoke powerful supernatural entities in their spells. This doesn't imply any special reverence; Names of Power are just another tool in the sorcerer's kit. Some mages, however, seek a closer and stronger relationship to the mystical Great Powers. Depending on the nature of the relationship, these mystics become Priests, Pacters, or Servants of Higher Powers.

Magic and religion are always bound together like Siamese twins. If nothing else, gods represent a source of power mystics may draw upon. Many religions explicitly grant priests the right to wield divine power for magic. Even if the gods don't offer magic to their priests, shamans, voodoo houngans, pagan witches, and other religious mystics might back up their spiritual beliefs with half-understood sorcery.



In modern or future settings, priest-magicians generally follow so-called "pagan" or "primitive" religions. In Fantasy settings, they worship actual gods who make their presence known through regular displays of power or visitations. In superhero settings, they may worship extradimensional "gods" divorced from any Earthly religious context. The widespread "ethical" religions like Christianity and Buddhism disapprove of sorcery. The Abrahamic tradition (Judaism, Christianity, Islam and their offshoots) regards virtually *all* magic as morally suspect if not actively Satanic. Priests may invoke divine power to bless, exorcise, or heal, but nothing else. Orthodox Buddhism suggests that mystical Enlightenment brings various magical powers, but these powers are distractions a mystic should ignore.

All the "ethical" religions, however, spin off mystical cults

WILD TALENT: JEZERAY ILLYESCU

From earliest childhood, Jezeray could see spirits and auras. Talking with people no one else could see, and saying what people really felt, isolated her from other children. After high school, she tried to make a living as a psychic, with little success despite a growing power to see the past and future and "read" psychic impressions off objects.

And then she found a partner. In a junk shop, a green glass ball paperweight caught her eye. Its psychic aura was rich and intense, almost *alive*. She bought it and scanned it. Jezeray found not just a past, but a person — a spirit in the glass ball. He called himself Zontar Bok and said he was a Warrior-Mage of Shamballah. He sounded crazy, but Jezeray thought channeling a spirit guide might help her business. Her attempt to channel Zontar, however, worked better than either expected. Zontar found himself in the body of a nineteen-year-old girl, an embarrassing position for one of his age and dignity. He made a lousy spiritual advisor, but remained an excellent wizard.

Through Zontar, Jezeray gets to move in a much higher circle of the Mystic World. Through Jezeray, Zontar gets to live again and carry on the war against evil. Jezeray is not merely a host for Zontar, though. Her powers to "read" psychic impressions, locate spirits, project her astral body, and see the past, future, and spirit world make her a formidable detective. Mystic heroes appreciate the young psychic as much as the old wizard who shares her body.

PACTER: HIEROPHANT

No one but the Hierophant himself knows his story. He hides his past well: no government has his fingerprints or tax records on file; he has no bank account, credit cards, or picture ID. Even the mystical community's grapevine can't discover who he is, or at least his teachers either don't recognize him now or they won't talk. He is a true legal nonperson.

The Hierophant is a powerful mystic, but he wants more. He wants to be feared, loved, obeyed... but he lacks the nerve to stand alone. He's a mercenary priest, always serving as front man for one dimension lord or another, offering it worship on Earth (or, in a *Star Hero* game, the Galaxy) in return for greater power for himself.

Naturally, this *modus operandi* only attracts evil dimension lords. Time and again, magical heroes must stop the Hierophant and his deluded minions from helping some demon or vile godling invade the Earth. For his part, the Hierophant has a vicious temper and repeatedly seeks revenge on mystics who thwart him.

and practices. Kabbalism, for instance, is mystical Judaism; and while a true Kabbalist doesn't seek magical power, Kabbalah supplied the intellectual framework for much of Western ceremonial magic. Mystical cults often slide into outright heresy and their leaders claim to wield magical powers.

A priest-magician could worship an actual god, a demon lord or other spirit, an extradimensional tyrant, a cosmic conceptual entity, or a powerful elder sorcerer — what matters is the being's power and willingness to "share" it. The god could even be a figment of the priest's imagination, making the priest also a Mad Mage. In some settings, a "god" may fib about its identity: a priest-magician may think he receives his powers and marching orders from Jesus Christ, when actually his "god" is a cunning demon or a dimensional conqueror disguised by illusion.

Mystics hungry for magic power sometimes cut deals with powerful supernatural entities. Selling your soul to the Devil is the classic example. Evil mystics also make pacts with dark gods, sorcerous tyrants of other dimensions, unspeakable Things From Beyond, or other malignant entities. In return for power, the pacter surrenders his soul. Pacters also usually serve their master's vile agenda. The pacter may worship his master, but the pact is really just a business arrangement: buy now, pay forever.

Not all supernatural entities demand that mystic allies sell their souls, sacrifice virgins, or do other nasty things to prove their loyalty. They simply ask that mystics use their power to further their patron's interests. For instance, a devout Kabbalist might channel power from angels through the favor of God, but he wouldn't say he'd "sold his soul" for power. Unlike a pacter, a "Servant of Higher Powers" believes in the rightness of his patron's agenda. His master gives him greater magical powers to make him a more effective troubleshooter and advocate. The relationship stays more professional than that of a priest, though. A servant of higher powers also does not necessarily belong to a congregation of fellow believers.

Not every entity who enters into pacts with mystics is necessarily evil, but they are necessarily ruthless in pursuing their goals: no truly benign entity demands such a complete submission from mystics. On the other hand, truly evil entities never accept anything less from their servants. The "Higher Powers" are not always kind and good — in fact, they can be completely fanatical — but they think their cause is righteous, and they usually give their servants more leeway. A pacter who tries to end his pact faces death and eternal torment. A servant of higher powers who wants to quit merely loses whatever power his patron gave him.

PLAYING A PRIEST, PACTER, OR SERVANT OF HIGHER POWERS

This character revolves around his relationship to his divine or demonic patron. How did this relationship start? A character might feel a calling to serve, along with a desire to learn magic; or the patron might choose the character and make an offer he can't refuse. Pacters usually choose their bond, though sometimes a magical experiment goes awry and a pact is the only alternative to immediate death. Why did the pacter think his power was worth losing his freedom or his soul?

A priest, pacter, or servant always has to consider his patron's desires as well as his own. For priests and servants, how do their adventures further their patron's agenda? A pacter's chief motive usually becomes, "Serve the dark master" given time, but until that final surrender the character's goals probably have something to do with what drove him to the pact in the first place. For instance, a servant of the cosmic entity Urizen the Lawgiver might have become a mystic from a desire to see justice done when worldly law enforcement fails, while a villain who sold his soul for wealth might set up a criminal organization to bring in still more money.

CHARACTERISTICS

A high INT matters less for priests, pacters, and servants, because they receive help from their patron. Priests often have a high PRE to go with their communications Skills. These characters sometimes are more physically competent than other mystics. In particular, High Priests of Evil fight with hysterical fury when cornered. Pacters sometimes receive extra physical competence from their patrons, and fight as furiously as evil high priests: their masters do not approve of failure....

SKILLS

Priests need Knowledge Skills related to their worship, such as "Cult Dogma" or "Legends." Pacters and servants of higher powers may have Knowledge Skills related to their patrons. Evil priests and pacters are also very good at sneaking into places and escaping when the heroes thwart their plans, so Combat Skill Levels and Skills such as Stealth, Climbing, Concealment, and Breakfall can be quite appropriate.

Priests typically excel at communication Skills. Oratory is practically a given, to keep the cultists fervent. Priests might also be skilled at debate (Persuasion), sounding people out (Conversation), or torturing captured infidels for information (Interrogation). Servants of Higher Powers, on the other hand, adopt a more mysterious and low-key demeanor. Pacters often try to keep their occult connections completely secret; Acting is good for this. On the other hand, priests and pacters don't need a great deal of arcane knowledge or magic-related Skills. Servants of Higher Powers tend to depend less on their patrons, so they may develop arcane Skills equal to any scholar-mage.

PERKS

Priests often have a Base and Followers (their temple and congregation), and high-ranking priests in sizeable sects might possess Money. Usually, however, the *Membership* Fringe Benefit subsumes all these other Perks. Priest-magicians, pacters, and servants alike often have a whopping Contact with their gods. Cult superiors or the leaders of allied cults are other possible Contacts.

TALENTS

Pacters often have Combat Luck to help them survive clashes with avenging heroes, while a few religious traditions include Universal Translator — the "gift of tongues" — as a divine benefit to missionaries. No other Talents are particularly associated with priests, pacters, or servants of higher powers.

POWERS

Any mystic can feel reverence for a god. Priest, pacters, and servants of higher powers differ from other mystics in that their magic is tied to their service to a greater entity. The patron usually can revoke the mystic's ability to cast spells. Patrons may grant their servants innate powers as well. This is particularly common with pacters, who often desire physical superiority in addition to greater magical power. In folklore, evil magicians (who are often pacters as well) sometimes make themselves unkillable by removing their heart and hiding it in some secret place.

Priests may suffer a few distinctive Limitations. For instance, some spells might be usable only on consecrated ground, or this might count as all or part of a Variable Limitation on a spell. Priestly magic usually requires Incantations in the form of a prayer, and perhaps Foci from religious ritual, such as holy water or the deity's symbol.

Pacters and servants, on the other hand, may get to use stripped-down, combat-effective magic. Pacters don't want to be bothered with a lot of work when they cast spells, and cosmic patrons send their minions into dangerous situations where getting off the first spell is a matter of survival. Superheroic servants of higher powers often use Thaumaturgy (see page 142).

Priestly magic can be quite formidable, but these characters are limited to magic their religion considers possible and acceptable for them. Pacters seldom develop much power beyond what their dark master grants them. They were too impatient to learn real spellcasting, after all, or they lacked the inborn gift for magic. Now their dark master keeps them too busy for deep studies. Finally, a pacter's magic often carries persnickety conditions and serious restrictions on its use, in addition to nasty Side Effects for breaking the rules. For all these reasons, scholar-mages insist that selling your soul to Evil isn't just wicked, it's downright stupid.

The Higher Powers may forbid some sorts of magic to their servants, but a devoted servant wouldn't want to study forbidden magic in any case. In general, though, the Higher Powers don't mind if their servants learn other magic, as long as they remain loyal.

DISADVANTAGES

Disadvantages based on Vows and Prohibitions are almost *de rigeur* for these mystics. The more a god invests in a particular follower, the more conditions it usually imposes. Real-world religious taboos include dietary restrictions (Hinduism's are amazingly complex), mandatory prayer at specific times several times a day (as in Islam), and never cutting your hair (Sikhism). Pacters and servants receive more leeway: as long as they do their job, their patron seldom asks for more. A priest character could carry one large Vow, "Deuteronomy" — a collection of rituals and taboos he must observe to maintain his power.

Of course, priests, pacters, and servants are Hunted (Watched) by their patrons. Enemy cults or servants of rival powers might Hunt them. These mystics should also take a Psychological Limitation representing their devotion to their god or religion; depth of commitment may vary. Some priests, pacters, and servants might take a Conditional Distinctive Features from the taint of their god's mystical energies.

Pacters carry a special Physical Limitation: *Damned*. Contrary to folklore, it's very difficult to cheat the Devil. Breaking the terms of a pact usually gives the patron legal grounds to carry the pacter off to Hell right away, or inflict some equally drastic punishment, and there's nothing the character can do to stop it. In game terms, this is a 15 point Physical Limitation, since it acts Infrequently — just once, in fact — but Fully Impairing.

OCCULT INVESTIGATORS

The occult investigator is one of the most enduring mystical hero types, from William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki the Ghost-Breaker, to Manly Wade Wellman's John Thunstone, to DC Comics's John Constantine. This classic hero type ranges from occultists with no powers but their knowledge, nerve, and wits, to supernatural mystery men whose powers leave superheroes' jaws dropping.

Occult investigators usually lack hard-hitting magic able to pound enemies into submission. They employ subtler tactics such as detective work, trickery, ritual magic, and — when all else fails — manipulating other heroes into doing the dirty work! This archetype fits better in Heroic-level campaigns, but a high-end occult investigator can make an unusual guest star for a Superheroic campaign, and they settle comfortably into moodier all-mystic campaigns.

Occult investigators specialize in street-level supernatural menaces such as ghosts, vampires, and cultists. In fact, not all of their opponents are magical: discovering whether an event is truly supernatural often forms an important part of an occult investigator's job. For instance, is Old Widow Fielding's house *really* haunted, or is her evil nephew trying to drive her crazy to get her money? On the other hand, what seems like a minor poltergeist or cult guru may turn out to be the tip of a very large and nasty iceberg: ancient curses, Elder Gods, the End of Life As We Know It, that sort of thing.

Fortunately, the opponents of occult investigators tend to have Achilles' Heels commensurate with their power, so a small nudge at the right moment can bring a massive evil plan crashing down. For a typical example, suppose a powerful cult plans to open a Gate to a horrible Nether-Verse and call the Dread Annihilator to Earth.

OCCULT INVESTIGATOR: SARAH REDHAWK

Sarah Redhawk grew up off the reservation and considered herself a modern American woman. She became a cop. When her shaman grandfather died without a male heir, however, he chose Sarah to become his successor — whether she wanted it or not. His attempts to open Sarah's mind to the spirit world caused an emotional breakdown. When she recovered, she found herself off the force and able to see spirits.

Sarah rebuilt her life as a private detective, while her grandfather taught her shamanism. More and more of her cases involve the supernatural: angry spirits of the land, scheming vampires, ghosts seeking their murderers, and the like. Though she can project her soul into the spirit world, Sarah finds the skills she gained as a cop are just as valuable when dealing with mystical threats. She has also attracted the notice of the Satanist crime boss Julian Silvers and and his undead minion, Randy Dandy.

A comic book super-mage would have to fight the Dread Annihilator. An occult investigator would discover the weakness in the cult's plan and prevent the Annihilator from arriving at all: say, by shooting the alien crystal that powers the Gate; resetting the cult's clock so it misses the once-a-century alignment when the Gate can open; or even using the force of the cult's ritual to summon a rival god to battle the Annihilator. Of course, if the villains' plot doesn't *have* a weakness, that's a good reason for an occult investigator to team up with other sorts of heroes.

This archetype grew out of pulp fiction, and characters look the part. Even Superheroic-level occult investigators prefer trenchcoats or tuxedoes to gaudy costumes. If you transplant this archetype into other genres, keep the character's garb near the social norm. For instance, an occult investigator in a Fantasy setting might dress like a prosperous tradesman, only with a black, hooded rain-cape; one from Science Fiction might add a touch of the fantastic and whimsical, such as an Inverness cloak, to his ordinary wardrobe.

PLAYING AN OCCULT INVESTIGATOR

What does an occult investigator hope to gain from his pursuit of the mystical? These characters face unknown dangers for uncertain rewards. Simple curiosity is one option — but *very strong* curiosity, the sort that prevents the character from leaving any mystery alone. Revenge is another possibility, if the character discovered the Mystic World in a traumatic way. In this case, the character is more of a monster-hunter than a sleuth, but he still needs to study his prey. Or perhaps the character hopes to gain some power or benefit for himself. For instance, Harry Houdini investigated Spiritualist mediums because he wanted to contact his dead mother... and when he decided mediums were all frauds, he debunked them from anger at the way they played on people's grief.

CHARACTERISTICS

Occult investigators seldom have any superhuman Characteristics; physically, they're on par with extra-competent agents or street vigilantes. *Dark Champions* has many suggestions for creating such characters.

SKILLS

Occult investigators shine in the Skills department. Detective-style Skills matter just as much as magic-related Skills, or more. Combat and physical Skills such as Breakfall or Combat Driving make a lot of sense too. Martial Arts can help compensate for the archetype's comparative weakness compared to most supernatural entities.

PERKS

Perks such as Base, Vehicles, and Money are not very traditional, but are possible; some occult investigators can afford to devote their time to delving into supernatural events because they're independently wealthy, for example. On the other hand, an occult investigator can have scads of Contacts and Favors, making Well-Connected an excellent Skill Enhancer. Initiate or minor Fringe Benefits such as a Private Investigator's License or a Concealed Weapons Permit make sense, too.

TALENTS

Most Talents are quite appropriate for Occult Investigators. For instance, an investigator who studied the mystic secrets of the Orient could learn Simulate Death along with the power to cloud men's minds, while a tough private eye who stalks vampires through the criminal demimonde could certainly use some Danger Sense. Some Talents border on magic themselves.

POWERS

Occult Investigators don't rely entirely on Skills. Intensive training may lead to "super-skills" like those described in *Dark Champions* or *The Ultimate Martial Artist*. Super-stealthy movement



(limited Invisibility or Teleportation), immunity to pain through force of will (Damage Reduction), or super-disguise (Shape Shift) are typical examples.

Some occult investigators gain unearthly powers through occult studies, like a scholar-mage. Others are Wild Talents whose powers manifest after some weird event such as a near-death experience or meeting with a spirit. As a rule, though, an occult investigator has just a few mystical powers instead of a long list of spells.

Most occult investigator magic overlaps a lot with psychic powers: "spells" to read minds, dominate wills, and the like. In fact, their powers might be innate psychic talents rather than magic (in pulp fiction, the line between ESP and magic often blurs to nonexistence). Occult investigators may know dispelling magicks and exorcisms too, but these tend to require lengthy rituals — they aren't much use in combat. Superheroic-level occult investigators might cast powerful illusions, visit the astral dimensions, or even travel through time (though again, these abilities probably require too much time to make them useful in combat).

Just because occult investigators are mystics doesn't mean they can't also carry mundane weaponry, making them even more like *Dark Champions* characters. A low-powered magic item would not be out of place, either.

DISADVANTAGES

Like true mages, most "physical" Disadvantages make no sense for occult investigators; they're just guys with skills, after all. On the other hand, one horror comic featured a vampire hunter who was crippled and confined to a wheelchair. A single physical Disadvantage can do a lot to make an occult investigator more interesting, as long as it grows naturally from the character's past. For instance, an occult investigator might be under a curse from a demon (a Vulnerability, Susceptibility, Dependence, or even Unluck), and now hunts demons to pay them back. Some occult investigators may incur Vows and Prohibitions as part of their training.

The supernatural evils hunted by occult investigators tend to Hunt them right back. The local police might also Watch an occult investigator. An experienced investigator can acquire a poor Reputation. Word might get around, for instance, that a certain occult investigator tends to abandon his friends to save his own skin. A DNPC or two helps round out the occult investigator's roster of social Disadvantages.

THE ACCURSED AND THE ENCHANTED

Some characters join the Mystic World because an outside force gives them magical power. If the person wants the power and can control it, he's enchanted. If he didn't want the power and can't control it, he's accursed. Either way, the character can expect further contact with mystics and the supernatural — whether he wants it or not.

Fiction and folklore provide many sources of enchantments and curses. Most simply, a mystic, god, or other powerful entity can infuse a person with magical power. The enchanter might want a powerful minion; or the enchantee might beg or buy his empowerment. For instance, King Midas persuaded the god Dionysus to give him his famous golden touch.

Legends also tell of people who enchant themselves. Old tales describe several methods to become a werewolf, for example. Magic power may come from a potion (like the Elixir of Life that grants immortality) or a magical place (such as a sacred cave or an enchanted wishing well). A magic artifact can bless or curse its owner: for instance, an Egyptian priest who claimed the mighty *Book Of Thoth* was slain by the fabled book's curse and became its spectral guardian. Lycanthropy and vampirism can pass from a cursed person to his victims, at least in the Hollywood versions of these famous curses. A curse can also pass down a family line.

Curses that grant unwanted, destructive power occur most often in horror stories, but appear in all sorts of Fantasy. Vampires and were-creatures, at least, turn up everywhere from High Fantasy to pulp adventure. They even sneak into Science Fiction now and then as supernatural intrusions in a future world, or given a pseudo-scientific explanation as diseases, aliens, or deliberate use of high technology by people in search of perverted thrills. For instance, jaded people in a cyberpunk setting might use virtual reality to project their senses into android beasts in a form of high-tech lycanthropy. Beneficial enchantments occur less often outside mythic Fantasy or the modern myths of superbeings. Comic books provide many examples of heroes and villains given super-powers through potions, spells, or artifacts.

The enchanted and the accursed seldom show a wide range of Powers. Since their Powers are innate, though, they rarely suffer many Limitations. Beyond that, these characters are too diverse to allow general statements about their game mechanics.

PLAYING AN ENCHANTED OR ACCURSED CHARACTER

An enchanted character's attitude may resemble those of true mystics, depending on how the character gained his powers. A person who deliberately enchanted himself may feel he's paid dues other characters have not, and deserves respect for that, like a scholar-mage. For victims of accidental enchantment, like wild talents, anything from angst to arrogance is possible: a lot depends on how the

THERIANTHROPE: TIGER-MAN

Leon Chun, the manager of a video store in Hong Kong, is actually Chunhu Liang, a scion of a secret Chinese dynasty of shapeshifters. While most of his relatives seek power, safety from mortals, and greater influence in the Mystic World, Liang became a superhero to defend humanity against mystical and mundane evil.

Liang is a weretiger. He becomes a humanoid tiger in his Heroic Identity, but cannot (yet) take fully feline form. Like most members of the Chunhu dynasty, his therianthropy is not contagious. Tiger-Man's super-strength, inhuman speed, and invulnerability to everything except fire and silver make him a formidable combatant, while his feline senses make him a better detective than most people expect. His ferocity in battling supervillains and the Triads is tempered by a strong aversion to killing and a concern for Hong Kong's poorer residents. Tiger-Man doesn't know magic himself, but he recognizes it when he sees it. His family background also means that most people in China's Mystic World will talk to him, if reluctantly: a Chunhu estranged from his family is still a Chunhu, and few mystics want to show disrespect to the powerful dynasty.

character received his powers, the social setting, and the nature of the powers themselves. A character who receives powers from some greater entity is in the same position as a priest, pacter, or servant of Higher Powers. The enchanter probably retains some interest in the character. Does the character accept an obligation to the enchanter, or try to escape him?

Therianthropes

Werewolves (lycanthropes) are only one example of were-creature, or *therianthrope.* In legend, not only do people turn into wolves, they turn into bears, leopards, tigers, hyenas, and many other animals besides. The movies added the notion of a monstrous form in between man and beast. Folklore also describes a less familiar tradition of people who project their spirits in animal form.

Therianthropes usually appear as monstrous menaces that must be hunted and destroyed. A were-creature might be an outright villain who enjoys preying on the people around him, or he might be a tragic, accursed figure who hates his condition but must be slain. Some stories, however, present therianthropes in a neutral or even a positive light. Modern Fantasy and comic books sometimes use therianthropes as heroes or gothic anti-heroes — some stories and games even revolve around entire societies of therianthropes. Victorian authors, with their keen sense for taboo, recognized the man-beast as a symbol for the eruption of repressed animal passion and violence into civilized life. Post-Freud, the repression is apt to be viewed as the problem, and the cure for the curse is not a silver bullet but acceptance of the inner animal. The were-creature remains an ambiguous character who can claw his way into many roles.

The movies usually show lycanthropy as a contagious curse: a werewolf bites someone, and on the next full moon, the victim becomes a werewolf in turn. Folklore offers many other sources for the curse. See page 206 for descriptions of some of the ways people can become shape-shifters, and the animals they can become.

Therianthropes can be Heroic-level or Superheroic-level characters. In folklore, many were-creatures have no special powers beyond those intrinsic to the animal form: a werewolf or leopard-man has the animal's claws, teeth, speed, and keen senses, but nothing blatantly supernatural except the very fact of changing into an animal. Some legends do speak of the need for a special weapon to kill a were-creature, though, such as the familiar silver bullet or a weapon blessed by a priest. Fiction writers seized on the dramatic possibilities of the nigh-unkillable were-creature; this more "literary" therianthrope may need to be Superheroic-level.

CHARACTERISTICS

A large predator such as a wolf or bear can be strong, quick, and tough enough to give Heroic-level characters all the challenge they need. In a Superheroic-level setting, therianthropes can combine superhuman STR with DEX and SPD equal to a martial arts master, plus enough defenses, STUN, and REC to make them very difficult to Knock Out.

SKILLS

Nothing about this archetype suggests any Skills except those a predatory animal might possess, such as Concealment, Stealth, or Tracking.

PERKS

This archetype does not forbid any Perks, but most Perks won't be useful while the character is in animal form. If the setting includes societies of therianthropes, these societies may create Perks of their own. For instance, the alpha male of a werewolf pack might receive a *Membership* Fringe Benefit for his rank.

TALENTS

No Talents are more or less plausible for were-creatures than for any other character.

High-end therianthropes could justify Combat Sense or Danger Sense as keen animal senses and feral awareness of their surroundings.

POWERS

Most importantly, were-creatures need an HKA for their claws and fangs, plus whatever Enhanced Senses and movement are appropriate for their animal forms. If you follow the tradition of therianthropes as nigh-invulnerable to everything except a silver weapon (and perhaps one or two other forms of damage, such as fire), the character needs high defenses, plus Healing with the Regeneration option, all with a -½ Limitation representing the fact that the powers don't work against attacks of that special effect. Heroic-level therianthropes may use Damage Reduction and a high PD and ED as their principle defense; Superheroic-level were-creatures could have high Damage Resistance instead, or as well. Contagion is a Transform, with Limitations that the therianthrope must bite the victim, and that the victim can prevent the contagion through prompt use of holy water or special charms.

You can represent the power to change forms in more than one way. Perhaps the simplest is to give the character a Multiform. A therianthrope might have three forms: a high-powered beast-man form, a human form, and a purely animal form. Typically the human form is the true form, but this may depend on the nature of the character. Alternately, you may prefer to treat the beast-form abilities as powers usable Only In Heroic Identity; this is a Limitation because the therianthrope cannot change forms at will, or because he may change forms accidentally (see below).

Naguals and other astral shapeshifters need some version of Astral Projection (see page 54). They also need powers that can affect people in the material world. While an astral killer ripping

wounds in a screaming mortal victim certainly makes a fine monster, astral therianthropes more often inflict wasting diseases or other gradual forms of damage.

DISADVANTAGES

Since therianthropy is usually a curse, were-creatures often suffer from an Enraged or Psychological Limitation reflecting their bloodthirsty nature. They may have other Psychological Limitations based on bestial instincts as well, such as fear of fire. The most common physical Disadvantage is Accidental Change: in many stories, were-creatures must assume their animal form under the light of the full moon, and may change forms if they become angry or are exposed to blood. If you follow the Hollywood model for were-creatures, they might also carry a Reputation as a class, since everyone knows how to kill a movie werewolf. Therianthropes usually have a Social Limitation (Secret Identity), since they don't want people knowing they change into ravening beasts.

Vampires And Other Undead

Dark forces can trap people between life and death as vampires, mummies, zombies, and other sorts of "undead." Just about every culture has stories about the dead who don't stay in the grave. These revenants usually prey on the living for revenge, unholy sustenance, or sheer malevolence. Nevertheless, a few legends feature sympathetic undead who leave the grave to honor pledges, rescue loved ones, or see justice done. Modern writers sometimes turn undead characters into tragic anti-heroes. Such revenants can be playable characters.

Vampires are far and away the most popular undead, and the most playable. In modern fiction, at least, vampires show the most human appearance, the most complex motivations, and the widest range of cool powers of any undead. In folklore, people become vampires for reasons ranging from dying unshriven to a black cat jumping over the casket. The literary vampire, however, generally becomes undead through contagion. In some stories, it's enough for a vampire to bite someone once. In other stories, the victim must drink the vampire's blood to receive the curse. Most vampires remain thoroughly evil, but heroic vampires (such as Nick Knight from the *Forever Knight* TV series) struggle against their vile thirst and do good deeds to atone for their cursed state.

The mummy, on the other hand, is always the victim of a deliberate curse — an eternal punishment for some heinous crime, or to guard something forever. In the movies, mummies have an element of pathos even though they're villains. A mummy often searches for his lost love, who may be reincarnated as some other character's love interest.

The zombie is an undead slave. An evil sorcerer reanimates the zombie to serve him. To the African slaves who created the modern zombie legend, nothing inspired greater horror than the thought that even death couldn't free them from their labors. Zombies are usually mindless. The



real-life zombie — a person entranced by powerful drugs rather than black magic — can recover his mind, however, so supernatural zombies might do so as well.

Fantasy fiction and games add other sorts of undead. One of the most terrifying is the lich, a powerful mystic who becomes undead to prolong his existence. Liches are almost invariably portrayed as evil. In folklore, some varieties of vampires also become monsters voluntarily, though these "vampires" are more often based on witchcraft than return from death.

The less powerful sorts of revenants can be Heroic-level characters. Vampires, however, need points comparable to Superheroic-level characters to buy the diverse powers ascribed to them in books and movies. Other sorts of undead range widely in their power level. *The HERO System Bestiary* includes character sheets for several types of undead.

The undead appear most often in Fantasy and horror stories. Like therianthropes, vampires and other revenants sometimes appear with a pseudo-scientific twist in Science Fiction. Of course they appear in comic books too, as villains, minions, and occasionally as tormented anti-heroes such as "I, Vampire" from DC or the Living Mummy from Marvel. Vampires remain the most popular undead protagonists; whole RPGs have been built around them.

VAMPIRE: RANDY DANDY

Randall Danforth, leader of the 5th Street Bloods, thought he was pretty damn tough. Then he saw the dumb whitey with the greasy hair and the flashy rings. Just asking for trouble, walking in the 'hood like that. Randy didn't bother telling the whitey to hand over his wallet and the bling-bling; he just shot him. And the bullet didn't leave a mark.

"My turn," Julian Silvers said. He raised his hand, something in his palm flashed, and Randy found himself stripped and strapped to a table. On one side, a bowl of fire. On the other, the whitey, toying with a dagger.

Julian Silvers said he wanted a lieutenant, a stone killer who knew the gangs. If Randy agreed to be that lieutenant, he would live forever. If he didn't, Julian would kill him. Randy thought he'd play along and kill Julian when he got free. Julian killed him anyway... but Randy rose again as Julian's vampire slave.

Being undead has its compensations, though. Sure, he can't go out in the day, but the pimps and the dealers practically beg him to take what he wants. He can't do everything the movies say a vampire can, but he's stronger and tougher than any living man, and can jump three stories high. And the blood... the taste of fear in a victim's blood, that moment when he knows Randy Dandy will drink his life... that's better than sex, better than drugs, better than *anything.*

CHARACTERISTICS

Gothic vampires, mummies, and other revenants are often super-strong: the mummy crashing through a wall, or the vampire throwing an imprudent hunter across the room, are both classic images. Vampires may be fast and agile, too, but other literary undead tend to be slow and clumsy. Undead intellects range from mindless zombies to brilliant vampire schemers and erudite liches. Most undead are hideous and obviously dead, with vampires as the most notable exception.

SKILLS

Vampires and other intelligent undead may possess extensive Skills, either retained from life or accumulated during centuries of undeath. Other undead seldom possess many Skills, though Concealment, Stealth, and Tracking are appropriate for predatory sorts.

PERKS

Most Perks make no sense for most undead. As usual, vampires are the exception. The aristocrats of the undead can have a Base (whether a Carpathian castle or an ultra-chic penthouse apartment), Followers (Dracula had Renfield, his Gypsies, and his three "brides"), Money, or even a Fringe Benefit of noble rank. Fantasy liches also have a Base. A lich who becomes an undead Dark Lord, of course, has the *Head Of State* Fringe Benefit.

TALENTS

Simulate Death would be peculiarly appropriate for the undead, since they only fake being alive in the first place. No other Talents seem necessary or forbidden.

POWERS

The undead are usually hard to kill since they are dead already. Life Support is a must. Some degree of Damage Resistance, or possibly Damage Reduction, represents that undead don't really have vital organs. Mindless undead usually have Automaton Powers. Some undead are especially hard to destroy because severed parts re-attach; in fiction and folklore, vampires can be destroyed for good only by special treatment such as severing the head and filling the mouth with holy wafers. Both are applications of Healing with the Regeneration and/or Resurrection options.

In fiction and movies, vampires can have many other powers. The most commonly seen are hypnotic Mind Control, mastery of animals such as wolves or rats (Summon and Mind Control), and the ability to turn into mist (Desolidification), a bat, or a wolf (Multiform). Since movies like *The Lost Boys,* Flight has also become a common power for the cinematic vampire. Many other powers are possible, though. In folklore, vampires overlap with ghosts, witches, ghouls, and many other sorts of supernatural creatures, any of which could contribute intriguing powers for a character. Folklore can also supply inspiration for designing new forms of undead with powers beyond those of simple revenants.

DISADVANTAGES

The undead suffer from many Disadvantages. Since they are blasphemous crimes against God and nature, they often take damage from holy water, religious symbols, and holy ground. Sunlight and fire are also anathema to many undead. Revenants may suffer restrictions that are more arcane. In some books and movies, vampires can't enter a home uninvited, or cannot cross running water (Physical Limitations). See page 208 for more traditional weaknesses of vampires.

Normal undead carry Psychological Limitations such as *Bloodthirsty* or *Wants To Make All His Family Into Vampires,* with Strong or Total commitment. Revenants who struggle against their condition have Psychological Limitations such as *Must Atone For The Crime Of His Existence.*

Many undead take a Distinctive Feature for being reanimated corpses (assuming that's appropriate for the campaign). This is obvious in the case of many revenants, but even a vampire who can "pass" for a living person faces fear and hatred if anyone notices he doesn't need to breathe or eat, has no reflection, or other traditional signs of the undead. Revenants also may be Hunted by fearless vampire killers, or face other Social Limitations if they are legally dead.

Others

Legends and literature provide no other well-established archetypes of people empowered by curses or enchantments. They are all special cases, like King Midas's golden touch. No guidelines can be given about such characters' Skills, Powers, or other game traits. In *Champions,* enchanted characters often seem just like any other character with intrinsic powers, such as a mutant or alien. Their most important difference lies in their origin story: who did the enchanting, how, and why? And just as importantly, why don't more people use that method to gain super-powers themselves?

ENCHANTMENT BY POWERFUL ENTITY

Demon lords, gods, mighty elder archmages, or cosmic entities sometimes grant powers to humans. Usually they want the humans to do something for them in return. The pact with the Devil is the most famous example. Effectively, the person is a Pacter or Servant of Higher Powers who doesn't know any magic of his own. Since the enchanter gives power at his own discretion, other people cannot hope to duplicate the enchantment.

ENCHANTMENT BY RITUAL

A person who doesn't know real spellcasting might succeed in one spell to give himself superpowers, just like scientists sometimes give themselves powers without inventing any other superscience. Such a spell requires an extensive ritual, which the person never has reason to cast again. The spell might require rare ingredients, making it hard to duplicate. It may also be quite dangerous, so only a brave, desperate, or foolish person would try to use it. Characters might learn "origin spells"

from ancient tomes, or get lucky with an improvised ritual. In fact, a few characters might perform origin rituals without knowing it....

ENCHANTMENT BY MAGICAL ACCIDENT

When great magical forces are unleashed, some of the power might go in ways the unleashers didn't intend. This is the magical version of the well-known "radiation accident" — but instead of nuclear waste, lightning bolts, and experimental machines it employs weird artifacts, mystic blasts, and cosmic entities. The PCs themselves might cause an origin event or two by disrupting a villain's Doomsday Spell or breaking an artifact, giving innocent bystanders super-powers.

Characters who gain their powers this way diverge least of all from the "standard superhero" idiom. They just have a stranger origin, that's all: "You got your powers in a *liturgical* accident?"

ENCHANTMENT BY ARTIFACT

Some artifacts spontaneously grant powers to people around them. The GM must define some reason why the artifact doesn't give powers to *everyone* who contacts it: perhaps it only bestows power on one person at a time, or under special conditions. Examples include a talisman that makes the first person who touches it super-strong and invulnerable; a magic book that impresses spell-casting knowledge on the reader's mind, if it doesn't drive him mad (or perhaps only if it *does...)*; or a potion that confers a magical power on whoever drinks it.

MYTHOLOGICAL GODS

Cultures such as ancient Greece, the Aztecs, and Japan believe in a multitude of gods who combine great supernatural power with very human personalities. Unlike the remote and abstract deities of "ethical" religions such as Christianity or Buddhism, the gods of mythology get in fights, fall in love, spend a lot of time interacting face-to-face with mortals, and have adventures of their own.

Few games include gods (or even demigods) as options for player characters, but gods often appear as protagonists in mythology and comic books, and at least as important supporting characters in Fantasy fiction. Mythological gods therefore are one of the standard archetypes for superhero settings, and are right at home in Superheroic-level High Fantasy campaigns (*"Fantasy Champions,"* if you will). Gods don't fit so well in other genres: their presence nudges a setting toward outright Fantasy. For instance, Eastern gods might appear in *very* wild *Ninja Hero* campaigns. In far-out Space Opera campaigns, super-powered aliens might pose as gods (a plot *Star Trek* used several times), and show classically divine powers and personalities.

Gods can have whatever power level seems appropriate to the setting, from Standard Superheroic on up. If you see the gods of mythology as genuinely supreme entities that can hurl mountains, stop the sun and moon, and generally affect the world on a very wide scale, build them on thousands of points (or leave them as "plot device" NPCs). If the deities of myth are merely "the small gods of Earth" who put on airs, Standard Superheroic characters might suffice. Such characters could still seem nigh-omnipotent to simple folk.

Players and GMs who want both cosmically-powerful gods and playable divine characters have a number of options. An individual god might suffer a permanent reduction in power to PC level, while gods in general remain far more powerful. Alternatively, you could say gods can't wield their full power in the mortal world, only in their own supernatural realms. Thus, Storm-Hammer-Thunder-God might be able to shatter mountains in his home plane, but diminish to a 350-point superbeing when he visits Earth. Gods might prefer to project less-powerful avatars of themselves to the mortal world, or empower select mortals to wield a bit of their power in their name. Most mythologies also include demigods: minor deities, young gods not yet come into their full power, or half-divine children of gods who may become full gods after their mortal death.

PLAYING A MYTHOLOGICAL GOD

Although gods are important supernatural figures, often they are not portrayed in a very "mystical" way. In both epic myth and modern comics, divine adventurers look a lot like regular superheroes. They still may have an important place in the Mystic World: gods can be allies, enemies, or patrons of mystics, and mystics can visit the mythic realms where gods dwell.

You can make god characters more "mystical" by playing up their connection to mythology. A divine PC can draw his teammates into adventures set in the god's mythic realm. Other gods may come to Earth to replay ancient myths. A god's motives and methods can reflect his cultural background and role in mythology.

> **Example:** *The Aztec religion centered on sacrifice. An Aztec god in the modern world might believe that great good always requires sacrificing a life, in a literal or metaphorical way. A villainous god's plans involve murder on an epic scale. A heroic god sacrifices himself, in great and small ways, and tells his teammates they must expect to give their lives to save the world. If necessary, he will sacrifice them, the way Quetzalcoatl sacrificed the other gods to set the sun in motion.*

True gods — or people who think they are — tend to have big egos. Heroic gods may be nicer about it than most gods, but every now and then, they still remind their allies they are higher beings, with certain privileges denied to mortals. They often boast how enemies are in for a divine smackdown.

A person empowered to act as a god's proxy was most likely chosen because the god saw some resemblance in their personalities or professions. For instance, the Yoruba blacksmith-god Ogun might pick an engineer as his avatar. Then again, you could create an interesting character

MYTHOLOGICAL GOD: CHRYSAOR

During the Renaissance, poets and artists freely combined Christian and Greco-Roman characters. In the supernatural world, that enabled meetings unthinkable before. The goddess Aphrodite seduced a warrior angel just to prove she could. Their cross-pantheon union produced a son she named Chrysaor, the Golden Sword. The young demigod became one of Olympus's champion athletes.

As the centuries passed, Chrysaor grew bored with competition against other demigods in the Land Of Legends. When a group of the gods' enemies escaped from Tartarus to Earth, Chrysaor volunteered to bring them back. On Earth he took the mortal guise of Chris Graham, a college Classical Studies instructor and wrestling coach. Chrysaor immediately recognized supervillains as modern Earth's versions of the Land Of Legends' warlords, bandits, and monsters; he gives them a good thrashing whenever he can! But he pays special attention to mystical villains as he searches for the escapees from Tartarus.

The gold-skinned godling is super-strong, nigh-invulnerable, and can fly on golden-feathered wings. He is a master of Greek boxing and wrestling. He also has mystical powers, such as banishing spirits by touch or throwing low-powered versions of his grandfather's thunderbolts.

As both a superhero and a teacher, Chrysaor tries to inspire mortals with the heroic ideals of

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by having a person who seems inappropriate gain a god's powers. What happens when a shy nerd gets the power and identity of a divine brawler like Hercules, or a party girl becomes the mortal host of wise Athena?

CHARACTERISTICS

Physically, gods are clearly superhuman. Comic books and mythology often portray gods as super-strong and tough, with other powers added on. Spending at least 20–30 points each on STR, DEX, CON, and PD/ED makes a god suitably superhuman. Gods also show a high PRE, and most of the European pantheons describe their gods as notably good-looking.

Mentally, however, most gods are nothing special. The myths of all nations portray most gods as no smarter or wiser than the humans who worship them. The gods may claim superior wisdom, but they often act like impulsive, spoiled brats.

SKILLS

Mythological gods seldom know many Skills. As a rule, gods know the Skills decreed by their special area of concern: combat skills for war gods; Paramedics for gods of healing; Stealth, Lockpicking, and the like for gods of thieving and mischief; and so on. Gods who come to Earth automatically speak the local standard language (*i.e.,* English in a modern campaign), though verily, sometimes they doth useth badly mangled archaic forms. Buying the Language of a god's culture of origin would make a lot of sense.

PERKS

Not every divine PC needs the *Deity* Perk (see page 42). Some gods never had very large cults, even if they had important roles in mythology. In a modern setting, divine visitors may lack the resources and social power the Perk implies: Western pagan mythologies, at least, have lacked worshippers for more than about a dozen centuries. Modern neo-pagan revivalist groups are small and without influence, though they could become Contacts. A god who receives active worship from large numbers of people should take this Perk, however, whether the setting is modern Earth or a Fantasy world. A well-known god may have a Reputation, though, even if he isn't worshipped.

TALENTS

Aside from Universal Translator, most of the Talents do not seem especially appropriate for gods. War gods, however, can have any of the combat-related Talents.

POWERS

In mythology and comics, gods resist attacks from mere humans but the weapons of heroes may do them harm. Unless a god is specifically notable for being hard to damage, defenses don't have to exceed the normal Superheroic range. Divine attacks fall on the high end of the PC point range. As they appear in the comics, gods dish out impressive amounts of damage. The ever-popular war gods, for instance, aren't just bricks, they are some of the strongest bricks around. Cosmically powerful gods, of course, have no limit on the power of their attacks.

Divine PCs do not need a wide range of powers. Although a few divine superheroes in comics — most notably a certain hammer-swinging thunder god — display an amazing variety of powers through their careers, most of these are *ad hoc* powers introduced by lazy writers and then forgotten. The standard repertoire of frequently-used powers remains quite small. Gods wield powers based on their mythological character: storm gods have weather control powers, a god of hunting carries a bow, healing gods have Aid powers, and so on. You can make a god more "mystical" by giving him a few powers seen often in mythology. For instance, gods often change people into animals or plants, and *vice-versa,* and perform other Transforms. A Dispel against Summon lets a god banish spirits and demons. Longevity, immunity to disease, and other forms of Life Support are mandatory, except perhaps for mortal avatars. Cosmically-powerful gods, on the other hand, may have large Cosmic Power Pools, though their point reserves should be smaller than the god's favored attacks and signature powers.

DISADVANTAGES

In this area, gods closely resemble other superbeings. A god PC may be Watched by the pantheon head, and is usually Hunted by a godly enemy from the same pantheon. Mythology suggests that gods often have strong Psychological Limitations; many Greek gods, for instance, clearly had *Lecherous* with Strong commitment. Gods seldom show any physical Disadvantages, though. In a modern setting, mythological gods might suffer an unusual Susceptibility: born of human belief, they might take damage from sincere displays of mass disbelief and scorn. This is very optional, though, and presumes the gods of myth are not "real" gods, but merely spirits of exceptional power.

SPIRITS AND SPIRIT HYBRIDS

"Spirits" include angels and demons, ghosts, elementals, and many other types of beings. In game terms, however, all sorts of spirits have much in common.

Except for ghosts, spirits often personify states of mind or matter. Elementals, for instance, personify states of matter such as Fire or Water. Demons (in all their varieties around the world) embody human ideas of Evil. Angels (and their analogs in other cultures) express ideas of Goodness. Nature spirits personify aspects of the environment; for instance, tree-spirits or river-spirits. Gamemasters may define their own original spirits personifying other abstractions, such as Chaos or Justice.

Though spirits may manifest in solid form and seem alive, they're not made of normal matter. Spirits normally dwell on other dimensions such as Hell, the Astral Plane, or a "pseudo-dimension" like

the interior of a tree or stone. They appear from such dimensions and disappear back into them. Spirits are immortal, too, or at least their life does not depend on the same factors as for humans. For instance, a tree-spirit lives as long as its tree: Killing the spirit's solid manifestation merely dispels it.

Even the weakest spirit must be at least Heroic-level. Writing up most spirits requires points comparable to Superheroic-level characters, because of the powers needed to describe typical spiritual feats. No clear line distinguishes spirits from gods, either in terms of their powers or the points on which they are written: demon lords, archangels, and other mighty spirits are as powerful as at least minor deities.

Spirits occur most often in Fantasy adventures, though mystical superheroes often encounter spirits too. Pulp heroes may encounter demons, and wilder *Ninja Hero* campaigns may include Asian spirits. True spirits can't appear in campaigns where the supernatural doesn't exist, but *Cyber Hero* or *Star Hero* settings could include simulated spirits as part of virtual worlds.

Spirit hybrids — the combination of a spirit's powers with a human body — are another possibility. Spirit hybrids can form through possession, in which the spirit inhabits a human body and grants its host magical powers. A spirit might fuse with its human host so thoroughly it cannot leave. This usually happens because of some enchantment (accidental or deliberate) on the human host. Finally, a person might have a materialized spirit for a parent and inherit that spirit type's powers.

Since a spirit hybrid might lack many powers of a true spirit, they require fewer points to describe. A spirit hybrid with just a few supernatural powers could fit comfortably into a Heroic-level campaign. Superheroic-level spirit hybrids tend to look just like non-supernatural heroes and villains: making them "mystical" depends on playing up their connection to other supernatural creatures and forces. For instance, a character who gained super-powers by merging with a fire elemental might have the powers of a standard energy projector — but if he can also see astral spirits invisible to normal people, and feels a tingle in the presence of magic, other characters will remember he's no mutant.

The various classes of spirits do not receive separate discussion of their game traits. All spirits have many traits in common; their differences are usually a matter of specific powers rather than some general pattern for each class of spirits. See Chapter Five for more information.

Angels

Angels are emissaries of God in the Abrahamic religions. Similar spirits occur in some other traditions, too. See Chapter Five for descriptions of several sorts of angels.

Using angels as characters treads on sensitive areas of personal faith for some players, though TV shows like *Touched By An Angel* show it's possible. If (as some game settings assume) human belief creates and empowers spirits, there's no problem explaining why angels have finite power, and why some might choose to operate on Earth. If the setting assumes angels serve the true God and Creator, what's an angel doing on Earth? And how could an agent of the Supreme Being ever fail? The simplest answer may be that God permits some freelance activity for His inscrutable reasons (or even assigns it to selected angels), but limits the power of angels so humanity can make its own choices. Still, players and GMs will have to work out answers to suit themselves.

In a Heroic-level campaign, an angel working on Earth might become flesh and blood with only a few supernatural powers, and look indistinguishable from a normal human. A Superheroic-level angel would certainly have Flight. Powers based on light, such as Flashes and brilliant Energy Blasts seem appropriate; so does Dispel Summon for casting demons back into Hell.

Angels have Psychological Limitations such as *Total Honesty* or *Never Permits Deviation From Divine Law.* NPC angels may be moral specialists with very limited ranges of behavior: for instance, an Angel of Mercy can never, ever fight, while an Angel of Vengeance can never, ever let any sin go unpunished.

Demons And Devils

Demons are natural villains. Any demon that isn't utterly vile is a fluke, either cast out of Hell or on the run from other demons that want to destroy it for being "too nice." Demonic spirit hybrids, however, make wonderfully Gothic heroes, forever striving to remain human in spite of their demonic side.

Many demons can change their shape, dematerialize, and turn invisible. They may also fly or teleport. The popular Abrahamic tradition paints demons as fiery beings, suggesting fire RKAs or flaming Damage Shields. Especially in the Abrahamic tradition, though, demons also may have subtler attacks such as Telepathy to discover hidden desires and Mind Control to influence a person's actions. High-ranking devils use a Universal Transform to grant pacters their desires.

Demons are spirits of great power, but they pay for it with equally great weaknesses. Summoned demons always have a huge package of Vulnerabilities, Susceptibilities, and Physical Limitations: in addition to the usual Disadvantages of spirits, holy symbols intimidate and harm demons; they can't cross the lines of a pentacle or attack anyone inside one; and trespassing on holy ground snuffs out a demon in short order. A demon can

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fighting for the right and the pursuit of excellence in all things. His grasp of Earthly law is weak, however — and like any Greek god, he's a sucker for beautiful women.

SPIRIT HYBRID: PAGAN

The master wizard Archimago chose Virgil Rohan's mother as one of 12 women to bear the children of archdevils in his horrific Zodiac Working. Superheroes rescued the women, but not before their rape and mystic impregnation. Years later, Virgil's mother married a high school English teacher and bore Virgil. He grew up not knowing he was also the son of the archdevil Belial. Virgil found out when one of Archimago's acolytes tracked him down and activated his demonic heritage, intending to incarnate Belial in his flesh. Virgil fought his way free, but Belial threatened he would yet bring Virgil to his service. Virgil rejects his evil heritage by fighting crime as the superhero Pagan. As the son of an archdevil, however, he is a nascent power in the Mystic World and many people in different factions seek to recruit or exploit him.

In his demonic form, Pagan looks like a handsome, blonde satyr. Not only is he super-strong, he knows a smattering of tae kwon do and casts beams and bursts of burning light. He also has a few eerier, more demonic powers, such as materializing any small object he can imagine. (He uses this Power to change into his costume.) Pagan also learned that demon-summoning spells can snatch him at any time; fortunately, pentacles don't hold him because he isn't all demon.

In Heroic genres, Pagan would simply be plain old Virgil Rohan. He'd look like a normal human (though maybe

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evade some Disadvantages by possessing a human host, but not all of them. Demons also suffer massive Psychological Limitations such as *Treacherous, Sadistic,* or *Bloodthirsty.*

Elementals

Elemental spirits embody states or types of matter. Earth, Air, Fire and Water elementals are the best known, but you can imagine more exotic elementals based on mud, ice, lightning, or other substances. In contemporary settings, mystics may be learning how to evoke elementals from man-made substances such as electricity, plastic, or smog.

Elementals have lots of raw physical power and not much intelligence. They might lack strong defenses against subtler magical attacks, and be sitting ducks against mental powers. In game terms, they might have some Power Defense, but little or no Mental Defense. Each type of elemental has, naturally, an Elemental Control describing powers based on its body substance: Flight, Invisibility, and weather control for air elementals, Tunneling and stone manipulation powers for earth elementals, and so on.

These spirits usually appear because a mystic summoned them as minions. Gamemasters can create elementals that range widely in power, from tiny elementals conjured by apprentice wizards to city-destroying spirit-monsters called by mad archmages. An elemental character needs some explanation why he didn't vanish back to wherever elementals come from, and how he gained a personality.

Games and stories usually assume elementals are cantankerous — an Enraged is appropriate. Most elementals have a Susceptibility or Vulnerability to opposing states of matter: earth elementals, for instance, must stay in contact with the ground; ice elementals take extra damage from fire.

Ghosts

Ghosts stand out from types of spirits because they used to be human. According to most stories, a dead person sticks around as a ghost because of an exceptionally traumatic death, or "unfinished business" from life (and often both). A ghost can "pass on" once it resolves that unfinished business. Traditional tasks include avenging its murder, getting its mortal remains buried in consecrated ground or passing a message to a loved one. On the other hand, some ghosts hang around for centuries. Most ghosts only haunt a rigidly defined area, but a few can wander.

There are at least two ways to write up ghosts. First, you can give them Persistent, Inherent Desolidification. Alternatively, you can represent ghosts as dwelling on the Astral Plane and projecting attacks and Images of themselves to Earth. In the latter case, ghosts must have Disadvantages so at least some kinds of attacks on the Image affect the actual ghost. An opponent who can only be attacked through Transdimensional Powers is just too unfair!

Traditional ghostly attack forms include Telekinesis (for "poltergeists"), Mental Illusions, a "deathly touch" (an Ego Attack, a Drain, or a Hand to Hand Attack with Power Advantages) and a tremendous Presence Attack with which to terrify the living. A few ghosts can take over people's bodies — lots of dice of Mind Control (or sometimes a type of Mental Transform). Players who want to play a ghost PC, take note: many ghostly powers cost *lots* of Active Points, making ghosts nigh-impossible to write up as Heroic-level characters and a challenge to create even as Standard Superheroic characters.

PLAYING A SPIRIT OR SPIRIT HYBRID

In most legendary or fictional settings, spirits don't usually associate with mortals. Either they normally dwell in mystic Otherworlds (such as Heaven or Hell), or they just don't share mortal interests. A spirit needs some reason why he hangs around mortal characters instead of other spirits. Why does a spirit care what happens to mortals? For some spirits, how is it possible for them to stay in the mortal world? A spirit PC needs unusual and strong motivations — unusual for spirits, anyway — and some way to interact with other characters. For instance, a ghost isn't a viable character if only a few psychically sensitive people can see him and he has no way to affect the physical world. A demon needs some reason why he isn't implacably evil, while an angel needs some reason why he's allowed to mingle with mortals. You might also consider how much a spirit actually knows about mortals: such a character could be a real fish out of water.

Spirit hybrids have a stronger human connection, but in most settings, they won't occur very often. How did a mortal end up merged with a spirit? Or how did a spirit come to mate with a mortal, producing a hybrid? That isn't normal. A spirit hybrid's background may suggest story hooks, as people connected to the character's origin seek him out for their own purposes. A spirit hybrid may also acquire strong personality traits from his supernatural side, which may clash with his human attitudes. The obvious example is a half-demon hero struggling against his dark passions — but imagine a petty, nasty person unexpectedly merged with a noble and virtuous angel.

CHARACTERISTICS

Spirits may have superhuman Characteristics, but this isn't a necessity. After all, Jacob could wrestle an angel. Many spirits have high PD and ED (or abilities like Combat Luck or Damage Reduction): they're made of "ectoplasm" rather than normal matter, so not much hurts them.

SKILLS

Spirits are not a skill-intensive archetype. Some simple-minded spirits, such as elementals, might not have any Skills except Combat Skill Levels. Spirits don't need the same Skills as mystics because spirits don't *do* magic, they *are* magic. Which is not to say a spirit can't have all sorts of

Skills — but these are unusual spirits, such as a demon of knowledge. But of course any PC spirit is already unusual by definition.

PERKS

Few spirits acquire Perks that would mean anything on Earth. For instance, demons lords have an elaborate hierarchy of ranks, but a devil's rank of Marquis, Duke, or Prince won't get him much on Earth. A spirit's rank *may* become meaningful if the spirit is a PC and retains contact with his hierarchy. Likewise, spirits hardly ever own property — though spirits who set themselves up as cult gods can acquire Followers.

TALENTS

Some Talents are appropriate for spirits. For instance, consider Bump Of Direction: did you ever hear of an angel getting lost? Or Simulate Death: that ghost doesn't have to simulate. Feisty spirits such as warrior demons could have combat-oriented Talents like Combat Sense. Spirits associated with a particular environment might have a suitable Environmental Movement.

Universal Translator deserves special mention. Rarely do language barriers exist between humans and any type of spirits (though a legend says that Satan can't tempt the Basque people of the Pyrenees: their unique language is so difficult even the Devil can't learn it). On the other hand, few spirits in stories or legends actually speak multiple languages. Universal Translator makes sense for some cosmopolitan spirits, but you could assume that most spirits automatically speak their summoner's language, or the language of the region where they dwell.

POWERS

Spirits have innate powers. A few spirits might also know spells; for instance, demonic patrons of black magic, or the ghost of a sorcerer. Spirits hardly ever buy Powers with Foci or any other Limitations: they don't need the "props" used by mortal mystics. Apparent Foci such as a demon's armor or an angel's flaming sword are usually just special effects.

Virtually every spirit has some sort of Life Support — they just aren't bothered by conditions that harm mortals, and they live forever. Defense Powers like Damage Resistance can represent a spirit's immunity to most mundane harm, while Mental or Power Defense define a spirit's mystical nature. Desolidification or Teleportation enable a spirit to appear and disappear or ignore mundane barriers. Spirits who dwell on other dimensions need Extra-Dimensional Movement if they are to visit Earth without being Summoned. Gamemasters who plan to include many spirits in their campaign may want to define a Package Deal of standard spirit powers, to save time when preparing character sheets.

Whether spirits have Variable Power Pools is a matter of taste. In stories and legends, some spirits clearly show a limited set of powers. Other spirits may be able to do nearly anything. Take devils, for instance: the grimoires assign each demon lord a small set of powers it can use on the summoner's behalf. Deal-with-the-Devil stories, on the other hand, portray every demon as able to grant nearly any wish, defy space and time, and do darn near anything. If you follow the grimoire model, a devil should have a Multipower of typical powers. If you follow the stories, any demon of rank should have at least a small Power Pool, and possibly a large one.

DISADVANTAGES

Many spirits have powerful Psychological Limitations. In legends and stories, spirits often display very rigid, extreme personalities. Think of demons who *must* be evil, or angels who *must* obey the Divine Law. Enraged makes sense for some spirits, too; for instance, a murder victim's ghost who attacks anyone who reminds him of his killer.

Spirits can have many "physical" Disadvantages as well. Evil spirits traditionally suffer Susceptibilities to sunlight, holy ground, or other conditions associated with life and goodness. Some spirits have strange Susceptibilities: Japanese oni, for instance, are driven off by beans. Elementals have weaknesses based on the properties of the substance they embody. Each class of spirits' physical Disadvantages are discussed more fully in their particular description.

Morally aligned spirits, such as angels and demons, chaos spirits, and so on, are Hunted by their moral opposites. Other sorts of spirits don't have any automatic Hunted; individuals may acquire enemies, but not their class of spirits as a whole.

Spirit hybrids often acquire Disadvantages from their spiritual side. For instance, a person merged with a fire elemental might fear immersion in water, or the son of a demon might take damage on holy ground (though less than his parent would).

Nature Spirits And Genius Loci

Some cultures believed spirits inhabited every part of the landscape. The Greeks, for instance, imagined nymphs in the rivers, dryads in the trees, and oreads in the mountains, plus many other small gods. Nature spirits sometimes resemble elementals, but they can show a lot more personality and individual identity. Nature spirits are also often the spirits of specific locations — a particular tree, river, or mountain. Such entities are also called *genius loci* (literally, "the spirit of the place"). Nature spirits also overlap with faerie-folk and mythic races such as satyrs or tengu. Whether you describe a particular mythic creature as a spirit or corporeal entity is often a matter of taste.

Like elementals, nature spirits have powers related to the phenomenon they embody. A dryad might animate trees, or Teleport from tree to tree. A river-spirit could manipulate water. Nature spirits also sometimes have faerie-like powers to enthrall the mind and delude the senses of unwary mortals. Genius loci suffer an important Disadvantage that they cannot leave their special haunt; players should give some thought to why a nature spirit PC can go where he wills. Less powerful nature spirits may be written as Heroic-level characters, but like

Continued from last page

with oddly-colored eyes or some other indicia of his unusual heritage), and his abilities would be far subtler: the power to detect magic; immunity to diseases and poisons; greater than average STR. He'd probably be an occult investigator or the like.

most spirits, you probably need Superheroic point totals to represent all the powers that seem suitable.

Other Spirits

Folklore, occultism, and your own imagination can suggest new classes of spirits. Here are two examples.

ATAVISMS

Atavisms personify strong emotions and raw, physical drives such as fear, desire, pleasure, pain, or hunger. The occultist and painter Austin Osman Spare coined the name; other occultists sometimes, confusingly, call these spirits elementals.

Human thought spontaneously creates atavisms on the Astral Plane, ready for a mystic to summon and bind into service. Some black magic involves concentrating your hate through a magic ritual and sending the resultant thought-creature to attack your enemy. Spare claimed he could use atavisms to boost his strength and endurance. From here, it's an easy jump to totem-spirits invoked to give oneself the strength or hunting-skill of an animal. Western mysticism doesn't make much use of these brutal, almost mindless spirits, but tribal shamans and witch-doctors might know a lot about them.

Atavisms themselves are too mindless to make decent PCs, but characters might gain powers through fusion with an atavism. Suitable powers include superhuman physical Characteristics, emotion manipulation, or control over other people's bodies. "Animal powers" are another possibility: therianthropy may have some connection to atavisms, by way of totem-spirits.

PLANETARY SPIRITS

Planetary Spirits are described in two grimoires, the *Arbatel* and the spurious *Fourth Book* added to the *Occult Philosophy* of Henry Cornelius Agrippa. (They are not the same spirits in each book.) These possess powers based on the astrological associations of each planet. Thus, the *Arbatel* describes Och, Prince of the Sun, as creating gold and conferring health through magical medicines; while Phaleg, the spirit of Venus, grants beauty. Planetary spirits would make an excellent addition to the astrology-based sample setting described in Chapter Two. Since planetary spirits have no actual legendry, you can give them whatever specific Powers, Disadvantages, and personalities you want.

MISCELLANEOUS TYPES

Finally, some of the more peculiar or obscure types of magical beings don't fit in any category but themselves.

Golems

Golems are artificial creatures animated by magic. The original Golem was a man of clay given "life" by a magic word, but mystics could create golems made of stone, metal, wood, glass, rubber, or anything else. Golems don't have to be robot-like, mindless servants. Jack Pumpkinhead and the Scarecrow from the Oz books were free-willed golems.

Stories emphasize the golem's amazing resistance to damage. Very little can harm a living statue. For a less obvious example, the Scarecrow survived the loss of all his straw stuffing on several occasions: as long as his head remained safe (it detached), he could ignore any injury to his body.

OTHER CONSTRUCTS

Not all mystical "constructs" have to take the human form of a golem or scarecrow. Perhaps a magical statue of a dragon or griffin can come to life (or become a PC). A technomancer wielding strange magic powers in a modern or Science Fiction setting might make golems that are as much like robots or radio-controlled vehicles as humanoid statues. A Victorian mystic scientist might use "steampunk" technology to create his constructs.

Magic Item Wielders

A character might have no magic of his own, but wield a magical item — a magic wand, a sword, a suit of armor, a talisman, or whatever. In some ways, item users fall the furthest from true mysticism, but owning a magic item can inspire a character to learn real magic (so he isn't helpless when his arch-nemesis takes that blasted Focus away).

Magical Races

Some beings from mythology seem too corporeal to classify as spirits. At least some treatments of the faerie-folk, for instance, describe them as eating and drinking, or suffering wounds. The giants of Norse myth, Greek centaurs, and many other mythic creatures also clearly live in the world instead of just visiting. They are best seen as corporeal creatures with innate magic powers — if only the power to exist as anatomically improbable creatures. In a Fantasy setting, humans often share the world with many magical races. In a more contemporary campaign, magical races may dwell on other planes or hidden corners of the Earth. *The HERO System Bestiary, Fantasy HERO,* and *Monsters, Minions, and Marauders* describe many magical races drawn from folklore around the world, with full character sheets.

Tulpas

"Tulpas" are artificial beings materialized from pure thought. The term comes from Tibet, where materializing tulpas is one of the most advanced spiritual disciplines. A Tibetan lama supposedly takes weeks to create a tulpa, but a hard-core sorcerer might speed the process. A powerful lama or sorcerer might create a tulpa with super-powers. All those stories about writers whose characters come off the page and get a life of their own are about accidental tulpas.

The creator outlines the tulpa's personality and abilities, but the tulpa has free will and its opinions may change. Elements from the creator's unconscious mind leak into the tulpa's mind too, with unforeseen and probably undesirable consequences.

Only magic or a sophisticated medical examination can distinguish a tulpa from a real human being. When a tulpa dies, however, its body evaporates back into nothingness. If a tulpa lives long enough it can become fully real — real enough to have children and leave a corpse.

Crossover Characters

Magical characters can fall into more than one category. Mythological gods might use sorcery in addition to their innate powers; pacters might receive innate powers as well as their spells; anyone can own a potent magic item.

A few characters in comics or fiction add magic as a sideline to their main powers. These include Master Villains: on top of their powered armor, legions of agents, deadly Oriental martial arts, or whatever, they know some magic, too. Such magic usually functions as an extra means to help the Master Villain achieve some non-combat objective, such as stealing a unique artifact, brainwashing the hero's best friend, or escaping "certain" death.

At the other end of the power spectrum, some Heroic-level or even Competent Normal characters know just a little magic and usually must rely on mundane skills. Harold Shea, the interdimensional adventurer from the "Incompleat Enchanter" stories of L. Sprague deCamp and Fletcher Pratt, is a good example. Shea is a psychologist by trade, with fencing as a hobby that comes in handy when visiting worlds of myth and magic. He knows a few principles of magic too... but his spells seldom turn out the way he planned. His wits and epée are more reliable.

Among heroes, wild martial artists who do things like split walls with *ch'i*-powered shouts could qualify as semi-mages. Characters described as "learning" psychic powers are mystics in all but name. A mystically-empowered character might function most of the time as a conventional brick, energy projector, or whatever, and only occasionally cast actual spells. A few characters in comics are flat-out confusing, and it hasn't been clear which of their powers came from magic and which came from mutation or some other origin.

In theory, any sort of hero or villain could learn a bit of magic on the side. This can be especially tempting in superhero settings, where all sorts of powers and origins co-exist. In practice, players and GMs should view crossover characters with caution; they may become unbalancing, and allowing other types of characters to learn spells may tread on the true mystic's toes.

A good character should include a unified origin and set of powers. Mutant sorcerers, cyber-warriors with magic weapons, and the like are just too *cluttered.* Even most Master Villains lack strong enough personalities and origin stories to carry magic on top of all their other abilities.

Some origins demand more from the characters than others. Anybody could be a mutant, or get zapped by a glowing meteor. Magical characters demand *explanation:* people don't become scholar-mages, Servants of Higher Powers, or mythological gods by accident. If you add magic to a character as a secondary specialty, this tail may start wagging the dog.

Just as importantly, players deserve to feel like the game world has some internal logic. Powered armor characters have one sort of powers and act in certain ways; martial artists have other abilities; mutants, vigilantes, gods, and yes, mystics have their own distinctive styles as well. If the powered armor villain starts incanting, or the gun-toting vigilante is revealed as a demon, players will probably think, "Huh? What's going on here?" The same goes for other genres, though few other games allow such promiscuous crossovers. It's okay to confuse the players now and then, but a GM shouldn't do it without a good reason.



MAKING A MAGUS



Dare with determined will to
burst the portals
Past which in terror others fain
would steal!
Now is the time, through deeds,
to show that mortals
The calm sublimity of gods
can feel.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, part I

Creating a character involves more than spending points, and this particularly applies to magical characters. Fortunately, magical characters can draw upon an especially rich tradition. When players and GMs create origin stories for their characters they can steal ideas from Fantasy novels, comic books, mythology, and folklore. History, legend, and myth even suggest a general career path for wizards: the Myth of the Magus.

DEVELOPING THE ORIGIN

To repeat: more than most heroes, mystics gain their Powers, Skills and Disadvantages for *reasons,* which the origin story should address. Here are some traditional plot elements for magical origins, taken from comic books, Fantasy novels, and mythology. No event excludes the others. Gamemasters can introduce many of them at later points in a character's career as well.

ELDER SAGE AS MENTOR

Mystics can live to incredible ages. Your teacher studied magic for decades, even centuries, gaining great knowledge and power. Age, however, has left him physically feeble. What's more, several lifetimes' worth of enemies wait for him to step outside his well-protected Sanctum. He'd like to help more, but all too often he cannot provide anything but information and advice. Indeed, you must protect your teacher now and then.

Elder Sages might not have amazing raw power, but they can do just about anything, given time to prepare. Variable Power Pools are quite appropriate here. Sages run out of steam quickly, though, and are pushovers if an attack can penetrate their mystic defenses.

Such an Elder Sage makes a splendid teacher for a mystical PC, and a valuable NPC in any case. In terms of knowledge and flexibility, an Elder Sage demonstrably surpasses the PCs. On the other hand, an Elder Sage cannot steal the heroes' thunder because the Sage's physical infirmity prevents him from really getting into the action.

But no law says an Elder Sage *must* be a feeble, reclusive NPC. A somewhat more vigorous Elder Sage can provide an interesting roleplaying challenge for a creative player who doesn't need great power to have great fun.

FALLEN AND REDEEMED

Originally, you weren't a very nice guy. You may have enjoyed wealth and fame as a doctor, businessman, or other professional, but your pride, ambition, and greed left no room in your life for any warmer human feelings. And then your life came crashing down — an accident, a legal probe, a partner's betrayal, *something* took your brilliant career and ripped it to shreds.

When you hit bottom, you found... magic. Perhaps a book, a teacher, or an artifact showed you the way to a new life. Studying the mystic arts became a path to redemption. Now you pursue a nobler ambition: to serve humanity with the powers you have learned.

Any powers are appropriate for this origin. Skills retained from earlier life help individualize the character. Disadvantages might include Hunteds (people you annoyed in your previous life?), Physical Limitations (from wounds or dissolute living) or Psychological Limitations such as *Haunted By Past Life* or *Lacks Self-Confidence* on the one hand, or *Strong Sense Of Duty To Mankind* or *Code Versus Killing* on the other.

INHERITOR OF THE MANTLE

You are the latest successor to magical powers wielded by others before you. Perhaps a knack for magic runs in your family, or someone chose you as the next keeper of a powerful artifact. This sort of character might also inherit Disadvantages with his powers, such as Hunteds, codes of honor, or various vows and prohibitions he must observe to remain "worthy" of his power.

IN TOO DEEP

Honest, you never meant it seriously. You didn't *really* believe a demon would come to your pentacle, that your curse would kill, that the cult was more than a chance to play dress-up. You got involved with the supernatural as a lark... and now you can't get out. You've seen too much. For your

own protection, you must study the mystic arts in earnest, to fight the horrors with their own weapons. God help you.

Characters who are In Too Deep tend not to start with very powerful or flexible magic. That's the whole point of the character: he's a beginner, coping with circumstances beyond his control. To compensate, he might possess weapons (magic or otherwise) or special Skills. In Too Deep gives a fledgling mystic a good excuse to join a team of other heroes or adventurers. On the other hand, a GM could build a whole campaign around characters who've fallen In Too Deep.

Obvious Disadvantages include Hunteds and Psychological Limitations ranging from *Fears The Supernatural* to *Desperately Seeking Magical Power.* Considering how such characters discovered the supernatural, some Unluck may be in order, too.

MYSTICAL TESTS

This usually goes with some other origin bit. You had to pass some sort of test to obtain your magical power. The cosmic entity needed to know the strength of your devotion, or the elder sorcerer wanted to see if your heart was pure. Even if the test itself didn't give you magic powers, it showed you were worth teaching.

The mystical test of initiation turns up everywhere in folklore, Fantasy, and comics. Mystical tests also make good hooks for stories: to get something he needs, the hero must pass a harrowing physical, mental, or moral challenge. True mystics can expect to face mystical tests again and again.

THE ONE PROPHESIED

Your destiny was set before you were born. Perhaps you discovered this when you visited some back-of-beyond place and all the villagers looked at you funny. Eventually some old coot explained that their god or culture hero prophesied that one would come who fit certain conditions — which you meet. Or perhaps the old coot shows up on your doorstep, saying he's been looking for you for the last 20 years. Whatever the circumstances, the prophecy says he must give you something: a magic weapon or talisman, a scroll of ancient lore, a complete magical education, or even the revelation that you're the reincarnation of their god or hero, with powers you never knew you had. This usually comes as a bit of a shock, especially when the old loon adds that fighting some ancient demon comes with the job.

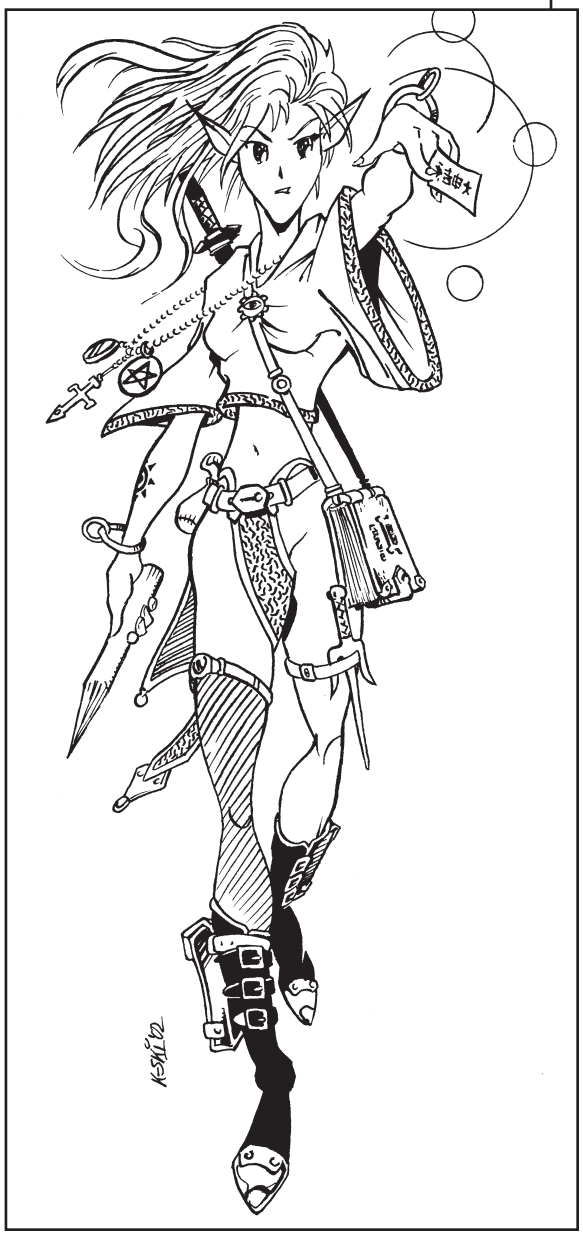
The One Prophecied often finds himself Hunted by the arch-enemy of whoever did the prophesying. The person who reveals the prophecy and guides you to discover your powers makes a fine DNPC.

A final note: what happens to the people who guarded the mystic legacy all those years (or centuries)? Having passed on the legacy, do they just shake hands and wave you on your way, or do they expect you to stick around as their new culture hero? If you don't, do they follow you? Pursuit by angry cultists or tribal people who feel betrayed could be a headache. Pursuit by worshipful, would-be followers could be worse: "Achmed, put that knife down! You can't go attacking waiters just because they say the restaurant is full!"

VENGEFUL HUNTER

A supernatural force did something rude to you or your loved ones, and now you want to commit rudeness right back at it. Vampire hunters are the best known example of Vengeful Hunters. Perhaps the original act of magical malfeasance gave you powers, or you went looking for magic with which to fight back: if not a true mystic yourself, at least you possess useful powers, weapons, or Skills that let you fight alongside the real wizards.

Vengeful Hunters really load up on Psychological Limitations such as *Hunting For Demons, Ruthless,* or even *Hates Everything Supernatural.* Such obsessions can make Vengeful Hunters lousy team players (especially in a magic-intensive campaign), so players should choose Psychological Limitations carefully. Vengeful Hunters also tend to be Hunted by the ghoulies and ghosties they pursue.



THE MYTH OF THE MAGUS

Literature builds on legend, and the legends of the world present a surprisingly coherent picture of how a mystic's life proceeds. Not every mystic treads the full path, and each magus emphasizes certain elements more than others, but the path is always there, hidden behind the details of biography. Players and GMs may not want characters to follow the Myth of the Magus — and they don't have to — but it can provide depth and structure to a campaign. Mystics face perils beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals. Their reward can be nothing less than godhood, because the Myth of the Magus fits inside an even grander pattern: the Myth of the Prophet or Savior. And here we tread on sensitive ground indeed, for the greatest magi of history established religions. This says nothing about the validity of the religions they founded — only that people really like certain narratives.

INITIATION

The career path of the Magus begins with initiation. At one extreme, a god may simply appear and make an ordinary man his servant, authorized to work miracles on demand. At the other extreme, becoming a mystic may require years of arcane studies. Most initiations fall somewhere in between: the future Magus must work to gain magical powers, but some special moment marks the transition from student to master.

Very often, a future Magus begins as the apprentice of some older mystic or prophet. Merlin studied under Master Bleys. Pythagoras learned from the Scythian mage Abaris. Jesus began his ministry after his baptism by John. Even the evil wizards find their mentors: the cult leader Dositheus taught Simon Magus; Gerbert of Aurillac (later Pope Sylvester II) stole a book of black magic from a Saracen wizard. The teacher doesn't have to be human, either. Solomon learned his magic directly from God, and any number of black magicians bought their magic from the Devil.

When the training ends, the Magus is confirmed as worthy to command the powers of heaven and earth. Sometimes confirmation takes the form of an actual graduation ceremony: medieval legend claimed the University of Salamanca offered regular courses in wizardry. Most of the time, however, the initiation involves a trial of some sort. The Buddha faced temptation as he meditated under the Bo tree. Simon Magus proved his power by defeating his teacher in a duel of magic.

FAMOUS DEEDS AND FAR JOURNEYS

The Magus work wonders throughout the land. Good mystics defeat monsters and demons, heal the sick, lift curses, and make the land bountiful. They may teach future kings, as Merlin taught Arthur, or Aristotle (credited with books of magic in the Middle Ages) taught Alexander. Evil mystics rise in the world through false miracles: Gerbert became Pope through the Devil's help; Faust produced magical feasts for his friends; Aleister Crowley turned a disciple into a donkey. See *What Magic Is For,* below, for some of the classic magical feats.

CONTESTS OF MAGIC

The Magus faces contests of magical power. The contest of miracles between Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers was the greatest (and most mismatched) of all mystic battles, but legend provides many other examples. Roger Bacon and his comrade Friar Bungay matched spells with the German sorcerer Vandermast; the court magician Zyto of Bohemia put a rival illusionist in his place by swallowing him whole, then vomiting him up again into a tub of water.

PERSECUTION AND FALL

The enemies of the Magus rally, however, and things turn bad for him. Apollonius of Tyana stood trial in Rome for black magic — a capital offense. Nimue betrayed a love-besotted Merlin and imprisoned him in magic sleep. Doctor John Dee lost his royal patronage.

The evil mystics likewise find the limits of their power. Simon's magic failed whenever he met an Apostle. Faust, like so many other pacters with the Devil, learned he didn't really want to go to Hell after all. Casanova (who ran occult con jobs in between seductions) landed in the dungeons of the Inquisition.

RISE AND REDEMPTION

After the fall, however, some Magi experience a literal or metaphorical resurrection to greater glory. Jesus literally rose from death. Apollonius vindicated himself in court. Merlin, like Arthur, shall wake and return in England's darkest hour. Some of the Devil-pacters repented at the last moment and reached Heaven, such as Gerbert, his predecessor St. Cyprian, and (in some versions) Faust. Casanova escaped in one of history's more astounding jailbreaks.

With his "resurrection," the Magus might bring a final boon of wisdom for mankind: a "Sermon on the Mount." Even Casanova did this in his old age, through his biography in which he explained how he pulled his cons.

DIVINITY: THE MYTH OF THE SAVIOR

In its rare final stage, the Myth of the Magus joins the Myth of the Savior. The Magus ascends to Heaven and becomes a god. Jesus did this; so did Apollonius, according to his biographer. Simon Magus tried to storm Heaven but St. Peter cast him down and he died. Crowley tried to set himself up as Prophet of the New Aeon, and found a dubious "immortality" as the fountainhead of twentieth century occultism.

After a successful ascension, the followers of a deified Magus fill in the other stages of the Myth of the Savior after the fact: the divine or otherwise mysterious origin; portents at the Savior's birth; and childhood dangers. In fact, the Magus and Savior myth cycle has such a stranglehold on the human mind that believers splice the Myth onto a religion's founder even if *none* of the traditional events happened to them in life. Mohammed is a perfect example. Mohammed never claimed any supernatural powers for himself — but as the centuries

passed, Muslim storytellers encrusted Mohammed's real biography with miracles and portents.

If a Magus is destined to become a Savior, the wonders and portents begin even before the wizard's birth. A god usually visits the future mage's mother, perhaps to father the mystic. Apollo fathered Pythagoras; Zoroaster was the son of Ahura Mazda; and everyone knows about that kid from Bethlehem.

Only a dolt could miss the birth of a Savior-Magus, what with all the signs and miracles. At the birth of Mohammed, all the idols in the world fell over. The Buddha walked straight out of his mother's womb and left footprints in solid rock.

Future Savior-Mages may face special dangers as agents of evil try to abort their destiny. Thus, Moses escaped the slaughter of the Hebrew children because his mother set him adrift on the Nile to be found by Pharaoh's daughter. A great serpent tried to kill the young Krishna.

Applications

So much for the Myth of the Magus as it plays out in history and legend. How can you use it in a game?

The Myth of the Magus directs special attention to the origin of a mystical character. How did the character learn magic? What led him beyond the mundane? Who initiated him at the end of his training? The details of a mystic's origin story create many hooks for the GM: teachers who give advice and assign missions; fellow students who became friends or rivals; enemies who tried to block the future wizard's course; and so on.

A mystic PC might not have finished his apprenticeship. His eventual initiation as a true Master of Magic provides a goal for the character and a natural climax for a story arc. Mystics may cycle through several initiations, too, each with their own trial and reward. For a Magus destined for divinity, his downfall and "death" becomes a particularly harrowing trial and initiation.

Villains follow a distorted version of the Myth of the Magus as well. More than one adventure can revolve around an evil mystic's attempt to win initiation to some greater power. In both comic books and Fantasy epics, evil wizards often seek godhood or world-dominating power. Here the PCs become part of the hostile mystic's initiation trial.

Mystical heroes face contests of power every time they face a mystical villain. Contests of power become especially literal in superhero settings. A Magus, however, may face challenges he cannot overcome by beating somebody up. A Magus encounters moral challenges, too, sometimes with no clue about what constitutes winning. Jesus faced temptation by the Devil and won by *refusing* to work miracles. To be sure, a mystic in a game faces plenty of challenges where blasting an enemy with flashing spells is entirely appropriate. When the gods show up and demand the character justify his existence — or the existence of all humanity — through a contest, however, it's best to think twice. Cosmic entities often look for wisdom rather than raw power.

Comic books and Fantasy stories often overlook the community service aspect of the Myth. Supermages routinely block invasions from beyond, and Fantasy wizards slay demons and monsters, but they seldom do something proactively good for their community, nation, or world — only stop evils once they attack. For an unusual adventure, GMs can challenge a mystical PC to teach someone wisdom, rescue a group of people from danger, or even save a nation from a natural disaster.

At the very least, GMs can use good deeds as introductory scenes. For instance, a dimension lord might set a forest fire as a cover for an invasion. An attempt to reform a gang leader could reveal clues to a Satanic plot. Conversely, after saving some people from the supernatural consequences of their own folly, a mystic might want to offer a piece of his mind.

The fall-and-redemption or death-and-resurrection motif provides powerful story arcs. These are big events in a mystic's career. A Servant of Higher Powers who breaks faith can undertake an epic quest of atonement (with a little help from his friends). Any mystical hero might be tricked or seduced into evil and try to work his way back to the light. Even a character's death can become an excuse for another adventure, as his allies try to resurrect him.

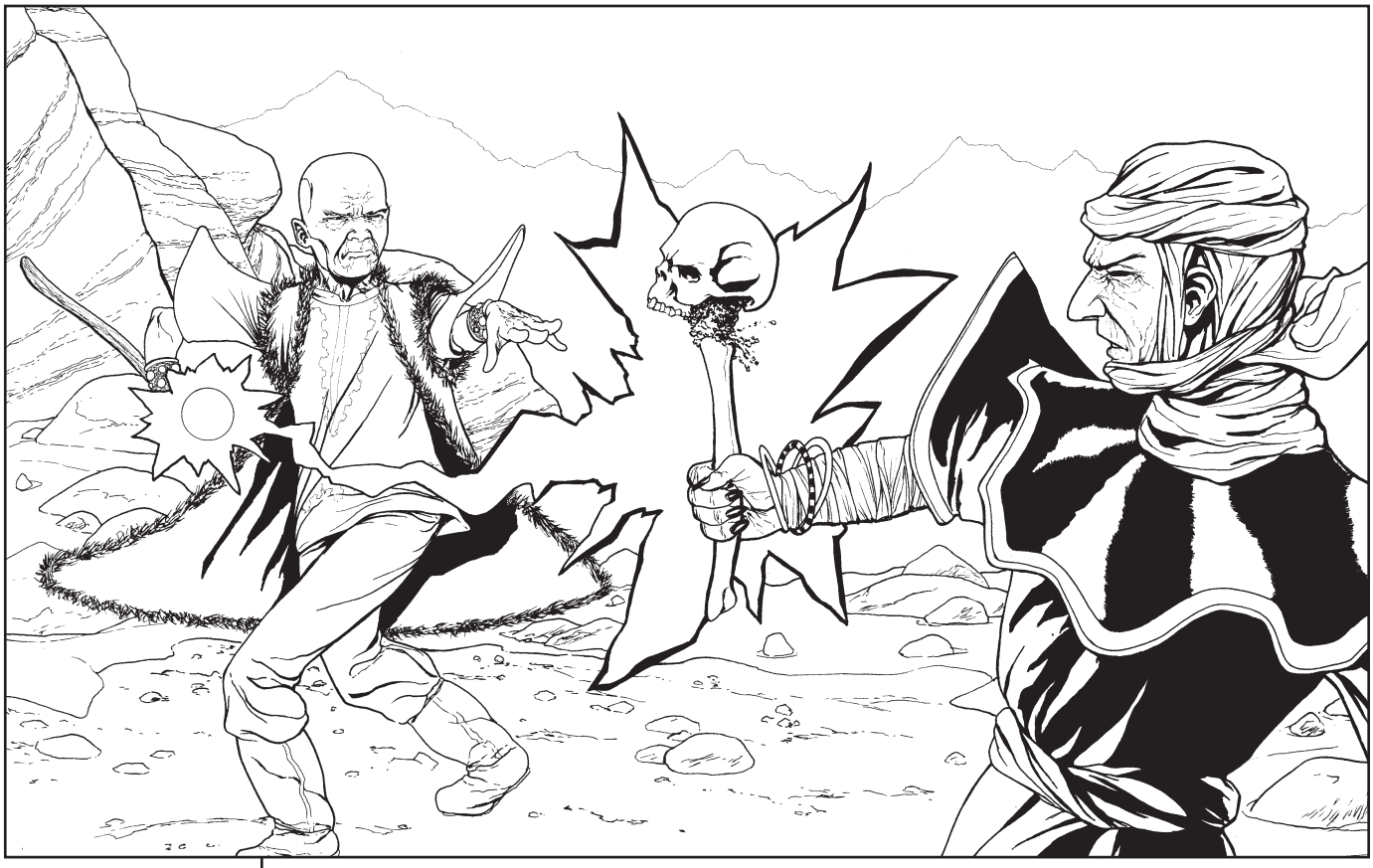
At the end of the Myth of the Magus waits the possibility of godhood. This can provide a long term goal for a mystical campaign. In comic books, mystical heroes never actually reach this goal — it's the end of the character's career, after all — but they may help their mentor or some other senior magus become One With The Universe or otherwise transcend mortality. It doesn't happen very often in fiction, either (though Gandalf's return to the Undying Lands, at the end of *Lord of the Rings,* may provide an example). Simply presenting the possibility of a divine ascension, however, can add depth and resonance to a mystical hero. Each victory gains added meaning as a step on the path to Ultimate Wisdom or divine union.

WHAT MAGIC IS FOR

Many of the wonders performed by fictional mystics don't appear in the claims of "real" mystics, or even in legends. Put simply, the sort of combat spells seen in Fantasy novels and games are only a small part of what people really want from magic. Grimoires, folklore, and other legends describe many wondrous mystical feats, but a few themes turn up again and again.

Luck and Prosperity account for a large percentage of all magic. People want magic to bring them material benefits. This may be as simple as a spirit who pours out bags of golden ducats (as in the *Black Pullet,* a grimoire), or less direct, such as a blessing on the crops, luck at gambling, or a successful job interview.

Healing and Exorcism form another common sort of magic. Deep down, most people believe misfortune doesn't just happen; it's the result of malice



or personal moral failure. (Don't believe it? Then why do you yell at your car when it won't start?) The oldest grimoires in the world are Sumerian guides to exorcising the demons of disease. Amulets, incantations, herbal potions, and exorcistic rites are all employed to avert misfortune or relieve its effects.

Curses inflict misfortune on others. Most "real" magicians consider black magic entirely justified when they do it for themselves or their clients. The stereotypical Fantasy wizard's fireball or mystic bolt is just a very direct sort of curse. "Real" curses spoil harvests, inflict disease or poverty, or cause other, less direct sorts of harm.

Domination spells have aspects of cursing. Many spells are meant to force obedience from another person or a spirit. That includes love-spells, a major class of magic all by itself. Even the gentlest love-spell has coercive aspects. Spells of domination also include illusion, which deludes and overpowers the senses of other people.

Divination and Detection spells give people certainty when they lack rational or reliable sources of information. Crystal-gazing, Tarot cards, the I Ching, astrology, necromancy, numerology, and a host of other -ologies and -mancies promise to reveal the future and explain the past and present. Witch-doctors promise to reveal the sorcerer who cursed you or the spirit you angered, and thus explain your misfortune. Mind reading, clairvoyance, and other forms of mystical perception fit in this category, too.

Transcendent Experiences form a subtler goal of magic. Mystics often seek experience beyond normal existence, such as a kabbalist's vision of the Throne of God, or a shaman's astral journey into the spirit world. Sometimes the mystic shares the experience, as in a spiritualist séance. Even lycanthropy and other sorts of shape-shifting offer a magical experience of the animal world. Sometimes a transcendent experience has a practical goal, as when a shaman seeks favors from the spirits, but often the experience is its own reward.

Commanding the Powers of Nature can take many forms. In legend, great mystics may raise or quell storms, cause earthquakes, tame animals, part the waters, or otherwise master the natural world. "Elemental" magicians obviously specialize in this. A mystic can use this power to help, harm, or simply show off.

Of course these don't exhaust all the goals of magic, but they are especially common. When you design a mystic, you might ask whether the character can accomplish any of these goals. That includes villains: even a classic Fantasy Dark Lord might want good harvests to feed his Legions of Terror. These arch-villains also usually contact demons and hell-gods from beyond; they don't just use curse-magic. For a mystical hero, you might want to consider what he can do beyond killing monsters or defeating villains. Could he show his mastery of nature by rescuing someone from a burning building or a cave-in? Does he possess sources of information denied to mere mortals, that could solve a crime or locate a missing person? Examples of healing or prosperity range from raising the money to save an orphanage, to raising the dead. Such feats help establish a character as a Magus.

SKILLS



> These are the Sciences which Magick takes to her self for servants and helpers; and he that knows not these, is unworthy to be named a Magician.
>
> —Giambattista della Porta, *Natural Magick*

Whatever the genre, mystics tend to be Skill-intensive characters. No Skills are truly inappropriate for mystics, except in specific genres. (Obviously, Computer Programming is not very plausible in a Swords And Sorcery world.) Some Skills are especially important for mystics, however, or have special applications.

TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

High-tech Skills like Computer Programming, Electronics, and Systems Operation become important for mystics only if the setting includes some sort of "technomancy." (See Chapter Four for a discussion of this magical style.) Otherwise mystics usually ignore them, though playing a mystic who's also good with computers or gadgetry might make for an interesting change of pace.

ACTING

In his "performance" for the community, a shaman plays the roles of the spirits with whom he communes; an impressive show also helps convince patients of a shaman's or witch doctor's power. Skill at deception — especially feigning greater power — helps a mystic negotiate with spirits... or mortal authorities. This Skill also helps a mystic tell if someone is possessed or their will is otherwise not their own.

ANALYZE

A character with Analyze Magic can evaluate the magical abilities and powers of a spellcaster, and perhaps other magic-using creatures. The Skill has several possible uses.

Most simply, the character can figure out what a spell does, if it isn't immediately obvious (this Action takes no time). For instance, an occult investigator could tell that a cult ritual is meant to summon a demon, or a sorcerer could recognize that a supposed blessing is actually a spell to influence the target's mind. The GM may impose a penalty on the roll if the character lacks an appropriate KS of the style of magic being used, or otherwise lacks experience with that type of magic.

A character may also use Analyze Magic to assess another character's power, skill, training, and strategies. Page 49 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* gives a general description of how to use this Skill. With a successful Analyze Magic roll, a character might identify who trained a spellcaster ("Only students of the Five Elements Temple cast fireballs using that particular gesture..."), his knowledge and raw power ("He says the words so sloppily! He is not trained well, for all his power..."), and perhaps even deduce secret aspects of the magic or gain a tactical advantage ("He couldn't cast such spells without a demon's help — which tells me just how to fight him!")

Analyze Magic does not itself enable a character to design a new spell, or operate an unfamiliar magic item; for such feats, see Spell Research (under Inventor) and Power: Magic Skill. Analyze Magic may, however, act as a Complementary Skill for such attempts. For instance, a mystic trying to reconstruct a spell he saw another mystic use could have a better chance of success if he analyzed the spell when he saw it performed.

Mystics are usually the only characters to know this Skill. In some settings, however, other characters might learn the Skill through sufficient direct observation and experience with magic. Some spirits or gods may also learn to Analyze Magic.

BRIBERY

In settings where magic is a disreputable or forbidden art, mystics may need to bribe local officials to assure their own safety. Negotiations with spirits (an important part of many magical traditions) may also involve Bribery to buy favors.

BUREAUCRATICS

If a setting features a hierarchical spirit world where every god and demon bears specific zones of power and fealty, mystics may need Bureaucratics to gain favors from spirits. (The Chinese pantheon is a particularly good example.) A character who belongs to a large mystical order, such as a spellcasting priesthood or a magical university, can use Bureaucratics to negotiate the office politics of that organization.

CONCEALMENT

This Skill has nothing to do with mysticism *per se,* but sorcerers and other mystics often need to be sensitive to small clues. For instance, a successful Concealment roll might let a mystic notice the runes hidden in the design of a mosaic floor, or spot the vampire in a group of people.

CONVERSATION

A mystic with Conversation might notice details of speech and body language that indicate someone is possessed, driven mad by forbidden lore, or otherwise not himself anymore. Creatures that impersonate human form may also give themselves away through subtle conversational clues.

CRAMMING

Cramming can represent a mystic's vast erudition in subjects that do not become useful very often. The character can't keep all his arcane lore in mind all the time, but after a few hours of "brushing up" he's ready to identify pre-Columbian glyphs, facet an Atlantean power-crystal, or locate native guides in an alien dimension.

CRIMINOLOGY

Occult investigators find this Skill extremely useful. Not only does Criminology expose hoaxes, the Skill lets an investigator gather and interpret clues to actual supernatural crimes and mysteries. For instance, a successful Criminology roll could let an investigator recognize that a grisly murder was actually a ritual slaying by Satanic cultists.

CRYPTOGRAPHY

Scholar-mages use this Skill a lot. The translation function lets an arcane scholar interpret mystical texts in ancient or obscure languages; but occult texts are often written in actual code as well. (Occultists actually wrote some of the first studies of cryptography.) Kabbalists can use Cryptography as a Complementary Skill to find hidden numerological meanings in sacred texts.

DEDUCTION

Mystics often encounter mysterious puzzles, creatures, or phenomena outside their experience — perhaps outside any human's experience. After a mystic gathers information through special senses, research among ancient lore, and Contacts with spirits, Deduction puts it all together and reveals what's going on. A successful Deduction roll may also reveal the special weakness of a nameless horror that seems otherwise invincible.

Gamemasters should be fairly generous with Deduction, because players seldom appreciate the significance of clues to an occult mystery. Not many players have background knowledge of cultists, wizards, and mystic dimensions comparable to the conventions of organized crime, robbery, or terrorism one naturally acquires from TV, movies, and comic books.

FORENSIC MEDICINE

Occult investigators often need this Skill to find a cause of death — supernatural or otherwise. Necromancers also may find this Skill useful, or at least relevant to their special field of interest. In Fantasy settings, though, anyone who knows too much about how people die and what happens after death may be suspected of being an assassin or a necromancer.

FORGERY

Even if a mystic never wants to commit forgery himself, this Skill is useful for spotting other people's forgeries. For instance, a ceremonial magician might want to be sure a grimoire is genuine before he attempts to use the binding-spell written in it. Unscrupulous people might also forge talismans, rings, and other magical paraphernalia; this becomes especially feasible if a setting does not include easy, magical methods to detect an item's authenticity.

GAMBLING

Many gambling methods, such as cards and dice, actually began as systems of fortune-telling. Diviners may pick up skill at the more sordid and worldly uses of their tools. The "Devil's Casino" — a place where characters gamble for their souls or other supernatural stakes — is a classic setting for mystical adventures.

HIGH SOCIETY

In some settings, the Skill to schmooze with highly-placed people may be all that stands between a mystic and execution as a witch. High Society also helps mystics treat with gods, faerie-folk, and other powerful supernatural creatures who value social graces (or at least proper subservience).

INTERROGATION

Interrogation can represent a ceremonial magician's attempts to browbeat and intimidate a reluctant spirit. Priests may need Interrogation as part of exorcisms. Mystic Interrogation, however, uses divine names and magical implements instead of the spotlight in the face and the rubber hose.

At the GM's option, a mystic who can only use Interrogation against mystic beings and the like may take the Skill with a -½ Limitation.

INVENTOR: SPELL RESEARCH

Few mystics have any use for Inventor itself. On the other hand, mystics often use its magical analog, *Spell Research.* This Skill enables a mystic to devise new spells, or activate unfamiliar magic items. Like Inventor, Spell Research is an Intellect Skill. Spell Research does not itself grant a character any arcane knowledge; the Skill represents the spark of genius that enables a mystic to go beyond what he has learned.

To use Spell Research, a mystic may need appropriate Knowledge about his style of magic and other arcane subjects. Devising a new spell takes a long time and might require a special laboratory as well, but this depends on the nature of magic in a setting. An alchemist, for instance, absolutely needs a lab stocked with a wide variety of substances and equipment. A Hindu holy man, on the other hand, might need nothing more than a quiet place to meditate for a few months.

The applications of Spell Research overlap with Magic Skill (see Power: Magic). In some campaigns, the GM might prefer Spell Research to Magic Skill. In others — for instance, a setting where magic is highly scholarly, and reliable if you



fully understand a spell — he might decide that Magic Skill is unnecessary. In such a case, Spell Research can also take Magic Skill's place as the control skill for mystical Power Pools.

KNOWLEDGE SKILL

Mystics know a great deal that other people don't. Scholar-mages in particular should possess appropriate Knowledge Skills. Here are some typical Knowledge Skills a mystical character might possess.

Area Knowledge

Magical heroes may travel to exotic locations on Earth, and it's nice to know what to expect. For mages and other mystical heroes, an Area Knowledge might include information about sacred or accursed sites, dwellings of ancient mages, and other locations whose significance somehow escapes the tourist guidebooks.

AK: Dimension

This is a normal Area Knowledge skill — but it's about a mystical otherworld such as Faerie, the Astral Plane, or the realm of a mythological pantheon. As with any Area Knowledge, the character knows about the other plane's geography, environment, life forms, society, power groups, special dangers, and the like. The more specific the area covered, the more specific the knowledge will be. A character who buys the very general Area Knowledge "Other Planes," for instance, knows little beyond the names of more frequently-visited worlds. A character with AK: City Of Pelferlost, City-States Of Yong, could give directions to the best restaurants.

Mystics may also possess Skills such as KS: Faerie or KS: Outer Planes. These provide more theoretical, less practical information. For instance, a character with KS: Faerie would know about many locations in Faerie; but couldn't give directions to them.

Dimensional Area Knowledges can serve as Complementary Skills to Dimensional Navigation rolls (see below).

KS: Arcane And Occult Lore

The more scholarly sort of mystic knows about many obscure subjects. Examples of the sorts of subjects this KS covers include Runes, Glyphs, and Sigils (symbols and diagrams used in magic); Mystic Gemology (magical properties of gems and minerals); Mystic Botany (magical uses of herbs); Basic Demonology And Mystic Beings; Famous Mystics (the great mystics of the past and present); and Legends (myths and folklore). (Of course, a character could take a KS in any of those subjects specifically, indicating a broader and deeper grounding in that lore.) Characters need such arcane knowledge to practice some styles of magic. Any mystic may find occult lore useful in some circumstances. For instance, knowledge of Runes, Glyphs, and Sigils might enable a mystic to recognize a warning symbol painted on a door, or the runes carved in a staff might tell how to invoke its magic. Arcane And Occult Lore may also be used as a Complementary Skill with Analyze Magic, Magic Skill, or Spell Research.

KS: Cosmic Entities

The possessor of this Skill knows about the *really* powerful people in the supernatural world. Depending on the setting, these might be gods, dimension lords, conceptual entities, or Nameless Horrors From Beyond. When a character faces such

DIVINATION METHODS

These divination methods all really exist. A few of the more obscure divinatory techniques may suggest interesting special effects for magic — or at least provide names for schools of Fantasy magic. Some, however, are just wacky.

Aeromancy: Divination by atmospheric phenomena. A related type of divination is *austromancy,* divination by winds.

Anthropomancy: Divination by the entrails of a human sacrifice. One or two of the later and weirder Roman emperors used this. See also *Haruspicy.*

Astragalomancy: Divination using dice (originally knucklebones, or astragals in Greek) or by "casting the bones."

Bibliomancy: Divination by opening a book at random and sticking a finger in. Usually done with the Bible, *the* Book. The sentence you touch supposedly answers your question. Also called *stichomancy,* and it makes a great party game. *Rhapsodomancy* does the same thing but uses poetry.

Botanomancy: Divination by plants. A related type of divination is *xylomancy,* divination by wooden twigs.

Capnomancy: Divination by smoke.

Captromancy: Divination from the fumes from poppy seeds thrown on hot coals.

Cartomancy: Divination by cards — the good old Tarot reading. The Tarot cards are great for made-up magic because they have so much symbolism built in.

Catoptromancy: Divination by mirrors (using a mirror instead of a crystal ball).

Causimomancy: Divination by fire. If objects thrown in a fire doesn't burn, it's a good omen.

Ceromancy: Divination by the shapes formed from dripping wax. A related type of divination is *molybdomancy,* interpreting the shapes formed by dripping molten lead into water; and *tiromancy,* divination by cheese curds.

Cromniomancy: Divination by onions placed on an altar on Christmas Eve.

Crystallomancy: The old crystal ball trick, also called *scrying.* Other scrying tools include bowls of water, ordinary mirrors, black mirrors, jewels, a pool of ink cupped in the palm, or a polished seed.

Geloscopy: Divination from a person's laughter.

Geomancy: Interpreting the designs formed by tossing a handful of earth into a circle — in particular, looking for certain patterns of dots which geomancers have given special Latin names. There are many variations, including *halomancy* (using salt instead of dirt) and *tasseography* (tea leaf reading).

Gyromancy: A form of divination that involves walking around a chalked circle.

Haruspicy: Divination by the entrails of a sacrificed animal. Very popular back in the Roman empire. The kinks and blotches of the intestines gave messages from the gods.

Hydromancy: A scrying technique using water. A possibly related type of divination is *pegomancy,* divination by fountains.

Libanomancy: Divination from incense smoke. Also called *turifumy.*

Lithomancy: Divination by precious stones, either by scrying or as a geomantic technique. A subtype of lithomancy is *margaritomancy,* divination by means of a pearl.

Moleosophy: Telling a person's character by the moles on his body.

Necyomancy: Divination by inspecting the nerves of a corpse.

Ololygmancy: Seeking oracles in the howling of dogs.

Oneiromancy: Interpreting dreams for omens.

Onomancy: Divination from the letters in a person's name.

Onychomancy: Divination from reflected sunlight.

Pyromancy: Divination by fire, either scrying or throwing tokens into a fire and interpreting how they burn. Scrying with a lamp flame is called *lampadomancy.*

Rhabdomancy: The famous divining rod. Also called *dowsing.*

Sciomancy: Divination by shadows or ghosts ("shades").

Spodomancy: Divination by ashes. Also called *tephromancy.*

Theomancy: Divination by oracles or persons possessed by gods.

Zoomancy: Divination by the behavior of animals. Many specialties exist, such as *ophiomancy* (snakes) and *myomancy* (mice).

beings, knowing their likes, dislikes, powers, and (hopefully) weaknesses confers a real advantage.

KS: Divination Methods

The character recognizes the various methods used to tell fortunes, from Astrology to Zoomancy. Knowledge of specific divination methods grants more specific and complete information. Many schools of magic draw their theoretical base from divination methods such as astrology, kabbalism, or the I Ching.

A general KS: Divination allows characters to perform the simpler fortunetelling methods, but some divination techniques require mastery of an extensive body of lore. In such cases, a character needs a KS of that particular divination method to use it.

In most settings, knowing a fortune-telling method doesn't grant actual knowledge of the future. The character merely knows how to follow the accepted divination techniques and interpret the results. Gaining real knowledge about the future, or other hidden information, requires Precognitive Clairsentience (or some other suitable Power). However, in some campaigns the GM may wish to change this KS into a full-blown Intellect Skill, *Divination.* In that case, a successful Divination roll (with Time Modifiers, as described on page 142 of *The HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook) would function as a limited form of Precognition — and the more the character makes the roll by, the more extensive (or more accurate) his vision of the future.

KS: Magic Style

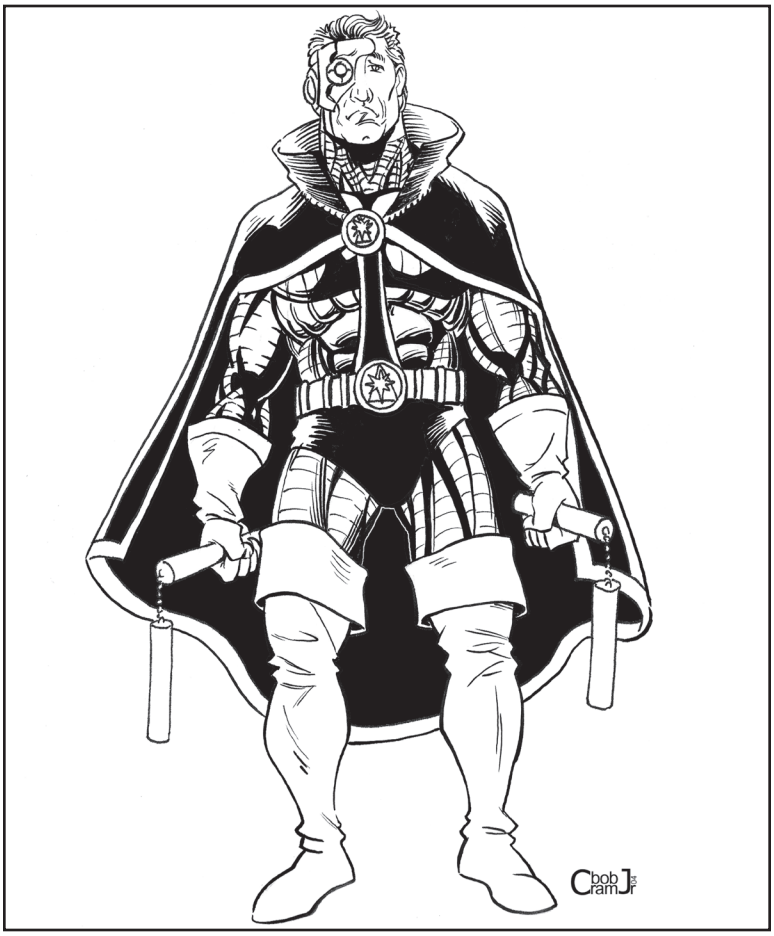
Most sorcerers know something about the history, theories, and classic spells of their own style of magic. For instance, a necromancer probably has KS: Necromancy. Mystics may also study other styles of magic. A general KS: Magic Styles enables a character to recognize the general type of magic another mystic performs, though he cannot gain the more detailed information (or tactical benefits) provided by Analyze Magic (*q.v.*) Knowledge of a magic style may Complement attempts to Analyze or use that sort of magic, however.

This Knowledge Skill deals with real magic, not the distorted and incomplete knowledge of Occultism. On the other hand, KS: Occultism gives better information on how people who are not sorcerers themselves may perceive a magical tradition.

KS: Mystic World

This Knowledge Skill deals with the secret subculture of magic and occultism that extends around the world. Mere Streetwise does not deal with this material very well; at most, Streetwise reveals which weirdoes the punks and lowlifes know to avoid.

The Mystic World contains more than just sorcerers. In fact, locating a real sorcerer through KS: Mystic World is a challenging feat (-0 to -5, depending on how zealously the sorcerer maintains secrecy). A character with an 11- rating in KS: Mystic World can automatically locate published occultists, the more public cult leaders, and libraries and museums with major occult collections. With a



successful Skill Roll, you can separate the dabblers, the deluded, and the charlatans from the people with real power or knowledge. You can locate private collectors and little-known sites of mystical power. The Skill also serves to keep characters abreast of interesting current events among their fellow mystics.

See Chapter Five for more about the Mystic World.

KS: Occultism

This Skill does not deal with actual magic. Rather, it covers the basic concepts and legends of major occult traditions, such as Kabbalism, Taoism, or Voodoo, along with the major writers about that tradition. In some ways, it's a layman's version of KS: Arcane And Occult Lore. Simply buying KS: Occultism gives only the most general information about occult beliefs, practices and folklore around the world. Buying a KS for a specific tradition (such as KS: Voodoo Occultism) gives more detailed information.

KS: Secret History

In some settings, mystical conspiracies work behind the scenes to shape world events. A character with this Skill knows about these Secret Masters, their past deeds, and their plans for the future. The related KS: Conspiracy Theory deals with beliefs about Secret Masters, possibly but not necessarily mystical — but with no indication which conspiracy theories are true (if any).

KS: Spirit World

Also called "Who's Who and What's That." The possessor of this skill knows the lore of ghosts, demons, angels, and other spirits. As always, more specific categories grant more detailed knowledge (and this KS itself provides more detailed information on the subject than KS: Arcane And Occult Lore). Related fields of knowledge include Monsters and Mythic Creatures.

LANGUAGE

Mages traditionally know a wide range of antique and obscure languages. The works of the Ancient Masters seldom exist in adequate English translation. Some magical traditions insist that sorcerers must incant in an archaic language. A student of Kabbalah, for instance, *must* know Hebrew, and the Renaissance demonologists assumed spirits only responded to Latin.

MARTIAL ARTS

East Asia boasts a copious tradition of martial arts masters wielding mystical powers, so it would be perfectly appropriate for a mystic to buy this Skill. Similarly, some schools of mysticism stress the "sound mind in a sound body" approach, teaching Martial Arts as a way of developing the body as part of developing the mind. See *Ninja Hero* for a discussion of combining martial arts with magic.

MECHANICS

As the oldest of the technological Skills, Mechanics has penetrated the furthest into legends and fiction about magic. In some Fantasy settings, clockwork and hydraulic devices might form an area of arcane study, and most people might see them as magic. Mystics might also combine mechanical devices with their magic, such as magical clockwork automata, or an enchanted clock that releases a precast spell when it strikes a certain hour.

NAVIGATION

In some genres, mystic have access to other worlds and need special forms of Navigation to reach them or travel through them. Space itself may work differently in supernatural realms: two regions may be near or far based on their emotional aura, their similarity of colors, or even stranger criteria. Finding your way in such realms depends on recognizing and interpreting cues most folk can scarcely imagine.

Astral Navigation

"Astral planes" are spiritual realms that exist, invisible and intangible, alongside material reality. A mortal may enter an astral plane by separating his soul from his body (see *Astral Form,* page 54), in dreams or visions, or by magic. Some systems of mythology or occultism propose just one astral plane; other beliefs include several of these dimensions.

Accounts of astral planes generally agree, however, that normal conditions of space and speed don't apply in these spiritual realms. Astral travelers can move with immense speed, going anywhere in the world — or visiting realms beyond — in mere seconds. If you don't imagine a destination clearly, however, you may find yourself someplace you don't want to be, or completely lost.

Astral Navigation depends, therefore, on the ability to visualize a destination clearly, and keep your mind on that location. Strength of will can play a role in astral travel, too, so EGO Rolls are complementary with Astral Navigation. Astral Navigation rolls receive modifiers based on how well the character knows his destination, or possibly other connections to the character. For instance, a mystic might receive a small bonus when trying to reach the town where he was born, even if he barely remembers it, because he retains a mystical connection to the place.

Dimensional Navigation

Fantasy stories, mythology, comic books, and occult legend provide many different descriptions of what travel to other dimensions is like. In some settings, characters reach other dimensions using fixed paths or portals, so navigation, as such, never becomes an issue. But in other settings, characters may travel freely between worlds, and need some way to know where they're going.

The *HERO System* assumes Extra-Dimensional Movement takes just a single Phase: a character disappears from one world, and reappears in another. (The *Extra Time* Limitation may lengthen the process, of course.) In some stories, however, movement between dimensions takes considerable time as a default; the GM establishes this as a campaign ground rule. For instance, a character might fly through a Limbo studded with portals to various worlds, or walk interdimensional roads. This does not fundamentally change the nature of Dimensional Navigation — either way, the character doesn't know he's off course until he enters another dimension and discovers he's not where he wanted to go.

Exactly what cues a mystic follows in Dimensional Navigation depends on how the GM defines the nature of the Multiverse and Extra-Dimensional Movement. Travel to the proper location in a particular dimension may depend on visualizing the correct set of mystic symbols, following a strand of colored light through an immense and tangled web of similar strands, or listening for the proper chord in the music of the spheres. Dimensional Navigation may even be purely intuitive or, like Astral Navigation, keeping in mind a clear image of where you want to go.

Astral and Dimensional Navigation are always distinct sub-Skills. Characters use Dimensional Navigation to move *between* planes of existence; they may use Astral Navigation *within* a single mystical dimension.

Temporal Navigation

In stories, mystics occasionally travel through time using astral projection, magic potions, or rituals. Such arcane methods are often less reliable than the usual Science Fiction time machine: mystics may have to guess how far back to project themselves, or watch for visual cues as they hurtle through the centuries. Mystical time travelers may need a special form of Navigation to have any chance of reaching the correct time. Travel across greater spans of time generally imposes penalties on a Temporal Navigation roll, though the usual bonuses for familiar destinations also apply: characters usually have a +3 bonus for returning to their own time.

Navigation Based On Other Attributes

These descriptions of Astral, Dimensional, and Temporal Navigation assume finding one's way depends on specialized knowledge or close observation — both the purview of INT. At the GM's option, mystical forms of Navigation may depend on other Characteristics. For instance, astral travel might depend entirely on force of will and fixity of purpose, and so Astral Navigation could be based on EGO. If movement between worlds depends on placating a gatekeeper spirit who sends travelers to the wrong place if he doesn't like their invocation, Dimensional Navigation might depend on PRE. In such cases, the GM should make these forms of Navigation into completely separate Skills (at 2 points for a roll of 9 + Attribute/5, +1 per +2 points spent), unless he feels players can handle the confusion of one Skill having more than one possible roll.

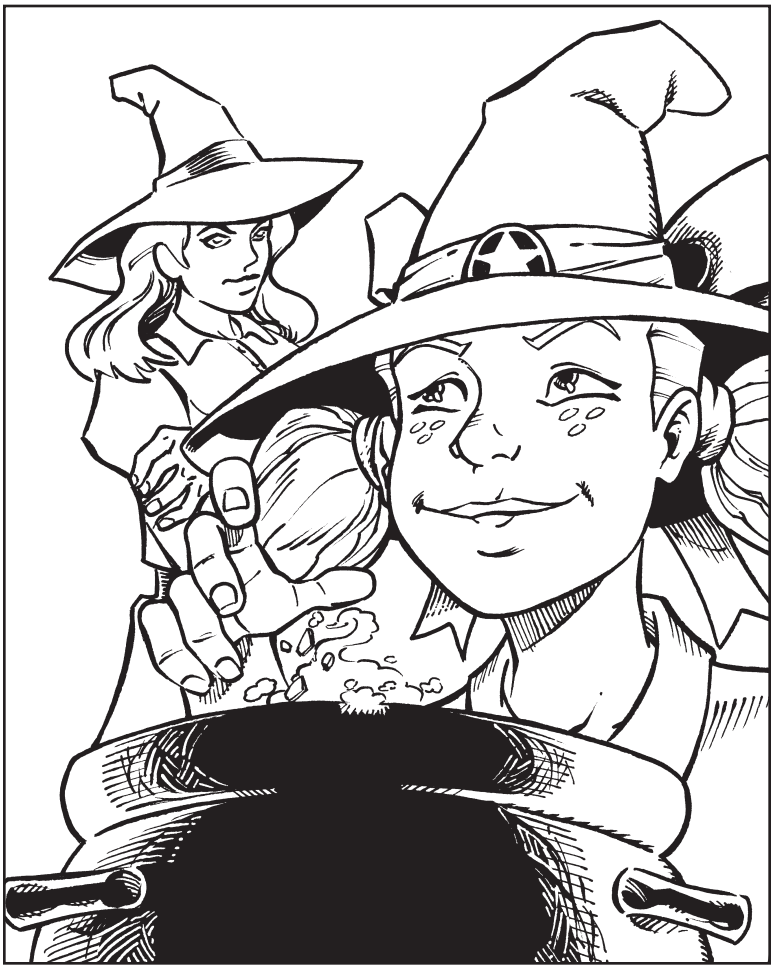
PERSUASION

Like Interrogation, this Skill becomes important in the ceremonial magic of summoning demons and other spirits. The grimoires show the magician blustering and browbeating reluctant spirits, alternating dire threats with cajolery and flattery. In a setting built around ceremonial magic, mystical characters might lack any spells to *force* obedience from spirits; they must convince the spirit to serve using their Skills, including Persuasion to convince the spirit of their power.

POWER: MAGIC

The generic Magic Skill is most often used to represent magic that's fundamentally unreliable. Spells may Require A Skill Roll to activate; a Magic Pool may take a Skill Roll to change. Characters can use Magic Skill for other things, though.

Like any Power Skill, a mystic can use Magic Skill in attempts to cast his spells in some unusual way. If some feat seems plausible given the special effects of a spell, a successful Magic Skill Roll can let the character bend the letter of the rules.



Example: *The Fantasy wizard Marco Vizzini knows a spell called the Walls of Air, a basic Entangle. His comrades notice the spell can create barriers, and these are both weightless and transparent. They have the bright idea of lashing saplings together in a frame and covering them in Walls of Air to create a lightweight "turtle" to protect them as they approach a monster's lair. The rules for Entangle say that anything more complex than a simple barrier requires a Transform, but the "turtle" idea fits the special effects of the spell. The GM rules the characters can make the attempt — but to build a structure of Entangles, Marco must succeed at a Magic Skill Roll. If he fails, the "turtle" falls apart, or the mystical barriers fill the structure instead of forming a shell.*

Gamemasters can also let characters use Magic Skill to activate magic items without the need for the character actually to know how the item works. The character suffers a -1 per 10 Active Points penalty to the roll as he tries to activate the item by intuition, force of will, and dumb luck. (If the character has time to study the item, Analyze Magic or Spell Research become the relevant Skills, without Active Point penalties.)

Magic Skill is usually an Intellect Skill, but different systems of magic may suggest alternate base Characteristics. If magic depends on force of will, Magic Skill should be based on EGO. If personal charisma governs magic (for instance, persuading or bullying spirits to work your will), PRE might be the proper Characteristic.

For some settings, GMs may want Magic Skill to absorb and replace Analyze Magic and Spell Research. The latter two Skills presuppose a system where studying magic, working magic, and inventing magic are quite different activities, posing different mental challenges. That may not be the case in settings where magic depends on intuition, an inborn supernatural gift, or the favor of the gods... or the GM simply doesn't want to ask characters to buy three Skills instead of one.

PROFESSIONAL SKILL

Sorcerers who use Foci might want to buy a Professional Skill or two so they can craft their own talismans and other paraphernalia. Some magical traditions, such as European ceremonial magic, *insist* that mages craft their own tools.

SCIENCE SKILL

Some magical traditions imply a degree of scientific knowledge. The old alchemists, for instance, used the most up-to-date lab techniques available. (In fact, they invented those techniques.) Why shouldn't a modern-day alchemist know contemporary chemistry? Voodooists and witches both use herbs to work magic, so SS: Botany wouldn't be out of place. Finally, the scientist-turned-sorcerer (including doctors and psychiatrists) is a classic character type, and why would such a character forget everything from his former career?

SECURITY SYSTEMS

Mystic adepts often protect their homes and laboratories with spells of protection and magical guardians. Even when stories depict characters bypassing such mystic defenses, they don't suggest a single Skill that serves as a magical analog to Security Systems. In some campaigns, however, GMs might ask for both Security Systems and Analyze Magic (or Magic Skill) Rolls when a mystic tries to break or evade the defenses on another mystic's sanctum.

SLEIGHT OF HAND

This Skill can become valuable in settings where magic hides itself, either because most people don't believe in it or because it's forbidden. Sleight Of Hand may enable a mystic to pass off real magic as "just a trick" — especially if the character already has a reputation as a stage magician. Some schools of magic, such as shamanism, include

FAKE MAGIC SKILLS

Sometimes it's more useful to impersonate a magician than to do real magic. Mystics can use Ventriloquism, Sleight Of Hand, Mimicry, and Disguise as a last-ditch strategy when magic is impossible or unsafe. Magical villains *never* seem to consider the possibility that an enemy mystic might use non-magical methods! The evil wizard who could see through the best illusion might ignore the enemy dressed as a scruffy peasant; loyal minions might cringe and obey the mimicked voice of their leader; Sleight Of Hand tricks might terrify a sorcerer if performed within his "magic-proof" sanctum; a bit of Ventriloquism could supply a crucial moment of distraction. On the other hand, remember that smarter villains can use these tricks as well....

Gamemasters should also remember that not all mystics possess real magic. A tribal shaman, a court magician, or a shifty alchemist might be a pure fraud, equipped with nothing but Skills and perhaps some exotic but non-magical devices. A shaman, for instance, might use Ventriloquism and Sleight Of Hand to convince people of his magical powers, and SS: Herbal Medicine and various Interaction Skills to treat the medical and psychological maladies of his clients. A modern charlatan might employ hidden microphones, chemicals, and other devices and Skills to frighten people out of a "haunted" house. On the other hand, some charlatans may sincerely believe they have magical powers.



Sleight Of Hand as a way to produce quick, flashy tricks to impress the ignorant when real magic may be slow, difficult, and dangerous.

STREETWISE

In Urban Fantasy, street culture may brush against the Mystic World. Street-savvy people know that one bag lady can lay curses that really work, a particular gang leader carries a lucky charm that makes him invincible, or that a crackhouse is just a front for a weird cult. In most genres, however, Streetwise can't lead characters straight to a powerful mystic. See page 174 for further discussion of finding the Mystic World when you aren't part of it.

SURVIVAL

Some genres of mystical adventure may include new Survival categories with special relevance for mystics. Survival in a faerie otherworld, for instance, may require knowledge of how to propitiate the spirit of an animal slain for food, or how to avoid fairy mounds.

SYSTEMS OPERATION

In settings where magic is highly developed and systematized — a veritable alternate technology — mystics who specialize in surveillance magic might need Scrying or Divination as magical analog to Systems Operation. Instead of cameras, microphones, and other electronic gear, however, the requisite tools include crystal balls, magic mirrors, trance-inducing drugs, Tarot cards, or divining rods.

TRADING

Once again, this Skill is important for mystics who want to negotiate with ghosts, gods, demons, and other supernatural creatures. Keep in mind, though, that supernatural creatures often value different things than mortals. A ghost or dryad doesn't care about money; supernatural creatures may dicker for exchanges of favors, sacrificial offerings, first-born sons, or even stranger commodities. For instance, a spirit might want a year off the end of the mystic's life, or the memory of his first love, in exchange for its help. Fairy tales and deal-with-the-Devil stories supply many examples of Trading for mystics... both successes and failures.

TRANSPORT FAMILIARITY

Depending on the campaign, mystics might be eligible to learn exotic Transport Familiarities, such as flying beasts, enchanted mecha shaped like demons, or ghost ships that sail between dimensions.

WEAPON FAMILIARITY

Fantasy stories and games usually assume that magical weapons are simply mundane weapons with special powers. Some magic weapons, however, might require separate Weapon Familiarities. For instance, a magical flaming sword is still just a sword, but a Ghost Sword with an ectoplasmic blade might require special training to wield with skill.

WEAPONSMITH

Depending on the setting, a mystic who wants to enchant a magic weapon may need to make the weapon himself, using mundane skills as well as magic. Some settings may include magical categories for Weaponsmith, such as Spirit Weapons or Magical Energy Weapons.

PERKS AND TALENTS



Perks and Talents are an excellent way to individualize just about any mystic. A Contact or two tells you a lot about a character's background and history, while many enchantments may be represented by a Talent.

PERKS

Mystics can have perfectly ordinary Perks: there's no reason a mystic couldn't have a noble title (a Fringe Benefit) or friend who's a lawyer (a Contact). On the other hand, a mystic's Perks can also represent social resources or privileges quite different from those of other characters. The Mystic World also offers a few Perks unique to itself.

ACCESS

Mystics often re-interpret this Perk as *Dimensional Access.* Some dimensions are hard even for mystics to enter. The dimension's master might frown on visitors and attack anyone who intrudes. Some planes simply are not possible to visit unless a mystic passes some special test or wins the favor of a god. In such cases, the right to enter the dimension is a Perk: instead of a secret way in or out of a prison, military base, or other mundane structure, the character has the right to enter a realm forbidden to most other creatures. Right to access does not mean the dimension or its masters necessarily *likes* the character. The dimension may still be horribly dangerous — but at least a visiting mystic has a chance.

The cost of this Perk depends on how many dimensions it covers and the value of the access, as indicated by the accompanying table.

Some dimensions are especially useful for the few who can visit them. Access to a dimension where gold and jewels are as common as rocks, for instance, can make a sorcerer a billionaire. A dimension with healing powers would also be especially useful. Gamemasters may increase the cost of Access to such dimensions, or insist that the character buy more than one Perk. For instance, if the ruling intelligence of a restricted dimension befriends anyone who passes its test to win access, then a PC who passes the test must buy two Perks, the Dimensional Access and a Contact with the dimension lord.

Dimensional Access makes a good alternative or addition to Experience Points for adventures involving gods or cosmic entities. If the PCs bring the adventure to a successful close, the satisfied deity might award them the right to visit an important dimension.

DIMENSIONAL ACCESS

Cost	Access Granted
1 point	Access to a single restricted dimension
2 points	A small group of related dimensions
3 points	A large group of dimensions

The GM may increase the cost of Access to particularly useful or helpful dimensions (see text).

ANONYMITY

Mystics may be able to obtain this Perk by magic. Many stories tell how djinn or demons fulfill a nobody's wish to become rich, famous, and powerful. Few people realize that a powerful mystic might want to go the other way and hide his identity. Anonymity makes a mystic harder for his enemies to find; it also hides True Names, family connections, and other aspects of a mystic's past that enemies might use against him.

Normally, a character who wants to buy Anonymity in mid-game has to put in a lot of effort to explain what he does to make himself an unperson. For a mystic, it may be as simple as casting a spell... though to preserve game balance, the GM may require the mystic to jump through a lot of hoops to learn (or obtain access to) that spell, or have it cost a lot of resources.

Whatever game mechanic or dramatic explanation the GM chooses, magical Anonymity can be broken by deducing the character's identity through indirect evidence. For instance, an Anonymous mystic who knows Akkadian must have learned this dead language at a university; logically, some professor ought to remember him. Uncovering the clues to break magical Anonymity requires multiple, successful Bureaucratics and Deduction rolls, and perhaps other Skill Rolls as well.

COMPUTER LINK

As it stands, this Perk might seem strange for a mystic (especially in campaigns not set in the modern world). You can re-interpret Computer Link to apply to any source of information not open to the public. A "Computer Link" could be anything from a cult's arcane library to an oracle the character may consult to receive messages from the gods. Think of this Perk as *Right To Use Restricted Information Source,* not just access to a computer database.

CONTACTS

Magical characters can have wonderfully bizarre Contacts. Mystics often hobnob with gods, dimension lords, and cosmic entities — the mightiest Contacts around. See below for optional rules



for Spirit Contacts. However, if he seldom gives any help besides cryptic advice, a Contact with Zeus or the Great Geometer of Selestar might not cost any more points than a Contact with Freddy the Fence.

Other Contacts to consider include: other sorcerers, especially the PC's teacher; relatively benign vampires, ghosts, and other supernatural creatures; spirit mediums and other occult specialists; museum curators, rare book dealers, and other folk who work with the old and obscure; eccentric recluses with unique knowledge or skills; faerie lords; priests, mainstream or exotic; or whatever government agency investigates weird phenomena. Just to drive a superhero group's grim-nightstalker-detective wild, a mystic could even take the sentient spirit of the campaign city as a Contact: it *always* knows the "word on the street"!

Spirit Contacts ⚠

At the GM's option, some mystics can use Contact as a form of *faux* conjuration. Instead of using Summon, the character represents his relationship with a spirit, faerie, demon, god, or the like by buying him as a Contact.

"Spirit Contacts" automatically have *at least* very useful abilities or resources (+1, or more). If they can call on others of their kind, consider that equivalent to "access to major institution" or "significant Contacts of his own" (+1 in either case). If they have a good relationship with the character, add +1-2 points; if they're slavishly loyal, add +3. If a mystic can access a group of spirit Contacts (such as "any nature spirit"), he must apply the x3 multiplier for "organization Contact."

After making all additions, subtractions, or other multiplications, the character must apply a "spirit Contact multiplier" to the cost. The lowest multiplier, for the weakest sort of spirit Contacts, is x2. The GM may increase the multiplier proportionately to the power of the spirit Contact. While an ordinary nature-spirit or imp might cost only x2, a magically powerful faerie or minor demon would be x3-x5, and a powerful demon or god could be x6 or more.

A character may only be able to get in touch with his spirit Contact at a particular place, during a particular time, or after performing a specific task or ritual. This generally does not merit any cost savings, though the GM can grant one if it seems appropriate. Any such preparations do not count as "devoting substantial time" to finding the spirit Contact.

When a character wishes to speak with his spirit Contact, he must take any necessary preparations and then make his roll. If the roll fails, the Contact does not respond. If the roll succeeds, the Contact responds, and now the character must somehow persuade him to do what the character wants. Don't forget the Contact Modifiers Table! Since the character has to negotiate with his Contact for services or assistance, the modifiers in the Table may come into play frequently.

FAVORS

Everything about Contacts also applies to Favors. Favors from other mystics or supernatural creatures also make a good alternative or addition to Experience Points.

FOLLOWER

Priestly mystics and supernatural Master Villains may collect lots of Followers, but this is rare for mystical heroes. A well-designed Follower, however, can be a boon for both a PC and a GM. A Follower can compensate for a character's weaknesses, while (like a DNPC) providing another way for the GM to draw the PC into adventures.

Remember that a Follower doesn't have to be human: it could be a ghost or spirit, a monster, a sentient magic item, or some other sort of magical "computer."

Evil cult leaders and such ilk do not always buy their congregations as Followers. Sometimes cult members buy the *Membership* Fringe Benefit instead.

FRINGE BENEFIT

Just about any Fringe Benefit is appropriate for mystic characters, depending on the circumstances. An occult investigator probably needs a Private Investigator's License, and a technomancer from Arcturus Colony may have Galactic ComputerNet Access.

Membership

Membership in some cults and magical societies carries privileges. Sometimes a mystic can obtain help from other members, or make use of group resources. For example, an occult society

EXAMPLE FOLLOWERS

The Apprentice: The mystic has a student who's sufficiently competent to count as a Follower rather than a DNPC.

The Enfeebled Teacher: The mystic is himself the apprentice of an aged but knowledgeable master. Since the teacher cannot himself take action, he is for all practical purposes an assistant who supplies information to the character.

The Familiar: The character has a companion spirit, usually in the form of an animal (such as a black cat, an owl, or a serpent), who assists him. It may act as a second set of eyes and ears, a scout, a source of knowledge, or even as an "arcane battery" to make his spellcasting easier. See page 25 of *The HERO System Bestiary* for a short (and definitely non-exhaustive) list of possible abilities for familiars; that book also has character sheets for many animals that make good familiars.

The Impassive Servant: The mystic has a general factotum who tends to his mundane affairs. If the servant wasn't impassive before he entered the mystic's service, he'll get blasé after seeing daily miracles and arcane menaces. If the servant assists the character at his magic (though the servant doesn't cast spells himself), he's called a *famulus*.

might own a library of arcane tomes members can consult, or a cult might take up a collection to help a member in financial trouble. Some groups might even promise to avenge a member's death. Mystical groups also may have connections to various supernatural beings who feel friendly to people who give the secret handshake.

Rank in a mystic society gives other sorcerers an idea of a character's power, prestige, and connections. It's sort of like two doctors comparing their medical schools and residencies... except the doctors don't judge the risk of occult vengeance if they kill each other.

Membership carries duties as well as benefits. Leaders of a mystical society expect members to keep its secrets, follow its doctrines, pay their dues, and follow orders. The rank-and-file members, in turn, expect the group's officers and leaders to administer fairly, help members with their problems, and uphold the group's ideals.

As with non-occult Memberships, the cost of this Fringe Benefit depends on the size of the group the character belongs to, his rank in the group, the resources he can call upon, and so forth. Membership in a small New Age society might not be worth representing as a Fringe Benefit. Leadership of an international cult of assassins might be worth as much as being a head of state. Standard levels of Membership in mystic organizations are:

■ **Initiate (1 point):** The character is a member in good standing. He knows the group's basic doctrines or goals, and has the right to attend meetings. He may ask the group's officers or leaders for help in minor matters and use the group's facilities.

■ **Minor Officer (2 points):** The character holds some post with special responsibilities, such as treasurer, secretary, or keeper of the sacred slime-pits. He has better access to the group's facilities, and some small authority over rank-and-file members. Minor officers receive greater trust from the leaders, at the cost of correspondingly greater duties — and for some groups, correspondingly greater penalties for betrayal or failure.

■ **Officer (3-4 points):** The character holds significant authority over lesser members. If the group has any secret goals or doctrines, he knows them. Officers have access to most of the group's resources, but still must justify their actions to the leader or leaders.

This level of Initiate can also represent the leader of a small, weak group. Higher levels of Membership imply a large cult or society, possibly with multiple chapters, or a group with significant power.

■ **Leader (5-8 points):** The character leads a cult or society with lots of members and considerable power (mystical, financial, political, or otherwise). In the Mystic World, leadership of a cult or occult society marks a character as an important figure with notable supernatural power. To the mundane world, it may mean tax-free income. The character can exploit all the group's resources, but not indiscriminately: members might desert the group or choose a new leader if they decide the leader misused funds, exploited members frivolously, violated the group's doctrines and bylaws, or otherwise betrayed their trust. If the members accept anything a leader commands, without concern for its legitimacy, the character cannot take this Fringe Benefit: the rank-and-file members are Followers instead; the group's assets become Money; and so on. On the other hand, GMs can increase the cost of this Fringe Benefit if the group grants exceptional latitude to its leader, or if the members are unusually powerful.

EXAMPLES OF MEMBERSHIP

Trismegistus Council Associate: 1 point. The Trismegistus Council, the leading alliance of benevolent magicians and occultists in the Champions Universe, accepts you as a low-ranking member. That means you can ask other members for help in researching mystical threats and arcane secrets. In return, you must render equal assistance to other members, especially when the Council's leadership board mobilizes the group to stop some horrible menace.

Chunhu Family Member: 2 points. This family of weretigers and other shape-shifters has great influence in the Asian Mystic World. They don't know much magic, but the family has collected many favors. The threat of retribution from the powerful and clannish "Tiger Lords" also encourages mystics and other supernatural creatures to treat any Chunhu with respect.

Druid Of The Scarlet Moon: 3 points. Each coven within the Circle of the Scarlet Moon has a leader called a Druid. The Druids wield magical powers, and the Circle possesses vast financial and political power. The Druids, however, must answer to regional Archdruids (Membership cost: 5 points) who each command several covens.

Pontifex Of The Astral Light: 3 points. The Astral Light Fellowship is a group of New Age devotees. They don't know any real magic, but their library includes a wide selection of occult and fringe material. Their leader, who takes the title of Pontifex, has just enough mystical lore and talent to get himself in trouble should he encounter a real mystic artifact or spirit.

High Priest Of The Holy Family: 5 points. On the Swords And Sorcery world of Loezen, the Church of the Holy Family is one of the more widespread and popular religions. Each kingdom's High Priest or Priestess heads an autonomous church, answerable only to the gods.

DEMON Morbane: 8 points. A powerful sorcerer called a Morbane commands each cell of the criminal cult DEMON. Each Morbane rules with an iron hand. Their terrified or fanatical subordinates — some of whom wield magic powers in their own right — sometimes count as Followers, but usually are just DEMON members themselves. The Morbanes themselves answer to a shadowy Inner Circle, and beyond them, to dark gods of unspeakable power.

Old Man Of The Mountain: 10 points. From the fortress of Alamut, the head of the Hashishim directs his fanatical agents to murder whomever he desires. Though his devotees are few in number compared to more orthodox branches of Islam in the 12th century, frightened kings deal with the Old Man of the Mountain as an equal.



■ **Pope (9-10 points):** If a mystical society or cult grows large enough, a super-leader may emerge with powers comparable to a head of state, with 10 points indicating the head of an international religion. Such a super-leader wields immense social power, but of course most of that power isn't immediately available. For instance, millions of people might revere the *Mahinturé* (Archpriest) of Mahin as the god's chief mortal spokesman, but he doesn't have them as bodyguards.

Deity

At the GM's option, a character may be a god. A god wields authority comparable to a head of state. The greater point values of being a Deity, compared to being a king or president, comes from the greater devotion shown by the people who accept your authority over them. A Deity also doesn't have to obey a constitution, keep vassals happy, or accept the other political restrictions of a mortal head of state. On the other hand, a god's worshippers are not as useful as actual Followers. Sure, a billion people worship you, but you can't have all of them at your side. If you want them to smite your foes, it still takes time to organize and train an army. If you want them to build a temple a mile wide, you still have to feed the workers.

Levels of divine authority run as follows:

■ **Local God (15-20 points):** The god claims worshippers in a few countries, or an equivalent region. The god could also be a figure in a greater religion, but subordinate to some greater power.

DEITY EXAMPLES

Amaterasu: 20 points. The sun-goddess of Japan is the chief deity of Shintoism, but has no following outside the Japanese islands.

Shiva: 35 points. One of the chief deities of Hinduism claims hundreds of millions of devotees. Hinduism has not spread much beyond the Indian subcontinent, though.

The Devil: 50 points. Satan, Lucifer, Mephistopheles, the Prince of Lies, Old Scratch — his names are legion, and so are the politicians, media stars, business tycoons, and other powerful people who owe favors to the Devil in a *Horror Hero* setting where Satanists form the chief adversaries. The Devil's power affects everyone in the world, but only a few people know it.

Tyrannon the Conqueror: 50 points. This interdimensional tyrant from the Champions Universe holds trillions of mortals in terrified submission.

■ **Major God (25-45 points):** The god claims worshippers throughout a large section of a continent, or some equivalent region, and owes no fealty to any greater power. The character is the focus of a major religion.

■ **Greater God (50 points):** The god claims billions of worshippers throughout the entire world, or multiple worlds. Alternatively, the god receives worship from fewer people, but these people are very powerful and give the god *de facto* influence over a large fraction of the population.

This Fringe Benefit deals only with the people a god can influence. It does not address rank within a pantheon. For instance, in a Mythic Greece setting, Zeus and Apollo both count as Major Gods. Apollo nominally owes fealty to Zeus, but Apollo receives just as much worship.

The *Deity* Fringe Benefit has no relation to a deity's absolute power in terms of Character Points. Depending on the setting, a Local God might be built on thousands of Character Points, or a Greater God might be no more powerful than an experienced superhero. In some settings, a "God" might be a person with no intrinsic Powers at all, whom people merely accept as divine. (Joseph Stalin was effectively a god: his whim was law.) On the other hand, not every deity needs to take this Perk — some gods are long forgotten, or don't have large numbers of people worshipping them.

MONEY

Money is a peculiar case, especially for comic book wizards and other contemporary mystics. On the one hand, mystics may own big old houses with luxurious furnishings, and they never worry about paying the bills. Fantasy wizards often live in lonely towers, apparently self-sufficient through their magic. On the other hand, mystics rarely flaunt wealth by purchasing yachts or the like. And mystics who might seem penniless, like the archetypal guru on a mountaintop or cave-dwelling hermit, suffer no penalty for their poverty if they never need or want to buy anything. Money just doesn't seem that relevant for mystics.

Some powers may allow mystics to acquire wealth whenever they choose. For instance, Precognition makes it easy to win lotteries or clean up at Vegas. Transforms may enable a character literally to make money. Gamemasters can let characters support themselves by magical means as long as they don't go overboard. If a character starts throwing around magic-spawned wealth, however, he must buy an appropriate amount of Money (usually at least 5 Character Points' worth). In modern settings, GMs can also invoke the bureaucratic consequences of the characters' actions. The IRS, for instance, watches for people who spend unaccountably large amounts of money.

VEHICLES AND BASES

Sorcerous characters call their Base a Sanctum. Other sorts of mystical characters may own appropriate Bases as well. For instance, what's an aristocratic vampire without a crumbling castle or foreboding mansion? A ghost might claim the house it haunts as a Base. Gods and demigods may hang out at their temples, as do priests and cultists.

Some mystical characters own *pocket worlds* — places that exist within an object. (See page 81 for more description of pocket worlds.) A character can own or create a pocket world by spending the points for a Base the size of the pocket world and paying for the *Another Dimension* Location cost (+30 points). He then defines the point of access appropriately; for example, what looks like an ordinary landscape painting may actually turn into the portal that allows access to the pocket dimension depicted in the painting. An even more amazing Sanctum might include Gates to other dimensions, or other permanent magical effects.

The most common Power for a Sanctum, however, is the *ward* — mystical defenses to block magical spying or entry by Teleportation, Desolidification, or Extra-Dimensional Movement. You can represent wards to block entry as Force Fields or DEF with the *Hardened, Cannot Be Escaped With Teleportation,* and/or *Affects Desolidified* Advantages. Wards against magical senses are based on Darkness, Invisibility, or Images.

Contemporary wizards and other magical heroes and villains seldom own special Vehicles. Fantasy and folklore, however, are full of magical Vehicles such as flying carpets, or water-chariots pulled by sea monsters.

TALENTS

Magical characters often have remarkable minor abilities that hint at the greater power they can wield. Some Talents, such as Bump Of Direction, can be considered minor spells. Other Talents, like Eidetic Memory or Lightning Calculator, simply suggest a wizard's remarkable intellect. Simulate Death is one of the most famous abilities of yoga masters, and the meditation regimens of the East may justify other Talents such as Double Jointed or Lightsleep. Supernatural beings may have some Talents as innate abilities. Only a few Talents, however, deserve examination in detail.

DANGER SENSE

Danger Sense for mystics usually acts on an area. They often sense when supernatural evil is afoot. For instance, the Greek magus Apollonius realized that a plague afflicting a city was actually the work of a demon, whom he exposed and destroyed. On the other hand, mystics seldom anticipate *personal* dangers such as a guy sneaking up behind them with a blackjack.

Non-Personal Danger Sense STOP

At the GM's option, characters can buy Danger Sense that *only* covers an area, and does not warn of personal dangers. For the same cost as personal Danger Sense in combat (*i.e.,* a base cost of 15 Character Points), a character can buy one of the following forms of "non-personal" Danger Sense:

■ the character perceives danger to anyone in his immediate area, but he won't know the target — just that someone near him is in imminent danger. Maybe it's that guy over there; maybe it's someone else; maybe they're all in danger. He doesn't know, unless he makes his Danger Sense roll by half (in which case he knows the target as well as the nature of the threat).

■ the character can only perceive dangers that operate on the scale of a city or county. Somewhere, a significant danger to the whole area (or at least to a lot of people within that area) has arisen. Maybe a crazed villain schemes to hold the city for ransom with his Death Ray; or maybe a building has simply caught fire and its occupants are in peril (and the fire might spread). If the character makes his Danger Sense roll by half, he can narrow the threat to a particular location, and also discern the nature of the danger.

■ the character only senses dangers on the scale of nations or the entire world. He doesn't register threats to anything less than an entire city, and the danger must have the potential to spread further. If the character rolls less than or equal to half his Danger Sense roll, he has a pretty good idea what menace endangers the world: a supervillain's Ultimate Weapon; an epidemic; a wizard opening Gates to the Outer Horrors; a crazy world leader who's about to start a devastating war. Obviously the GM must interpret the concept of "threat to the world" using dramatic sense; the character shouldn't perceive things like global warming, United Nations

DANGER SENSE EXAMPLES

Trouble In The City: The character has a keen mystical sense for when evil or disaster threaten his city (even if it's a type of danger he can't perceive with his ordinary Senses). Most of the time, though, he has to investigate to find exactly what menaces the city — and he can't detect dangers to just himself or on a similarly small scale.

Danger Sense (city scale only, any danger), +2 PER Roll. Total cost: 27 points.

Universal Mystic Danger Sense: The character's mystic senses alert him to any type of danger, anywhere in the world, that requires his attention as a guardian of the "mystic order of Reality."

Danger Sense (any area, any danger), Sense, Discriminatory, Analyze. Total cost: 52 points.

World Protector: The character is a mystic guardian of Earth, and thus has the power to perceive threats to the entire world... but not to himself, or on a smaller scale.

Danger Sense (planetary scale only, any danger), +5 to PER Roll. Total cost: 30 points.

intrusions onto national sovereignty, or the like as a "danger."

All of these forms can only perceive dangers in combat, and only dangers the character could perceive with his other Senses (see the *5th Edition, Revised* rulebook, page 88). Characters usually pay the additional +5 or +10 points for "out of combat" or "any danger."

The *Intuitional* modifier applied to any of these forms of Danger Sense limits the character's information even further. The character cannot narrow the location of the danger or know the nature of the threat even if he makes his Danger Sense roll by half. On the other hand, remember that Sense Modifiers such as *Discriminatory* and *Analyze* can provide more detailed information about a threat.

Limited Danger Sense

A character's Danger Sense might also be limited at some scales. In that case, buy Danger Sense at the least limited scale, and then apply Limitations to the cost of the other areas.

Example: *Jezeray the psychic can detect personal dangers. In her dreams, she also sees regional and global dangers, though these warnings come in symbolic form. Her basic Danger Sense costs 27 points: 15 for the basic Talent, +10 for any danger, and +2 so the Danger Sense functions as a Sense. Her dream-warnings costs a base of +15 points for the "any area" improvement to Danger Sense, but take a -1 Limitation because the warnings happen Only When Asleep (-½), and are Vague And Unclear (-½) — a Limitation borrowed from Clairsentience. These Limitations reduce the cost of the added areas to +7 points. In all, Jezeray's Danger Sense costs 34 points.*

Keep in mind that Danger Sense isn't precognition (for that, buy Clairsentience). A character with Danger Sense receives no warning until danger is immediate. For instance, *at the earliest* he has a chance to perceive a plot to bomb a skyscraper only when the bomb has been built and is on its way to the target... and the GM might not allow a roll until the bomb's actually in place. Global dangers tend to develop slowly, though, so a character probably has a decent period of warning. For example, a conqueror from another dimension probably spends some time spying on Earth before opening his Gate to invade. At some point during the spying, the danger becomes immediate enough for the GM to allow Danger Sense rolls. As always, the GM should time things for the best dramatic effect and most fun.

UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR

Universal Translator seems virtually universal itself among comic book super-sorcerers. No matter what weird dimension they visit, they never seem to have language troubles. Likewise, critters from other dimensions can usually make themselves understood when they come to Earth. Similarly, many mystic beings, such as demons, can communicate with anyone.

More than one religious tradition says that prophets and apostles can speak the language of everyone they meet. The "Gift of Tongues" might be appropriate for a god's most favored servants in a variety of settings.

This Talent costs a lot of points, though. In most cases, for ease of game play the GM can assume travelers to other dimensions automatically "learn" the local lingo as part of the dimensional transference process. Spirits summoned to Earth, for instance, speak the summoner's tongue, while humans who go to the City-States of Yong speak Yongese. Characters really need Universal Translator only for multilingual situations, or for special cases such as musty tomes of eldritch lore written in archaic languages. Language problems just aren't much fun, so don't impose them very often. Few characters should ever need Universal Translator as a true Talent — more often a mystic buys it with Limitations, as a "spell of comprehension."

POWERS



But here thy sword can do thee little stead.
Far other arms and other weapons must
Be those that quell the might of hellish charms.

Mystics can produce just about any Power through magic — and in many Fantasy games, they do. Fantasy *stories,* on the other hand, usually assign a narrower range of powers to mystics. Even if GMs won't flat-out forbid any Power to a mystical character, some Powers are more traditional than others. Choosing some Powers and avoiding others helps convey the "style" of a mystic, as distinct from other sorts of characters. This is especially important in *Champions,* where characters have access to the full range of Powers, but it may apply in Fantasy, horror, and other genres as well to distinguish true mystics from vampires, demons in disguise, and other human-looking creatures with supernatural powers.

Some classes of Powers are more appropriate for mystics than others. Roughly speaking, mystics emphasize Adjustment Powers, Mental Powers, and ranged Attack Powers. They do not usually have Persistent Powers, since their Powers come from spells rather than innate abilities. The exceptions tend to be Powers that reflect abstract aspects of a character, such as an Endurance Reserve to represent a mystic's ability to cast spell after spell even though physical exertion quickly tires him.

ADJUSTMENT POWERS

These Powers are extremely appropriate for mystics. They bypass normal defenses, as mystical powers traditionally do, and can represent many traditional mystic feats. Curses of disease, weakness, or other debilities can be Drains or Suppresses. A Dispel can be a spell to undo another mystic's magic, such as removing a curse or banishing a spirit. Aid and Healing let a mystic swiftly repair the damage done by other Adjustment Powers, or more mundane damage.

ATTACK POWERS

Most Attack Powers, especially ranged ones, appear frequently in the arsenals of RPG mystics. Mystical Attack Powers often have unusual special effects — for example, an Entangle could represent anything from a glowing cage of force to tree-branches clutching at the target. Similarly, they often have Advantages like *AVLD, BOECV,* or *Line Of Sight* to give them the right "mystic feel."

BODY-AFFECTING POWERS

These Powers seldom appear in tales of magic; at least, not as often as Adjustment or Mental Powers. Only the power to change shape (Shape Shift or Multiform) is really common. The other Body-Affecting Powers appear in quirky contexts, such as a Hindu mystic's power to become immovably heavy (Density Increase) or Growth and Shrinking cakes and potions in *Alice in Wonderland.*

DEFENSE POWERS

Since mystics are fundamentally people with special knowledge, they should not usually have Persistent and Resistant Defenses. Force Field, Force Wall, and sometimes Missile Deflectionn are the normal ways for mystics to defend themselves against physical and energy attacks. Armor may come from protective magical devices, but Foci can be removed.

The only Persistent Defense Powers that are really appropriate for mystics are Mental Defense and Power Defense (especially the former). Mystics have strong wills and know how to block assaults on their minds; similarly, their mystic powers may protect them from the Adjustment Powers so often used in spells. Every other defense should come from a spell the character casts, or a magic item that could be taken away.

If a mystic wants other innate Defense Powers, he should provide a special justification. For instance, an evil wizard might gain immunity to damage (Armor, and usually a Healing power too) by hiding his heart outside his body.

MENTAL POWERS

Whether they come from fiction or folklore, many mystical feats are best represented as Mental Powers. A Voodoo priest stabs a needle into a doll, and his victim feels the pain of a migraine — an Ego Attack. A ceremonial magician brandishes the Secret Seal of Solomon and commands a demon to obey — Mind Control. A man sees a witch as a beautiful maiden instead of a hideous crone — Mental Illusions. Mental Powers are also invisible to onlookers, and normal people have very little defense against them, which makes a mystic seem more uncanny.

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Aristotelian Zone: The superhero Chrysaor, scion of the Greek gods, carries a bit of the ancient Greek world wherever he goes. In his presence, the world operates by Aristotelian science: heavier objects fall faster than light objects, matter is made of atoms of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, and a telescope can spot the crystal spheres that carry the sun and planets around the Earth. This has no effect on combat whatsoever, but it wigs out scientists.

Change Environment 1" radius, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½) (10 Active Points); Always On (-½), No Range (-½). Total cost: 5 points.

Dramatic Lighting: The mystic vigilante Robert Caliburn sometimes evokes a subtle aura of power that changes the way light and shadows fall on him. Effectively, when Caliburn creates this aura he has the equivalent of a Hollywood lighting specialist making him seem more impressive, from dark shadows for intimidation to the soft lighting of romance.

+30 PRE (30 Active Points); Only For Presence Attacks (-½). Total cost: 20 points.

Unspeakably Hideous: The Kings of Edom and their minions are so mind-blowingly alien and ugly that the very sight of them cripples all but the most strong-willed people with fear.

+60 PRE (60 Active Points); Only For Causing Fear And Madness (-1). Total cost: 30 points.

MOVEMENT POWERS

Mystics often employ Extra-Dimensional Movement, Flight, and Teleportation. They visit strange zones of reality denied to ordinary folk, levitate or conjure spirits to carry them, and disappear in puffs of smoke, among other effects. Not many stories or legends show mystics leaping immense distances, or burrowing through the ground. You can find examples of mystics using every sort of Movement Power if you look long enough, but the other Movement Powers are certainly not standard for this character type.

SENSE-AFFECTING POWERS

These Powers all frequently appear in tales of magic. Many mystics can bewitch the senses, making people see things that don't exist or not see things that do. All the Sense-Affecting Powers are discussed further below.

SENSORY POWERS

Mystics know things mere mortals do not, and that includes special ways to gain information. Find Weakness is the only Sensory Power that isn't extremely common for mystics. The other Sensory Powers are discussed below.

CHANGE ENVIRONMENT

Mystics often produce Change Environment effects. Weather mages create or banish rain; necromancers cast a magic gloom to protect their undead legions from sunlight. Tales of magic sometimes include changes to the environment over huge areas (using MegaScale). If a particular class of creatures has a known Susceptibility, a Change Environment to produce that effect can be an important part of a mystic's arsenal of spells.

Mystical creatures are intrusions from other realities than the scientific, material world. Some of them may carry a bit of their native reality with them. Sometimes the effect is best defined with Change Environment, such as a zone that interferes with senses or an aura of terror (a reduction in PRE).

CHARACTERISTICS

Myths and tales of magic often include items that increase a person's Characteristics, such as Thor's magic belt (Megingjord) and iron gauntlet (Jarngreipr) that doubled his strength. Similarly, spells that make someone swifter, stronger, or tougher are common in Fantasy stories and legends.

If a setting limits mystical characters' spellcasting by their Characteristics, then magic to increase those Characteristics becomes highly prized — so much that GMs might want to forbid such magic. For instance, if a mystic can only keep one spell running per 5 points of INT, that's a serious limitation on characters... but not as much if mystics can obtain extra INT on a Focus in the form of a "magic-enhancing amulet" or the like.

Extreme Presence Attacks

Presence bought as a Power for special purposes can be highly effective because Presence Attacks ignore every defense except PRE (or EGO). If you can't affect a foe any other way — because he's Desolidified, has Defenses too great for your attacks, or whatever — maybe you can still *scare* him away. Presence comparable to other Attack Powers might not be appropriate for most characters, but a "spell of awe" works just fine for a mystic.

As it stands, the Presence Attack Table only goes to PRE/EGO + 30 effects. Once in a while, characters may experience even greater Presence Attacks. Gods, for instance, may possess such Presence that meeting one is a life-changing event (like St. Paul on the road to Damascus). Anyone who sees particularly hideous demons or monsters might risk madness. Presence Attacks can represent overpowering charisma or horror that can affect a character simply because he sees something. On the other hand, a +30 Presence Attack still causes only brief incapacitation or changes in behavior. In some settings, GMs might want to extend the Presence Attack Table a step further.

A +30 effect Presence Attack to inspire fear can make the target flee in terror, faint or surrender on the spot. Equally powerful attacks to inspire loyalty and courage can persuade the target to follow the character into suicidal danger. In effect, the Presence Attack temporarily gives the target a new Psychological Limitation with Strong commitment.

A Presence Attack that inflicts a *+40* effect imposes Total Psychological Limitations. Pre-existing Psychological Limitations may override the Presence Attack, but with difficulty. A frightened target flees in blind panic or retreats into catatonia; a target inspired with loyalty regards the Presence Attacker as a living god. The target's personality can drastically change.

Such effects may last a long time. Completely incapacitating effects such as catatonia last from a few minutes to a few hours. A character can eventually overcome the effect through an EGO Roll at minuses (-5 for 1 Minute after the attack; -4 for 5 Minutes later; -3 for 1 Hour later; and so on per step down the Time Chart). Less crippling personality changes last as long as the GM wants. Personality changes might reverse under circumstances like these:

■ The target encounters a situation that would trigger his normal Psychological Limitations, provided they're Strong or Total. For instance, a target with a Strong Code Versus Killing might snap if he were ordered to murder someone.

■ The target experiences several hours without stress. The target's friends may have to remind the target of his previous state of mind.

■ For hyper-Presence Attacks to inspire loyalty, the effect might break upon seeing the object of devotion utterly humiliated.

■ Extreme cases may require therapy by a trained psychiatrist or the use of Mental Powers such as Mind Control.

■ If the new Psychological Limitations receive reinforcement for several days, the target's original personality might be restored by nothing less than another hyper-Presence Attack the other

way, or intensive treatment — psionic surgery — by a telepath.

A +40 Presence Attack might cause permanent personality changes. If the Presence Attack went along with the target's personality, those Psychological Limitations could become stronger. Conversely, Presence Attacks that opposed the target's normal personality might permanently weaken the relevant Psychological Limitations — or make them stronger in reaction. Permanent phobias or obsessions are another possibility.

It may seem excessive to give a Presence Attack results similar to a Major Transform, but consider how powerful the Presence Attack must be. Assuming a 20 PRE character (not that unusual), the Presence Attacker must roll at least 60 points of effect. That means a 17d6 Presence Attack has a 50/50 chance of affecting the character at the PRE +40 level. Even in a typical Superheroic campaign, where most attacks run around 60 Active points, *any* 85 Active Point attack should have a fair chance of incapacitating a PC for some time. And in any event, the extreme Presence Attack rules are subject to the GM's discretion and interpretation, and dramatic sense will dictate the best outcome in most situations.

CLAIRSENTIENCE

This Power is extremely common in tales of magic. Think of wizards and witches with their crystal balls and magic mirrors. A few points about this power deserve clarification.

Clairsentience does not let you instantly find an object in an unknown location. Clairsentience may speed a search because the searcher doesn't physically move from location to location, but searching a small town for something as small as a single person could still take days. Searching a major city for a villain's hideout could take weeks.

Precognition And Retrocognition

Precognition and Retrocognition can work in either of two ways.

The first way is to scan a *location's* past or future. Using this method, a character can see who (or what!) enters and leaves a given spot, but cannot establish a perception point beyond the normal range for his Clairsentience (nor can he move his perception point unless he's bought the *Mobile Perception Point* Adder). If something moves outside the radius, the character has to move himself, then establish another perception point at a location where he can perceive the person or object he wants to "follow." In short, using Retrocognition to follow a person in a fast car is almost always impossible.

Alternatively, a character can follow the timeline of *a specific object or person.* Theoretically, a character could watch an alien visitor's timeline back to his birth on another planet! But this assumes, of course, that the Clairsentience has sufficient range, and/or that the perception point is both (a) Mobile, and (b) fast enough to follow the object or person. The GM may waive these requirements in the interest of dramatic sense. In that case, how far away someone might have been (or will be) from their present location doesn't matter, as long as they are within Clairsentience range *now.* Even if the GM allows this, the character cannot perceive



MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Psychometry: By touching and concentrating on an object, a psychic can obtain visions of the object's past and events that happened around it.

Retrocognitive Clairsentience (Sight Group) (40 Active Points), Retrocognition Only (-1), Concentration (0 DCV throughout; -1). Total cost: 13 points.

The Blinded Eye: The Hierophant protects his sanctum from magical detection using a consecrated statue of the dimension lord Ozoth the All-Seeing with a special scarf tied around the statue's eyes. Mystical senses cannot register anything from the Hierophant's sanctum. The ward does not hinder the Hierophant himself.

Darkness to Mystic Sense Group 6" radius, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Personal Immunity (+¼) (135 Active Points); OAF Immobile (-2), No Range (-½). Total cost: 39 points.

into other dimensions, including when the subject uses time travel powers, unless he's bought the *Dimensional* Sense Modifier for his Clairsentience. Furthermore, the character cannot switch targets in the past or future: he cannot, say, follow one person's timeline back to a meeting with another person, in Marrakech, then switch to the other person and see where he went after the meeting.

Scanning The Timeline

Just as normal Clairsentience can't scan a broad zone of space instantly, Precognition and Retrocognition can't scan a long timeline instantly. A second-by-second trace of a subject's timeline can be sped up, like a VCR on fast forward or reverse, but details get lost. Quickly scanning whole decades of a subject's timeline just isn't practical.

Locating information by looking through time takes a PER Roll, and fast scans impose negative modifiers. Gamemasters can use the Time Chart for modifiers. Scanning the past or future in "real time" speed, one Segment per Segment, imposes no modifier. A faster scan, one Phase per Segment, imposes a -2 modifier on the PER Roll; one Turn per segment gives a -4 modifier; one Minute per segment gives a -6 modifier; and so on. Long-lasting, fairly static events give opposing bonuses: +2 for an event lasting a full Phase, +4 for a Turn, and so forth. Using this as a guideline, GMs can make up reasonable modifiers for fast scans. Characters may well decide to just scan short sections of a timeline and hope they get lucky.

Alternatively, a character can use a "selected highlights" version of scanning. It's not as precise and controllable as deciding to scan, say, everything that happened between four and three weeks ago, but when it works it saves the character a lot of time. In this system, each use of Precognition or Retrocognition picks up one important event from the subject's timeline. For objects, significant events include its creation, its use in a powerful magic spell or a murder, its destruction, or getting a new owner. For people, any event charged with strong emotion is magically important: birth, death, family tragedy, love's first kiss, sheer terror, and the like.

The chief problem with this method is getting the right scene. The less important an event was to the subject, the harder finding the event will be. Suppose one is trying to solve a murder by Retrocognition, using objects at the scene of the crime as subjects. The murder weapon would be perfect: it was intimately involved in the crime, and very close to the killer. This would be a straight PER Roll to spot the murderer's face. A vase shattered in the course of the murder would not be so good: it suffered a significant event (breaking), but it wasn't closely involved in the crime itself. Seeing the details of the crime from the vase's point of view would suffer a severe penalty, if it was possible at all.

If a character has Precognition or Retrocognition, the player must select a system for how it works, and stick to it. If a character scans locations, he can't also scan along subject timelines. If he looks for highlights, he can't also do continuous scans.

Whatever system a character uses, GMs should remember that Precognition and Retrocognition only give sensory impressions, which the character — and player — must interpret for themselves. Gamemasters should try to merely describe what the character sees (or hears, smells, magic-detects, and so forth) without explaining them in any way.

DARKNESS

This Power has hidden depths for mystics. Remember that Darkness can target *any* sense, not just the Sight Group. For instance, Darkness versus Hearing creates a spell of silence (which prevents those within the Darkness from casting spells requiring Incantations). Darkness versus the Mystic Sense Group (see below) protects a sorcerer's lair from detection by enemies. Darkness against Mental Senses plays hob with searchers using Mind Scan. On the other hand, just as a character can see a Darkness field that blocks sight, Mind Scan can register Darkness against Mental Senses: the scanner can't find targets within the area, but he knows something is blocking his scan. Unless the character buys the Darkness with Invisible Power Effects....

DUPLICATION

This Power isn't especially common in tales of magic, but it does turn up now and then. St. Joseph of Cupertino occasionally appeared in two places at once while praying (he also flew); bilocation is also one of the more exotic but traditional powers for Tibetan lamas and Hindu mystics. Most importantly, Duplication provides one of the ways to represent astral projection (see page 54).

ENDURANCE RESERVE

Mystical characters may be physically average, or even frail, yet cast spell after spell without tiring. An Endurance Reserve represents such a difference between physical and magical exertion. Reserve END also has the benefit that it doesn't go away if a character's knocked out.

ENHANCED SENSES

Special senses are very common for sorcerers and other magical beings. Some Enhanced Senses make more sense than others for mystics, though. Various folk traditions claim that witches and sorcerers can see in the dark (Nightvision). Likewise, Spatial Awareness or N-Ray Vision can represent the "mystical awareness" of a yogi. Ultrasonic Hearing, Tracking Scent, and other superhuman extensions of familiar Sense Groups can be justified as spells conferring "animal senses" — suitable magic for shamans and their ilk.

The Mystic Sense Group

For ease of game play, and to better represent the special effect of "magical senses" and spells that affect them, the GM can allow mystic characters to define Senses as belonging to the Mystic Sense Group. (Or, he may consider all Senses deriving from magic, particularly Detect Magic and the like, as belonging to it as well as any other Sense Group they belong to.) The Mystic Sense Group grants no Sense Modifiers to a Sense, and has no standard Senses

that belong to it. Any Senses in the Mystic Group can be affected by Sense-Affecting Powers specifically designed to affect them (it's considered a Targeting Sense Group, since so many mystics buy Targeting for their Detect Magic spells and the like).

Detect Magic

This Enhanced Sense is so important for mystics that it deserves a special discussion about what it can and cannot do.

At its base level, Detect Magic only tells a spellcaster two things: that a person or item is magical; and how intense that magic is. It won't reveal what spells a caster knows, or what type of magic he practices. It won't tell a character what type of magic created an item, what powers it possesses, how it's powered, or the like. For example, if a mystic used Detect Magic on a Wand Of Withering, he would learn the item is magical, and its powers are fairly strong (say, about a 7 on a 1-10 scale), but nothing more. If he used Detect Magic on Kasdrevan the Wizard, he might learn that Kasdrevan is a powerful spellcaster, but not what kind of magic he uses.

A Detect Magic power with Discriminatory can perceive the types of magics a person practices, approximately how many spells he knows in each of those types of magic, and approximately how powerful those spells are (within, say, +/-25% of Active Points or DCs). Discriminatory Detect Magic also reveals the types of magics in an enchanted item, what powers the item has (and their approximate strength, as with people), and the item's source of power (but not how many Charges it has, if any). For example, if a character used Discriminatory Detect Magic on the Wand Of Withering, he learns the wand contains Necromancy magic, that it emits a beam that inflicts approximately 10 DCs of withering damage on living targets, and that it draws on Charges rather than the wielder's own energy. If he used that Sense on Kasdrevan, he'd learn Kasdrevan practices Elemental Magic and Wizardry, that he divides his spells in roughly equal proportion among those arcana, and that most of his spells have around 60 Active Points.

A Detect Magic power with Analyze can perceive exactly what types of magic a character practices, what spells he knows, and how powerful those spells are. It also perceives everything about the power in an enchanted item — exactly how many powers it has, how strong they are in game terms, and how many Charges it has (if any). For example, Detect Magic with Analyze would perceive exactly how many spells and mystic powers Kasdrevan has, and how many Active Points or DCs they have. If used on the Wand Of Withering, it would tell the character that the wand is a Wand Of Withering, it emits a beam with a 20" range that does RKA 4d6 damage to living beings, and it has 23 Charges left that Never Recover. However, the Enhanced Sense alone would not reveal how to operate the Wand of Withering: That would require the character to succeed at a Skill Roll with Analyze Magic or Power: Magic. Indeed, GMs should insist that characters with Discriminatory or Analyze also have some Knowledge about magic. The best analytical power in the world isn't worth much if you lack the knowledge to interpret the result.

Detect Magic can vary widely in its ease of use. In some settings, the GM might not want characters to determine easily if an item is magic or a person is under a spell. In horror settings, for instance, magic tends to come as a nasty surprise: It's not appropriate for characters to make a quick, simple test and realize a ring bears a curse, or a friend is possessed by a demon. In a pulp setting, perhaps a tribal "witch smeller" really can detect the taint of magic. In a heroic Fantasy setting, mystics might know spells to detect and even analyze magic, but this requires special paraphernalia. In a superhero world, on the other hand, mystic masters might spot magic at a glance, or possess supernatural senses keen enough to replace sight.

In the last-named case, GMs might want to define a mystical analog to Radar or Active Sonar. The character emits "mystic emanations" that tell him the shape and position of objects. Magic detection powers pick up these "Magic Radar Sense" emanations, just as Radio Hearing detects Radar Sense and Ultrasonic Hearing picks up Active Sonar.

Detect Magic often falls within the Sight Group, especially if it depends on a Focus. Placing the Enhanced Sense within another group could create an interesting character or detail for a setting, though. For instance, some Fantasy stories describe mystically sensitive characters sensing magic as an odor (fetid in the case of evil magic), or as a prickling in the skin.

Aura Vision

Occultists claim all humans — or even all objects — are surrounded by a shimmering halo of colored light that only the psychically aware can see. The color of a person's (or an object's) aura has meaning to those experienced in perceiving auras. (See the Aura Table for details.)

All objects have a basic blue-white aura (magical or unusual objects are an exception); living things have more variation in their aura colors. Creatures and monsters also have auras. No one can "disguise" his aura (at least, not without really special and bizarre powers); that's why auras are so useful for figuring out who's really a werewolf or which person in the room is actually a psychotic killer. Auras lack individuality and specificity — they're *not* unique to individuals like fingerprints or DNA are — but the character should suspect something if a supposedly meek, mild-mannered person has a blazing red aura. A person's aura rarely consists of one color; it's normally a mixture of several hues, and the mix changes with the current emotional state of the person. Without knowing a person for some time, though, a character cannot say what part of an aura comes from basic character and what part comes from current emotion.

Example: *Jezeray the psychic questions Freddy the Fence and gets close enough to see his aura. Freddy's aura shows both the orange of sincerity and the yellow-green of deceit (yuck). Jezeray realizes this could mean either that Freddy is*

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Astral Awareness: The characters can see and hear into the Astral Plane, a mystical dimension inhabited by ghosts and other spirits, and which human souls can visit if they separate from their bodies.

Dimensional (Astral Plane) on Sight and Hearing Groups. Total cost: 10 points.

Casting The Bones: When the witch-doctor suspects a witch plagues his village, he gathers the villagers in a circle around him and tosses a handful of small bones on the ground. The pattern they form reveals who is the witch. He also casts the bones to tell if someone is under a curse, or if an item is magical. However, the ritual does not reveal anything about the nature of any magic.

Detect Magic (INT Roll) (Sight Group), Ranged (10 Active Points); Concentration (0 DCV throughout casting; -1), Extra Time (1 Turn; -1¼), OAF Fragile (-1¼), Incantation (-¼), Instant (-½). Total cost: 2 points.

Uncanny Awareness: Nesson, a follower of an ancient Ergon mystic sect, hates the interstellar Thorgon Hegemony. If he spends hours surfing through vast amounts of random data, Nesson's mystic intuition alert him to the activities of Thorgon spies in his area... a useful first step for thwarting the Hegemony's plans.

Detect Thorgon Covert Activities (INT Roll), Ranged, MegaScale (1" = 100 km; +¾) (14 Active Points); Extra Time (1 Hour; -3), Need Large Database Of Random But Current Information (-¼). Total cost: 3 points.

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Good Luck Charm: A small amulet that gives luck to whoever carries it.

Luck 3d6 (15 Active Points); IAF (small charm; -½), Independent (-2), Limited (does not cumulate with other sources of Luck; -½). Total cost: 4 points.

Too Powerful For Death To Hold: Heroes thought they killed the Dark Lord several times. Within a few years, however, he rose again to reclaim his power and menace the world once more. A prophecy says the Dark Lord shall be destroyed for good only when... [here insert something cryptic or apparently impossible appropriate for your setting].

Healing 3d6 (Regeneration; 3 BODY per Year), Resurrection (stopped by fulfilling the cryptic prophecy), Difficult To Dispel (x2 Active Points; +¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½) (112 Active Points); Self Only (-½), Extra Time + Increased Time Increment (3 BODY/Year; -3¾). Total Cost: 21 points.

Veil Of Perfect Surprise: Does a particular character's Danger Sense make exciting stories of ambush, capture, and escape impossible? His arch-enemy obtains a talisman that hides him (the enemy) from Danger Sense — a precast spell he can activate before he attacks. But he can only use it once, so he'd better save it for just the right opportunity.

Invisibility to Danger Sense, Trigger (recipient places the talisman around his neck; +¼), Usable By Other (one recipient; +¼) (30 Active Points); IAF (talisman; -½), 1 Continuing Charge lasting 1 Hour that Never Recovers (-2¼). Total cost: 8 points.

AURA TABLE

Color	Meaning
Blue-white	The basic aura color; the color of all inanimate objects
Pink	Compassionate, warm, sociable
Pale Pink	Psychotic; indicates weakness or confusion
Rose	Generous, unassuming, motherly
Red	Energetic, a leader, extroverted; anger, moodiness
Dark Red	Emotion, desire, sensuality
Orange	Sincere, open-hearted, a sense of justice, fair play
Yellow-orange	Friendly, witty, humorous
Dark Yellow	Cowardice, fear, inferiority
Yellow	Intellectual, a teacher, deep thinker
Pale Yellow	Idealistic, humanitarian
Yellow-green	Greedy, stubborn; also jealous, deceitful, distrusting
Green	Practical, composed; also indicates a love for nature
Light Green	Brooding, lonely; often a loner
Dark Green	Envy, hate, maliciousness
Blue-green	Psychic or spiritual powers, a seeker after knowledge
Blue	Peaceful, calm, a strong character
Light Blue	Creative, spiritual
Dark Blue	Blind faith, superstitious, fearful
Lavender	Conservative, sensitive, civilized
Violet	Excitable, easily swayed by arguments, loves variety
Purple	Royalty, majesty, calm; a true leader
White	Purity, innocence, honesty; often found in children
Grey	Sickness, anxiety, a negative attitude
Black	Rage, anger, savagery, black magic, extreme illness
Gold	The color of saints; the highest, most spiritual color

basically honest but now lying for some reason, or that he is normally a liar but is now telling a truth and anxious that he be believed. Jezeray suspects the latter, but starts thinking of more tough questions that might make Freddy's aura reveal more about his emotions.

Aura Vision is normally assigned to the Sight Group; anything that blocks or interferes with Sight (such as a Sight Group Flash or Darkness versus the Sight Group) prevents a character from seeing auras. However, the effective range of Aura Vision is only about 3" in dim light, or 1" or less in bright sunlight. The GM should apply modifiers to the Aura Vision roll for ambient conditions, such as bright lights (-1 to -3), many people crowded together (-2), distractions (-1 to -3), and so on. Rare instances exist of characters whose Aura "Vision" relates to some other sense: for example, a psychic (rather than a mystic) might place Aura Vision in the Mental Sense Group.

The GM should handle Aura Vision carefully in a game. Since it's so difficult to hide or disguise an aura, Aura Vision may prove unbalancingly helpful to PCs, especially ones engaged in solving mysteries, so the GM may not always want to allow characters to buy it. However, if the GM creatively describes the various patterns and colors a hero sees in an aura, Aura Vision can really contribute to a game. The GM should feel free to add more colors to the table, and also the meanings of different colors in combinations or patterns. It's more fun when the meanings of colors remain at least slightly ambiguous, so the players must interpret the results for themselves.

EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL MOVEMENT

Mystic characters buy this Power more than any other archetype, regardless of genre. Their "planar travel" spells range from ones that can merely shift their bodies into the Astral Plane to ones that can carry entire groups of people to dimensions far, far removed from Earth's. See Chapter Two for information about dimensions.

FASTER-THAN-LIGHT (FTL) TRAVEL

At first glance, this is the least-appropriate of all Powers for mystics. Travel in outer space is just for Science Fiction, right?

Not always. Some Fantasy stories portray settings where powerful mystics travel between the stars. For instance, one of Jack Vance's "Dying Earth" stories included a magical castle that could fly to the edge of the universe. Lovecraftian horror stories sometimes include monsters able to live in outer space and travel throughout the universe. These are good examples of how no Power is truly unthinkable for mystics... in the right setting.

FORCE FIELD

This Power is the most common form of Resistant Defenses for mystics in most settings. Non-Persistent defenses, obtained through a spell, emphasize that a mystic is a normal person with special knowledge rather than some sort of supernatural creature. A mystic's Force Field may take the form of a glowing aura, an enchanted shield that flies around the mystic to block attacks, an enchanted cloak embroidered with runes of protection, or many other special effects. Mystics are likely to have Force Fields that include Mental Defense, Power Defense, or other special defenses.

HEALING

This Power's most obvious use lies in healing adventurers' wounds after a fight, but remember that Healing may be directed at any Characteristic or Power that suffers reduction.

Many supernatural creatures possess some form of Regeneration. The most powerful supernatural evils tend to have Regeneration with the *Resurrection* Adder. This is a good way to represent a villain or monster "too powerful to kill." For Master Villains, Elder Gods, and such ilk, the GM can forego the usual proviso that some factor can stop the Resurrection, or can make determining the "stops Resurrection" condition so secret that the PCs will have to go on even more adventures just to find it out!

The *Resurrection* Adder also enables characters to raise the dead. Gamemasters may balk at a Power that turns a character's death into a temporary

inconvenience. Tales agree, however, that unless you happen to be a god or saint, raising the dead is seldom easy and often carries dire consequences. Gamemasters who allow this at all may still insist on major Limitations. For instance, the spell could require a mystic to give up five years of his own life (a Side Effect), kill someone else to trade a life for a life (an Expendable Focus), or owe a really big favor to a death-god (a more subtle Side Effect, perhaps).

IMAGES

Illusion is one of the classic mystical powers: in myth and fiction, mystics often triumph through deceit rather than blasting an enemy into submission. Most mystic Images are usually directed against the Sight or Hearing Groups, but especially cunning mystics may employ Images against the Taste/Smell Group, Touch (the illusion even *feels* solid!), Detect Magic, or even Danger Sense.

A character can use Images to camouflage and conceal —creating an Image of something *not* being there. An Image of No Magic Here does not conceal a person or Base as well as Darkness or Invisibility, but it gets around one problem with those other two Powers. Darkness or Invisibility make an area *impossible* to sense, but a clever mage might realize that a blind spot indicates something important. Images gives a searching mage something innocuous to detect.

INVISIBILITY

This Power frequently appears in myths and tales of magic. Rings turn their wearer invisible; spirits walk unseen. Invisibility can affect any Sense, which permits a wide range of unusual concealments. Invisibility versus Detect Magic, for instance, prevents enemy mystics from locating a character's sanctum.

LIFE SUPPORT

In some genres of legend and Fantasy, mystics often have some form of Life Support. Hindu ascetics, for instance, practice fasts that would kill normal people, have themselves buried alive for a month, and perform other feats of superhuman endurance. Immunity to all disease is another traditional power for Asian mystics, and great mages often live much longer than normal folk.

In Fantasy stories and comic books, mystics often cast "spells of protection" to let them and their allies breathe underwater or live in other hostile environments. Life Support spells also provide defense against magical attacks with No Normal Defense. In such cases, players should remember to add the *Nonpersistent* Limitation, and possibly *Costs Endurance,* to the Life Support.

LUCK

Luck is one of the most common benefits people seek from magic. Not only might a mystic become lucky, he might become able to grant luck to others. A true "Good Luck Charm" would be an Independent item, but temporary blessings become possible if the GM permits Luck to be Usable By Others. In this case, the power should almost certainly have Costs Endurance, Constant, Nonpersistent, Continuing Charges, or some other Limitation so that it only helps the recipient for a discrete period of time. Providing a character with Luck for a long period of time requires a Major Transform (and the GM's permission).

MIND CONTROL

Under most circumstances, Mind Control isn't very heroic. Villains mesmerize innocent people to commit crimes for them, or force heroes to turn against their comrades. In comic books, however, heroic mages often make bystanders forget what they saw, since ordinary people are better off not knowing about the Mystic World. The GM might even make ordinary people Vulnerable to this sort of Mind Control, since their minds don't *want* to remember Things Man Was Not Meant To Know.

MIND LINK

This Power can represent nearly any magic used for long-distance communication. For instance, a wizard might call up a person's image in a crystal ball, talk to the image, and the person hears him even though he's a thousand miles away.

Normally, characters need Mind Scan to establish a Mind Link with someone outside their line of sight. The *Psychic Bond* Adder removes this need, though it limits the number of people a character can contact. For instance, a Psychic Bond can represent a priest, pacter, or servant of a higher power's ability to contact his divine or demonic patron. The character may need special paraphernalia to activate this power, though the link really exists all the time — and the patron doesn't need any Foci or rituals to contact the servant. A mystic who wants to contact any god or demon, however, needs Transdimensional Mind Scan.

MIND SCAN

Tales and legends often show mystics who can find people and affect them with their magic from great distances. Usually, this is an evil magician who curses his enemies while remaining safe in his tower. Mind Scan enables this long-distance magic (so do special long-range sensing abilities, which are discussed in *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire,* page 211), provided the power used to attack is a Mental Power or has the *BOECV* Advantage with Line Of Sight range.

Although this sort of long-distance magic is very traditional, GMs need to impose strict limitations on its use. There's not much adventure if a villain can attack the heroes any time he wants, and they have no way to defend themselves or retaliate (unless they have Mental Powers themselves, of course). There's even less adventure if the *heroes* can do this. Ways to restrict long-distance magic include:

■ Sympathetic Links: Any mystic who wants to target a character using Mind Scan needs something from the victim, like a sample of hair, spittle, or the person's clothing. A major villain can obtain sympathetic links to heroes, but he'll have to work at it. In a society where people know about long-distance magic and about this limitation,

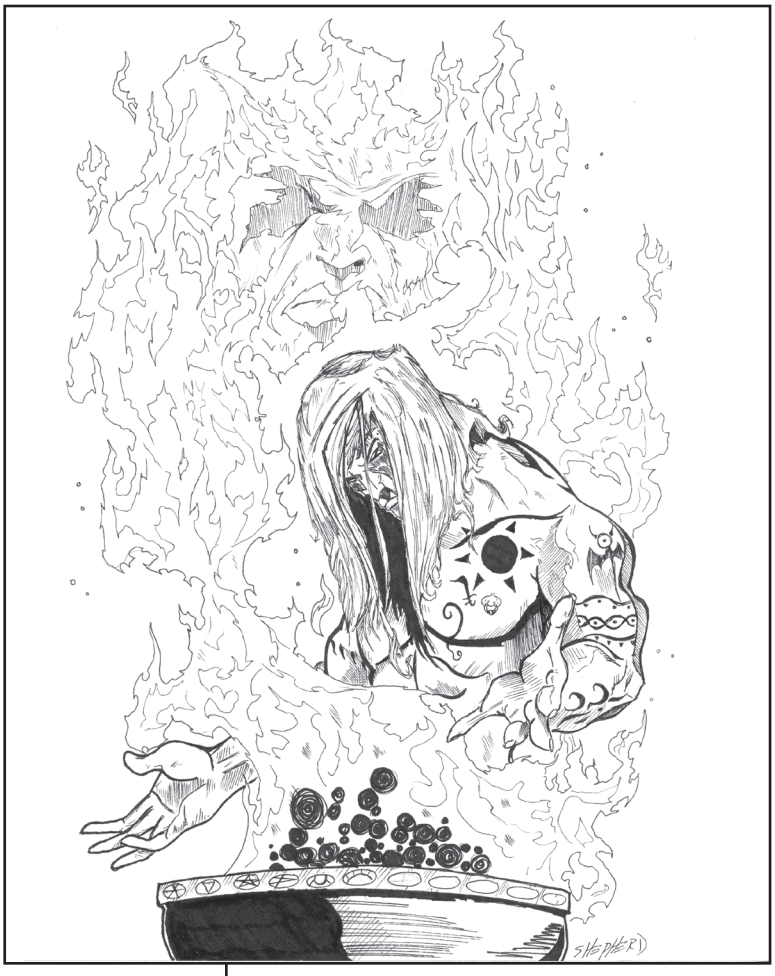
MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Fog of Forgetfulness: Super-mystics use this spell to erase the memories of witnesses to supernatural events. When the event terrified the bystanders, this doesn't take much Mind Control: the witnesses *want* to forget. People may remember these traumatic events under psychotherapy, however, or be reminded by witnessing some other mystical event. The spell evokes a circular zone of warm, pink mist; people within the fog forget recent events, as the magician instructs them.

Mind Control 8d6, Area Of Effect (4" Radius; +1) (80 Active Points); Set Effect (only to make people forget; -½). Total cost: 53 points.

Flame Of Infernal Communion: The Satanist Julian Silvers uses this spell to contact his master, the archdevil Paimon. Julian draws a magic circle, builds a small fire in the center, and offers a drop of his blood to the flames while intoning magic words. Paimon's voice speaks from the fire.

Mind Link to Paimon, any distance, any dimension, Psychic Bond (20 Active Points); OAF Fragile (specially-prepared magic circle and fire, see text; -1¼), Extra Time (1 Minute to activate; -¾), Incantations (-¼), Visible (pacter must speak aloud, and other people hear the demon's reply; -¼). Total cost: 6 points.



MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Jezeray And Zontar: The psychic Jezeray Illyescu found a crystal orb in a junk shop. When she tried to "read" its aura, she found the spirit of Zontar Bok, Warrior-Mage of Shamballah. They worked out a time-share agreement. Zontar could borrow Jezeray's body to continue the fight against the Dragon, and his power gave Jezeray access to the Superheroic World. She needs to concentrate on Zontar's orb to let him take over her body.

Multiform (assume 300-point Zontar Bok form; true form is 250-point Jezeray form) (60 Active Points); OAF (Zontar's crystal orb; -1), Concentration (0 DCV; -½), Extra Time (Full Phase; -½). Total cost: 20 points.

they'll take great care about haircuts, nail clippings, and the like. Barbers may be suspected of sorcery. True Names are another traditional sympathetic link.

■ Inconvenient Spellcasting: All spells targeted using Mind Scan are so difficult to use that even a master sorcerer cannot cast them very often. The spells might require hours-long rituals, consume costly Expendable Foci, or are only usable at a special time of day.

■ Easy Defense: The point cost for Mental Defense is much less than for Mind Scan. If a character can obtain magic to hide or defend himself from Mind Scan, his enemies cannot strike him down from afar. Perhaps this defense is *not* easy, and the heroes are the land's only hope against a sorcerous villain because only they possess the defense against his curses. Or turn this around: the villains of the campaign are such a threat because they can block magical searches and curses from the heroes.

■ Limit The Power: Simply don't allow anyone to possess more than a certain number of dice of Mind Scan, or don't allow mystics to buy extra ECV. If Mind Scan cannot exceed a certain low number of dice of effect, villains might still target ordinary, weak-willed people, but they cannot target strong-willed heroes. If ECV bonuses are not allowed, heroes and villains cannot target each other with Mind Scan unless they already know their enemy's location. This option also prevents characters from finding their adversaries too easily.

These restrictive options are not exclusive. In a Fantasy setting, for instance, wizards might know a variety of long-range curses — but these only work if the wizard knows the target's True Name, and can name the target's current location with some accuracy.

MISSILE DEFLECTION AND REFLECTION

Standard Missile Deflection And Reflection allows characters to Deflect or Reflect a particular class of ranged attacks. The *BOECV* Advantage changes this to Mental Powers. At the GM's option, Missile Deflection can work against other distinct classes of ranged attacks, defined by special effects (via Limitations) rather than game mechanics. Limitations like *Only Against Magic* (value depends on the nature of the campaign and how common non-magical Ranged attacks are) can restrict a mystic's Deflection so it "feels" like a spell and not a superpower.

MULTIFORM

Legends and stories often portray mystics and supernatural creatures taking animal form. It's almost obligatory for shamans and other tribal mystics, though Merlin did a fair bit of shape-shifting in *The Sword In The Stone*. Witches, vampires, and therianthropes take animal form too. Other cases of mystical characters changing into radically different forms occur less often. But Multiform could represent a character who is sometimes possessed by a spirit with powers of its own.

POWER DEFENSE

Many forms of mystics' Power Defense (be it from a spell or an innate ability) should only apply against magical attacks — not against drugs, poisons, mutant powers, or other abilities often built with Drains and other non-magical forms of Adjustment Powers. You can simulate this by applying the *Only Works Against Limited Type Of Attack* Limitation for Defense Powers to the Power Defense.

SHAPE SHIFT

While Multiform typically works best for mystic powers that involve changing into animal shapes (and the like), mystics sometimes use Shape Shift to disguise themselves — another traditional ability. The special effect can be a literal alteration to the mystic's form, a magical illusion, or simply clouding the minds of everyone who sees the character.

Powerful spirits often can assume a wide variety of shapes. For instance, Arab legend says the djinn often take the form of black or white cats, or solid-color or spotted dogs, and the gods of myth appear in whatever form they choose. Since this doesn't really change their powers, Shape Shift suffices instead of Multiform.

SUMMON

Summon is a favorite power of mystics, who often conjure demons and other Beings From Beyond... not to mention animals and similar

mundane creatures. When creating a mystical campaign, a GM must also decide what creatures can be Summoned, and what Advantages and Limitations apply. Most Summoning effects fall into three classes: *evocation,* in which a creature appears instantly; *calling,* in which the creature travels under its own power; and *creation,* in which the character makes the Summoned creature from scratch.

Evocation

Almost every tradition of magic, in folklore and fiction, includes the ability to Summon other creatures — especially demons, elementals, and other spirits. Evocation carries pitfalls, however, so GMs may want to restrict its use. For one thing, Summoned creatures can make a fight last much longer, just because of all the extra dice rolling! Mystics who can Summon a class of creatures, such as any sort of elemental, or any sort of minor demon, may gain access to a wide range of powers through these minions (especially if the Summoned beings are Amicable). This forms an important part of some mystical traditions (such as European ceremonial magic), but it may be hard to challenge characters who can obtain such supernatural assistance, especially on short notice. Of course, any character who wants to Summon helpers needs an incredibly high EGO to win the contest of wills against a minion with significant power. Alternatively, the character might also possess a binding spell (Mind Control, or possibly Transform), or simply add the *Amicable* Advantage to the spell.

In some settings, GMs might want to limit all these options so mystics who Summon creatures must go through the dangers of negotiating with them. European ceremonial magic raises dickering with Summoned demons into high drama, as the magician alternately cajoles the demon and threatens it with ever-harsher punishments. Negotiating with a tricky, greedy, or cantankerous spirit offers chances for great roleplaying.

In stories, mystics seldom evoke living creatures — just spirits. Evoking a *character* probably shouldn't be possible, except for gods or similarly powerful NPCs. After all, the effect is the same as Teleportation, Usable Against Others, Ranged and MegaRanged, *plus* a power to find someone anywhere in the Multiverse, and there's no defense against it at all. Under no circumstance should even gods be able to apply Amicable to Summoning a player character!

Gamemasters may want to rule that evoking a particular spirit does not require the *Specific Being* (+1) Advantage. This is a case where genre conventions may trump game balance considerations. For instance, grimoires of demonology always provide a conjured devil with alternatives: "I command you, [name], to appear, but if you can't, send some of your servants instead." Stories about spirit-summoning also say that even if you don't ask for a particular spirit at first, you can usually evoke the same spirit over and over again, to build up a working relationship.

Calling

Calling is defined by the *Arrives Under Own Power* (-½) Limitation, and almost always includes the *Summoned Being Must Inhabit Locale (-½)* Limitation as well. This makes it the most restricted class of Summon, since its success depends on factors outside the character's control.

Spirits are usually evoked, not called: they're not fully part of the material world, and can easily defy normal bounds of space. Living creatures, such as wild animals summoned to defend a druid, are usually called, not evoked. Calling sentient beings is problematic, since it can remove a character's free will. If you allow calling of sentient beings at all, compare the Active Points of the Summon to equivalent Active Points of Mind Control. If an equivalent Mind Control could easily overpower the will of the target creature, the power is probably not particularly abusive — no more than the Mind Control would be, anyway (assuming the character had Mind Scan or some other way to target it, of course). Keep in mind that to call a specific character requires the *Specific Being* (+1) Advantage. The *Amicable* Advantage should only be allowed for nonsentient targets: under no circumstances should a character suddenly become another character's slave because someone Summoned him with the *Slavishly Loyal* (+1) Advantage. That would be a Mental Transform.

Creation

Summon can represent anything from building a golem to growing a clone in an alchemical vat. The mystic's creation exists from then on as a character (or monster) in its own right. Creations aren't dispelled by damage, they are killed. On the other hand, you may rule that the Summon effect cannot be Dispelled, period: no spell can de-animate a golem or turn a clone back into a puddle of alchemical goo (or at least, not once it's existed for some defined period of time).

Conceivably, a mystic might create a spirit. In this case, the creation *can* be Dispelled... but does the Dispel unmake the spirit, or just send it to an appropriate spirit realm, from whence it may be evoked? This is a case where the GM must define the rules for the setting, quite apart from the *HERO System* game mechanics.

The GM must also decide whether creation makes individuals or merely specimens of a class. Mindless golems and zombies are clearly representatives of a class, but what about that clone? A good general rule is that *monsters* or *minions* are instances of a class, but *characters with personalities* are individuals, and the *Specific Being* (+1) Advantage applies. You might waive this requirement if the Summoner lacks control over the creation's personality, though. For instance, if you could physically duplicate any person through your Summon, but their knowledge or personality are iffy, you aren't really Summoning an individual — just a creature who might bear some resemblance to an existing individual, or might not.

Creation usually requires lots of Extra Time to conduct rituals or grow a creature, Foci in the form

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Sympathetic Link: In many traditions, a mystic can cast spells on a target from any distance away if he has something from the target. This might be a literal piece of the target, such as hair or nail clippings; or a representation of the target, like a photograph or the target's True Name. In game terms, you can represent this as an appropriate attack (see main text) used through a Mind Scan lock-on. Nowadays, a mystic also needs to know what country the target's in: the population explosion of the last century makes unlimited-range targeting more difficult.

Mind Scan 6d6, +15 ECV (60 Active Points); OAF (ritual paraphernalia; -1), Need Link To Specific Person (-1), Only To Target Attack (-½). Total cost: 17 points.

Mesmeric Disguise: The mystic instantly hypnotizes everyone who sees him so they perceive him as being someone else. The spell does not deceive cameras, other electronic sensors, or people with any Mental Defense. The character's reflection also does not change — a potentially dangerous giveaway.

Shape Shift (Sight and Hearing Groups, any human form), Imitation, Costs Endurance Only To Activate (+¼) (41 Active Points); Does Not Work Against Devices (see text; -½), Does Not Work Against Persons With Mental Defense (see text; -½). Total cost: 20 points.

Create Cockatrice: Sorcerers and alchemists occasionally breed a cockatrice, a malevolent

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animal with the power to turn other creatures to stone. This requires having a snake incubate an egg laid by a cock — a very rare item indeed — plus certain mystic rituals. The process takes a week. See *The HERO System Bestiary,* page 45, for a cockatrice character sheet.

Summon 201-point cockatrice (40 Active Points); OAF Fragile Expendable (chicken egg hatched by a snake, Very Difficult to obtain; -1¾), Extra Time (1 Week; -4½). Total cost: 5 points.

Induce Pregnancy: Many magic traditions include spells to make a woman pregnant. Usually this is just to help nature along as a Transform (barren to fertile), but in some stories a mystic induces the birth of a *specific* child, with a special appearance, attributes, or destiny. That requires Summon. This version assumes a child guaranteed to grow up as a Heroic-level character, with Gradual Effect to represent the time to young adulthood.

Summon 150-point person, Expandable Class (any 150-point character; +½), Specific Being (+1) (75 Active Points); OAF (ritual offering to a deity of fertility; -1), Extra Time (5 Minutes to cast; -2), Gradual Effect (16 years; -3), Requires Woman Who Wants To Bear A Child (-1). Total cost: 9 points.

Universal Taoist Transformation: A master of the Tao can change anything into anything — perhaps without anyone knowing what he's done. For instance, one magus played a prank on the Emperor by carrying a basket of oranges on his head. When the

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of raw materials, and a Skill Roll of some sort to get the creation right. Stories usually treat creation as one of the most difficult mystic arts. Side Effects if you get it wrong are highly appropriate: you create a rampaging monster, or perhaps a more subtly defective creature who turns against you when it hurts you most....

TELEPATHY

Fiction and folklore suggest that Telepathy may be a common mystical power, but GMs should treat it with caution: a character who reads minds can derail many sorts of plots. In many settings, GMs may want to insist that magical Telepathy always requires a special ritual, or only works face-to-face with the target, or suffers from some other restriction. If mystics can only read the minds of people already in their power, characters still face some challenge to solving mysteries or figuring out the schemes of their enemies.

In some cases, abilities that look like Telepathy might be better represented as unusual Detects. For instance, some traditions say mystics can glean information about people at first sight — for instance, a Hindu swami might instantly know a Western visitor's name and assorted trivial facts about his background. While the swami could gain this information by Telepathy, that Power might be too generous if the GM doesn't want the character also to know the foreign visitor's real purpose. In this case, an Enhanced Sense such as Detect Name And Personal Trivia could better represent this impressive but not plot-wrecking ability.

TRANSFORM

An alchemist changes lead into gold. A witch turns a prince into a frog. A vampire passes the curse of undeath to his victim. No sort of character uses Transforms as often as mystics, and no other Power represents so many traditional feats of magic.

Classic physical Transforms include the aforementioned lead into gold and prince into frog. Other traditional feats include materializing objects from thin air, turning people to stone, imbuing someone with a magical power, or magically disguising one person as another. Transforms can also represent miraculous cures beyond the reach of Healing, such as making the lame walk or giving sight to the blind.

Curses — Disadvantages imposed through a Transform, in this case — are the dark side of enchantments. For instance, a curse of misfortune could be described as a Transform to give the victim several dice of Unluck, or a curse that a princess shall die if she pricks her finger on the needle of a spinning wheel could be an exceptionally narrow Physical Limitation. Contagious curses, such as a werewolf's power to turn other people into werewolves through its bite, also act as Transforms.

Mystical characters sometimes use Mental Transforms to alter personalities for longer periods than Mind Control allows. An evil wizard, for instance, might magically brainwash a hero to forget his past life and become his slave. Good mystics can use a Mental Transform to break a slavery-spell or heal the insane. Some curses may be Mental Transforms: for example, a curse of berserker fury that forces an Enraged on the victim.

Spiritual Transforms are less easily defined, since no *HERO System* game traits explicitly define "spirit" (but see page 238 of *The HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook). Actually changing a corporeal person into a spirit would be one example. So is selling your soul to the Devil: the Devil works one Transform to grant whatever favor the pacter desires, and the spiritual Transform (free soul to damned soul) takes place as a Side Effect.

ASTRAL FORM

The power to send your spirit outside your body occurs in more than one mystic tradition. It practically defines shamanism, and is very common for comic book super-mages as well. You can represent astral projection several ways in the *HERO System.* All of them have benefits and drawbacks.

The Standard: The Altered Duplicate

As a default, *HERO System* supplements use Duplication to represent astral projection. The standard version assumes the Duplicate is a 350-point character, and at least 51% of the original character's game traits change, as measured by point costs. Most notably, the Duplicate is invisible and intangible, represented by Desolidification and Invisibility. The standard Power also assumes that projecting the astral body takes at least an hour of meditation, and several other Limitations. The result looks like this:

ASTRAL FORM	
Effect:	**Duplication (create one 350-point Duplicate), Altered Duplication (100%)**
Target/Area Affected:	**Self**
Duration:	**Persistent**
Range:	**Self**
END Cost:	**14 to activate**

Description: The character can create an "astral form," a second self composed of pure mystic energy that leaves his body and can act on its own. While the astral form exists, the character's physical form remains essentially comatose. Because the two are both aspects of the same being, any damage inflicted on one body affects the other as well; thus killing either the physical or astral form kills the other form, too. Additionally, the two forms can remain separate no longer than 24 hours, or they die.

The astral form possesses all the character's mystical powers, all his Intellect and Interaction Skills, and all of his memories (similarly, the character retains all the astral form's memories after the two rejoin). It may or may not possess his physical abilities, but typically does not — at least, not those beyond the abilities of a normal person. All Focus-based Powers are lost, since the Focus doesn't come

with the character's astral form. In any case, the astral form can only affect other astral forms and creatures, for it is intangible (it must buy Desolidification, Reduced Endurance (0 END), Persistent, Inherent, Always On, and therefore must apply the *Affects Physical World* Advantage to any powers, magical or otherwise, used to affect the solid world). Most astral forms are also invisible (Invisibility, Reduced Endurance (0 END), Persistent, Inherent, Always On) and can fly (Flight). Many can also cross the world in the blink of an eye (MegaScaled Flight or Teleportation).

Game Information: *Duplication (creates 350-point astral form), Altered Duplicate (100%; +1) (140 Active Points); Costs Endurance (to activate; -¼), Original Character Is Incapacitated And Helpless While Duplicate Exists (-1), Extra Time (must enter trance and meditate to allow astral self to leave its fleshy prison, 1 Hour; -1½), Feedback (-1), Both Characters Die If They Do Not Recombine Within 24 Hours (-½). Total cost: 27 points.*

Options:

1) Recombination Mastery: The astral form can recombine with the character easily and from a distance. Add Easy Recombination (Half Phase Action at half DCV), Ranged Recombination (+½). 187 Active Points; total cost 36 points.

2) Astral Projection: The character can quickly and easily unleash his astral form. This is the version most often seen in comic books, where supermages may zip in and out of their astral bodies almost at whim. Remove Extra Time (-1½). Total cost: 37 points.

3) Astral Brother: The character remains awake, alert, and able to act while his astral form exists. Remove Incapacitated (-1). Total cost: 33 points.

4) Shamanic Projection: The character remains awake and alert enough to avoid harm, but cannot engage in combat or other activities that demand total attention. Instead, he dances, sings, and mimes his astral form's activities. Replace Incapacitated with Concentration (½ DCV throughout; -½). Total cost: 29 points.

INTRINSIC POWERS OF ASTRAL FORMS

Intangible: Desolidification (affected by magic/other astral creatures), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼) (90 Active Points); Always On (-½). Total cost: 60 points.

Invisible: Invisibility to Sight and Hearing Groups, No Fringe, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼) (79 Active Points); Always On (-½). Total cost: 53 points.

Float Like A Ghost: Flight 6". Total cost: 12 points.

Total Cost: 125 points.

PRO

The standard Astral Form power stays within the letter of the *HERO System.* One character becomes two, though the original character may have to remain incapacitated while the Duplicate acts. The standard power also makes no assumptions about the character's setting, especially whether an Astral Plane exists with properties of its own.

CON

A character might need to jettison a *lot* of Powers, Characteristics, and other game traits to pay for an astral form's Desolidification, Invisibility, and other powers. (See the text box for game information for the astral form's powers.) A Heroic-level character might have an astral form with much higher point value than his basic form; a standard superhero might jettison super-powers inherent in his body rather than his mind. For a true mystic, whose powers are all a function of knowledge, this might be a problem: the comic books clearly show that supermages can cast all their spells while in astral form; they just can't affect the solid world very much.

What if a mystic wants a power to bring nonmystic characters onto the Astral Plane with him? Adding Usable On Others would seem to allow this... but what if the mystic wants to grant an astral form to a character already built on more than 350 points? Do all the target character's excess abilities have to go away, no matter what their source, so the Duplicate stays in the point limit? Do you hand-wave the character's actual point value? Or do you say the Power doesn't work on the higher-point character?

SOLUTIONS

Most simply, change the *Astral Form* power so a mystic's Duplicate has a point value equal to his own, plus 125 points (or more) to represent the added powers of his astral self. This does mean you have to keep recalculating the cost of the *Astral Form* as the character gains experience. You can also re-work the power itself in various ways.

Alternative One: Duplicate On The Astral Plane

One option is to remove the Duplicate's need for Desolidification and other powers by saying it exists in another dimension. The Duplicate exactly copies the original character (minus any Focus-based powers or any other powers the GM says are unrelated to the character's mind or spirit). Other people cannot see, hear, or touch the character because he's in the Astral Plane — not really on Earth at all. The astral character can still see and hear events on Earth, though; it's a convenient property of this other dimension. The *Astral Form* power must also include Extra-Dimensional Movement, to send the Duplicate onto the Astral Plane. The result looks like this:

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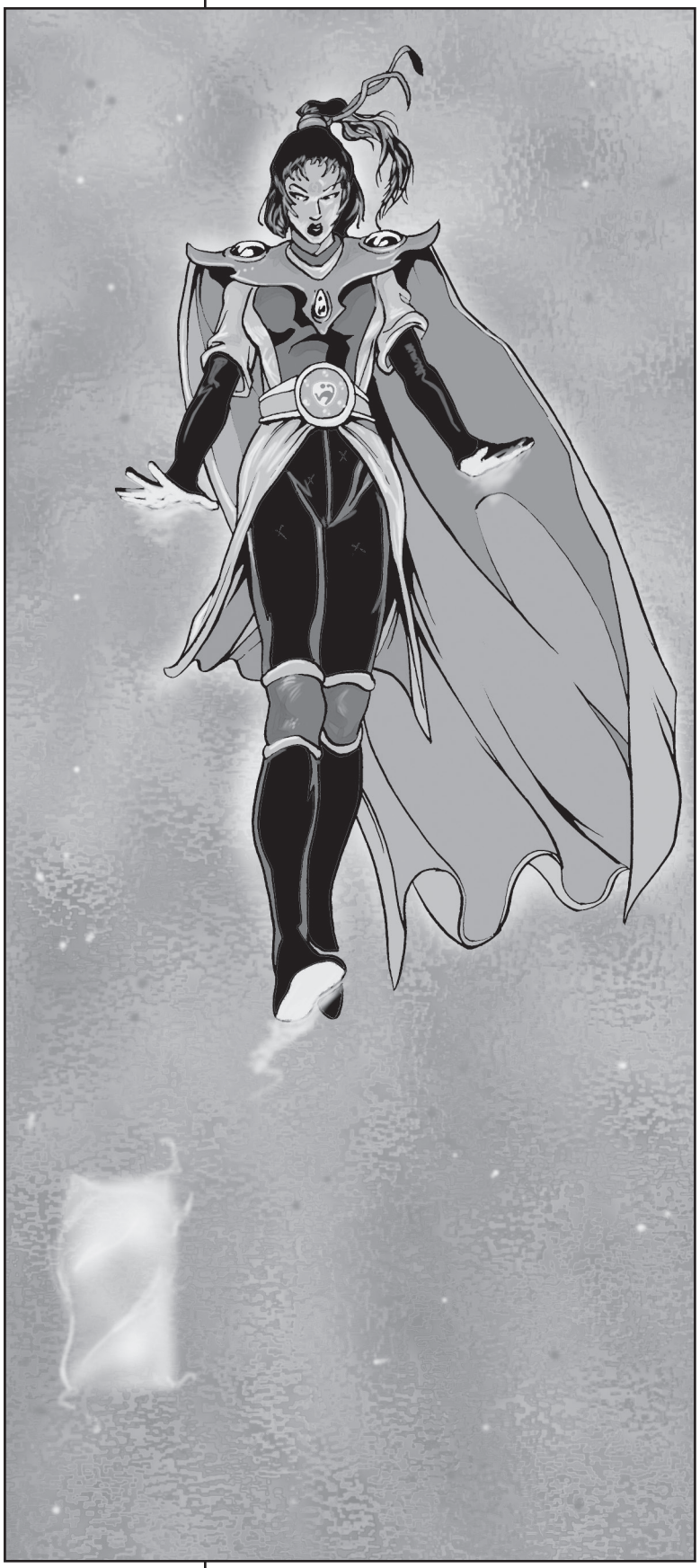
Emperor received his oranges, he found the rinds unbroken but the insides empty.

Major Transform 1d6 (anything into anything, heals back normally or through another application of this power), Improved Results Group (any physical object; +1), Indirect (bypass any physical barrier; +½), Invisible To Sight And Hearing Groups (+¾). Total cost: 49 points.

The Philosopher's Stone: One of the major goals of alchemy was the creation of the Philosopher's Stone. Historical accounts of alchemy claim the "Stone" was actually a reddish or ocher powder, and so it was also called the Powder of Projection. Making the Philosopher's Stone takes a full month of labwork, for just a few doses. To use the Stone, heat lead in a sealed crucible with a tiny amount of the powder.

The Philosopher's Stone is still one of the more difficult products for an alchemist to attempt. Selling alchemical gold takes some discretion, however, because the Transform can be reversed by certain conditions (such as contact with reasonably pure iron).

Major Transform 3d6 (lead to gold, reversed by contact with iron within 1 month of the transmutation), Delayed Effect (+¼) (56 Active Points); OAF Expendable (powder requires several exotic ingredients, Very Difficult to obtain; -1½), Limited Target (only lead; -1), No Range (-½), Extra Time (1 Month, storing Limitation; -5), Extra Time (1 Hour, release Limitation; -3), Requires An Alchemy Roll (-1 per 5 Active Points; -1), 8 Charges (-½). Total cost: 4 points.



ASTRAL FORM (ASTRAL PLANE VERSION)

Effect:	Duplication (create one 350-point Duplicate) and Extra-Dimensional Movement (Astral Plane)
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Persistent
Range:	Self
END Cost:	9 to activate

Description: See above. Options are left as an exercise for the reader.

Game Information: *Duplication (creates 350-point astral form) (70 Active Points); Costs Endurance (to activate; -¼), Original Character Is Incapacitated And Helpless While Duplicate Exists (-1), Extra Time (must enter trance and meditate to allow astral self to leave its fleshy prison, 1 Hour; -1½), Feedback (-1), Both Characters Die If They Do Not Recombine Within 24 Hours (-½) (total cost: 13 points)* ***plus*** *Extra-Dimensional Movement (Astral Plane, to/from location corresponding to physical body) (22 Active Points); Linked (only when character releases or recombines his astral body; -½) (total cost: 15 points). Total cost: 28 points.*

PRO

You don't have to write up a separate character sheet for the astral Duplicate: just note which powers are Focus-based or otherwise unavailable to the character's astral form.

This also makes writing up ghosts and other astral spirits easy. You just write them up as characters who exist on the Astral Plane, and give them suitable powers to project their influence to Earth (for example, Transdimensional Images so a ghost can manifest visibly).

CON

This version of Astral Form shunts a lot of game mechanics into the Astral Plane, which GMs must define for themselves. For instance, can all astral forms fly as a property of the dimension? Or must the Duplicate still buy this power? This version also does not deal with the possibilities of a Usable On Others version of the power.

A Duplicate in another dimension also raises questions about interactions with other powers. For instance, can someone use Extra-Dimensional Movement to bring an astral form back to the solid world? If the answer is yes, then astral projectors can become visible and solid at will, losing an important restriction on the astral form, by having Extra-Dimensional Movement powers of their own (nothing unusual for a mystic).

If the GM plans to make the Astral Plane an important setting in its own right, with many astral creatures, you may prefer this version of Astral Form. If not, he may prefer to stick to the standard form.

Alternative Two: Desolidification And Invisibility

If you *really* don't want to deal with Duplicate character sheets, skip the Duplication and just give the character Desolidification and Invisibility, then apply the Limitations from the standard version of *Astral Form.* The character leaves an insensate physical body behind, but you may feel this isn't really Duplication since only one body can be active at a time. It has no function except to be a weakness for the astral character. The result looks like this:

ASTRAL FORM, MARK II

Effect:	**Desolidification and Invisibility**
Target/Area Affected:	**Self**
Duration:	**Persistent**
Range:	**Self**
END Cost:	**0**

Description: The character sheds his physical form to move about in his astral form. His astral form is invisible and intangible; he cannot affect the physical world except by using other powers with the *Affects Physical World* Advantage. Separating his astral form requires an hour of meditation. The character also suffers various Limitations based on the lump of meat that used to be him: if it dies, he dies too, and he must recombine within 24 hours. Other powers, such as Flight, are left out of this writeup since they may vary between characters.

Game Information: *Desolidification (affected by magic/other astral creatures), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼) (90 Active Points); Leave Insensate And Helpless Body Of Flesh Behind (-1), Astral Body And Flesh Body Suffer Each Other's Damage (-1), Extra Time (must enter trance and meditate to allow astral self to leave its fleshy prison, 1 Hour; -1½), Both Bodies Die If They Do Not Recombine Within 24 Hours (-½) (total cost: 18 points)* **plus** *Invisibility to Sight and Hearing Groups, No Fringe, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼) (79 Active Points); Leave Insensate And Helpless Body Of Flesh Behind (-1), Astral Body And Flesh Body Suffer Each Other's Damage (-1), Extra Time (must enter trance and meditate to allow astral self to leave its fleshy prison, 1 Hour; -1½), Both Bodies Die If They Do Not Recombine Within 24 Hours (-½), Character Visible To Other Astral Creatures And To Characters With Astral Awareness (-½) (total cost: 14 points). Total cost: 32 points.*

PRO

This version describes the practical effects of an astral form, perhaps making it easier to understand and explain. You might consider this approach with a novice to the *HERO System.* This version also does not require multiple character sheets, though you still have to note any powers lost to the astral form (possibly entitling the character to take a *Lockout* Limitation on his Astral Form power).

This is also a good version if you want a power to help or force *other* beings into their Astral Form, since it ignores the target character's point value. All you have to do is apply the *Usable As Attack* Advantage.

CON

That meat body left behind forces the GM to accept a lot of *ad hoc* Limitations that wouldn't normally apply to Desolidification and Invisibility. The character also needs to buy any other powers used only by his astral body, such as Flight, though Linking them to the *Astral Form* reduces the cost somewhat.

Alternative 3: Extra-Dimensional Movement

After reviewing Alternatives One and Two, you may consider applying the various "discard the meat body" Limitations to Extra-Dimensional Movement. The character moves onto the Astral Plane, but leaves his body behind, comatose and potentially subject to the unkind attentions of his enemies. This may stretch the *HERO System* too far, though. Walking through walls and spying on people invisibly are formidable powers — too formidable for the Active Points of EDM to a single location (the point on the Astral Plane corresponding to the physical body's location). Desolidification or Duplication also can imply a change in the character's substance, which could include exchanging a meat body for an ectoplasmic form. Extra-Dimensional Movement doesn't cover that, so an *Astral Form* power based on EDM also needs Shape Shift, to represent the character's transition to ectoplasm.

Alternately, you could try building this type of Astral Form with Multiform, but some GMs may find that unbalancingly powerful.

ASTRAL FORM, MARK III

Effect:	**Extra-Dimensional Movement (Astral Plane) and Shape Shift**
Target/Area Affected:	**Self**
Duration:	**Instant**
Range:	**Self**
END Cost:	**3**

Description: The character goes to the Astral Plane, leaving his body behind as a breathing but comatose lump of meat. Instead, he occupies a body of ectoplasm while in Astral space. The character remains recognizable, but is transparent and feels different. If any harm comes to that lump of meat back on Earth, it also happens to the character. The astral character does not gain any further powers to move through dimensions, and can only return from the Astral Plane to his physical body. If the character has a significant number or quality of abilities that he can't use in Astral Form (such as Focused powers), he should also apply the *Lockout* Limitation to his ability.

Game Information: *Shape Shift (Sight, Hearing, and Touch Groups), Cellular, Costs Endurance Only To Activate (+¼) (32 Active Points); Leave Insensate And Helpless Body Of Flesh Behind (-1), Astral Body And Flesh Body Suffer Each Other's Damage (-1), Extra Time (must enter trance and meditate to allow astral self to leave its fleshy prison, 1 Hour; -1½), Both Bodies Die If They Do Not Recombine Within 24 Hours (-½) (total cost: 6 points)* **plus** *Extra-Dimensional Movement (Astral Plane, to/from location corresponding to physical body) (22 Active Points); Linked (-½) (total cost: 15 points). Total cost: 21 points.*

PRO

This costs a lot less than the other versions. It also makes no assumptions about what other powers the character may possess, or the character's point value overall.

CON

This power costs substantially fewer points than the other versions, which may make it *too* attractive to characters. It leaves GMs with little guidance about what powers might be left with the flesh body. Additionally, the character may have to pay for abilities he can only use on the Astral Plane (though some, such as the ability to travel quickly, may be inherent in the nature of the Astral Plane itself as the GM defines it).

This version can be adapted to a Usable On Others version, but this involves applying Usable On Others to Shape Shift, which is generally discouraged. A combination of Transform and Extra-Dimensional Movement also accounts for a character's possible loss of powers while in astral form.

Alternative 4: Clairsentience

If characters use their astral form only for spying and searching, you might not need to give astral characters any way to affect other characters or objects. In this case, Clairsentience may best represent this power: the character's viewpoint moves, but his physical body doesn't.

You can make this version more like other Astral Forms by saying that two astral bodies can see each other, and affect each other with Mental Powers. This may require adding an Enhanced Sense to the Clairsentience, and various Limitations. The version below presumes no interaction between Clairsentient astral projectors.

ASTRAL FORM, MARK IV

Effect:	Clairsentience (Sight and Hearing Groups), Mobile Perception Point (18" move)
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	Self
END Cost:	9/11 to activate

Description: As described above, the character sends his spirit out of his body to poke around. He can use his astral form only for reconnaissance and spying; he cannot attack others, move things, or perform any actions except observation. He can, however, send his awareness around the world (though finding a particular location may be a problem). Other Limitations are also possible, such as Extra Time to begin the Clairsentience.

Game Information:

Cost	Power
56	*Astral Form (variant):* Multipower, 112-point reserve; all Character Is Incapacitated And Helpless While Using Power (-1)
4u	1) *Local Remote Viewing:* Clairsentience (Sight and Hearing Groups), 32x Range (4,800"), Mobile Perception Point (18" movement rate), Costs Endurance Only To Activate (+¼); Character Is Incapacitated And Helpless While Using Power (-1)
6u	2) *Worldwide Remote Viewing:* Clairsentience (Sight and Hearing Groups), Mobile Perception Point (18" movement rate), Costs Endurance Only To Activate (+¼), MegaScale (1" = 1,000 km, can scale back to 1" = 1 km; +1¼); Character Is Incapacitated And Helpless While Using Power (-1)

Total cost: 66 points.

PRO

Because it only allows a character to see and hear things, this ability may not be as objectionable as one that lets them fight while in Astral Form, or the like. It does a good job of simulating one of the most common uses of projecting an astral self — observing other people — without allowing for any ability to attack.

CON

This ability is more than twice as expensive as the other forms of Astral Form, though in many ways it offers the least functionality. Even so, GMs may find that it's so useful to PCs that it unbalances the game — while it may take a character time to find something, it vastly increases a character's reconnaissance capacity.

Final Considerations

Which variety of Astral Form you choose depends on the needs of your campaign, the nature of that campaign, and your personal approach to the *HERO System.* Whatever version you choose, do not rule out any of the others for special cases. Even if you define a "default" or "preferred" method, in some circumstances you may find that some other method better represents the details of how a particular character assumes his astral form. Keep in mind that whatever game mechanics you use, they're all meant to represent the same thing: a spiritual body that can interact with other spiritual creatures, but which remains invisible and intangible to the physical world. For instance, a Duplicate on the Astral Plane may be able to see and touch an astral form that's a special effect for Clairsentience. Use the rules to represent a character's mystic abilities; if the letter of the rules doesn't precisely match some classic mystic power, bend the rules.

POWER MODIFIERS



Several Advantages and Limitations are especially useful at making powers more "mystical." Various styles of magic may favor some Advantages or Limitations, and shun others. And of course many a mystic creates a Power Framework (or two, or three...) to define his powers.

POWER ADVANTAGES

Here are a few notes about Power Advantages mystics often use.

AFFECTS DESOLIDIFIED

This Advantage becomes very important in magic-oriented campaigns, what with astral projectors, misty vampires, air elementals, and all. If the attack only affects *magically* Desolidified creatures, use the +¼ version.

AREA OF EFFECT

Area Of Effect Attacks are as useful for mystics as any other character. The *One Hex Accurate* Advantage deserves special mention, however.

Tales of magic often describe magicians cursing their victim from far away. Characters can simulate this with *Area Of Effect (One Hex Accurate; +½)* and enough MegaArea to cover the entire world (usually +1¼ will do). The mystical attack affects the one targeted person and no one else in the world-sized Hex. The victim still has a DCV of 3, so the attack could conceivably miss. The attacking mystic certainly gains noncombat Surprise, though (at least the first time), and can use Skill Levels to make his attack even more certain to succeed.

Of course GMs should hesitate to allow attacks with no possibility of counterattack or defense. Spells that attack a victim anywhere in the world are best restricted to major villains, and even they should suffer severe restrictions. Gamemasters might limit "around the world" powers to attacks that endanger the target without causing immediate harm. For instance, a curse could turn the victim into a dog, but that doesn't actually take the character out of the game. Inflicting a fatal disease gives the character a chance to find a cure before he dies. A spell to sink the ship a character travels on turns the story into a thrilling shipwreck adventure... or a race against time to reach safety before the ship sinks. "Around the world" attacks might also suffer from the same restrictions as attacks targeted through Mind Scan (page 51), such as the need for a sympathetic link.

ATTACK VERSUS LIMITED DEFENSE

Attacks with this Advantage represent mystical forces that ignore "merely physical" defenses. Gamemasters should not allow mystical characters to define strange AVLDs just because they know few characters ever have the needed defense, though. For instance, a spell whose only defense is Radio Group Flash Defense would clearly be absurd in most magical traditions: radio just isn't mystical.

BASED ON EGO COMBAT VALUE

This is one of the workhorses for a mage character. Players can use BOECV to create many exotically mystical powers. For instance, BOECV Telekinesis is one way for a mystic to control the bodies of his foes. The archetypal use of this power is the scene where the mystical Master Villain forces his failed underling to draw his weapon and kill himself. BOECV Entangle (Mental Paralysis) is another classic mystical attack that's sure to frighten musclebound but low-EGO swordsmen, superheroes, and pulp adventurers.

DAMAGE SHIELD

Damage Shield usually applies to Attack Powers such as Energy Blast, but players can apply it to other powers with the GM's permission, leading to many creative, unusual abilities. For example, the rulebook suggests Damage Shields based on Mental Powers as potential defenses against mental attacks, and as a way to represent creatures whose minds are incredibly foul. The GM might allow characters to create PRE Damage Shields for similar reasons. Applying Damage Shield to a special reserve of PRE achieves much the same effect: anyone who attacks the creature's mind suffers a Presence Attack, which may shock the character so much he breaks off contact.

DELAYED EFFECT

Players and GMs can use this Advantage to represent various sorts of "stored" magic. The Advantage practically defines systems of magic where mystics prepare their spells in advance and then fire them off later (as in many Fantasy settings). At the GM's option, Delayed Effect combined with Usable As Attack can also represent one-shot mystical powers bestowed by a demon or god: the spirit works the magic, but Usable As Attack "transfers" the magic to someone else, and Delayed Effect lets the recipient decide when to use the power.

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Coup Stick: Sarah Redhawk, shamanic detective, inherited her grandfather's coup stick. The enchanted baton can give a wallop to incorporeal entities... not to mention more mundane attackers.

HA +4d6, Affects Desolidified (+½) (30 Active Points); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½), STR Min (8; -½). Total cost: 10 points.

Strobing Saffron Sphere: This minor thaumaturgical attack creates a burst of flickering, yellow light that disorients those caught within it.

Energy Blast 2d6, AVLD (defense is Sight Group Flash Defense; +1½), Area Of Effect (One Hex; +½). Total cost: 30 points.

Voodoo Doll: By thrusting a pin into a cloth doll containing a bit of the victim's hair and clothing, a *bokor* (voodoo sorcerer) causes pain to his enemy. The spell isn't infallible, but the strong-willed *bokor* can usually affect most people. However, the spirits permit the *bokor* to do this only once per day.

Ego Attack 2d6, Area Of Effect (One Hex Accurate; +½), MegaArea (width, breadth, and depth of Earth; +1¼) (55 Active Points); OAF (voodoo doll and silver pin; -1), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -2), Incantations (-¼), Only Works Against Specific Character For Whom Bokor Has Prepared Doll (as defined by the cloth and hair used; -2), 1 Charge (-2), Costs Endurance (-½). Total cost: 6 points.

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Change The Seasons: According to legend, the mage Albertus Magnus could turn winter into summer.

Change Environment 1" radius, +2 Temperature Levels, Long Lasting (1 hour); MegaArea (1" = 10 km; +½) (27 Active Points); OAF (magic rod; -1), Extra Time (1 Minute to activate; -¾), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼). Total cost: 8 points.

Immolation: Many a demon can create an aura of hellfire around himself. It doesn't deal much damage, but it's useful when enemies Grab or Entangle him.

RKA 1d6, Continuous (+1), Damage Shield (+½), Penetrating (+½) (45 Active Points); OIHID (-¼). Total cost: 36 points.

Veltarian Bolt: The Veltarian Wizards of the Twilight Islands devised this irresistible attack for use against non-wizardly opponents.

RKA 1½d6, NND (defense is Wizard's Shield spell; +1), Does BODY (+1) (75 Active Points); OAF (Veltarian Staff; -1), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Limited Range (50"; -¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 23 points.

DOES BODY

Mystics — especially evil mystics — can kill people in ways that defy mundane protection. When coupled with AVLD, BOECV, or NND, the *Does BODY* Advantage can represent lethal magic. For any character except a powerful Master Villain who ignores normal Active Point limits, however, the large Advantage reduces an attack's damage so much that the Does BODY effect cannot kill anyone quickly. Furthermore, mystical heroes may well have the needed defense; and any hero can survive a few attacks, fight back, and perhaps force the hostile mystic to retreat. Does BODY attacks therefore work best against innocent bystanders, NPCs, and other normal people (as a way to show the power of an evil mystic) or when coupled with Continuous.

MEGASCALE

MegaScaled attacks only appear in the most high-powered Fantasy stories, where gods throw mountains, mighty mages annihilate whole armies, and evil witches can curse people from afar. Even for non-damaging powers such as Change Environment, this Advantage is usually limited to characters who wield significantly more power than other mystics. In legend, for instance, the magus-saint Albertus Magnus could turn winter into summer over a wide area — a spectacular example of weather control, perhaps the most common MegaArea power. Other mythic MegaScaled effects include legendary heroes who create hills, rivers, islands, or canyons by their actions, or with the help of enchanted items (such as a magic gourd full of water used to create a sea to block the path of pursuers).

NO NORMAL DEFENSE

Like AVLD, this Advantage gives wizards eerier, more "mystical" powers that ignore mundane defenses. In an all-mystic campaign, Mental Defense and Power Defense (the most common defenses for NND attacks) are almost ubiquitous. NND attacks versus various sorts of Life Support, however, create wonderfully Gothic effects: strangling tentacles for an NND against Self-Contained Breathing; withering for an NND against Longevity; or an NND against the appropriate Immunity for an attack that makes the target's flesh rot away in stinking corruption! Just as with AVLD, however, players and GMs should remember that NND versus The Defense Nobody Ever Has is very bad form. Don't do it, don't allow it, and always insist on some connection between the special effect of the attack and the defense that blocks it.

One interesting and peculiarly mystical option is an NND attack where the defense is an action or state of mind. In religious traditions, the ultimate defense against demonic power is often faith and prayer, rather than merely human magic. In a setting where divine and demonic forces are real and present aspects of life, the only defense against some supernatural attacks may be active prayer to some contrary power... but the gods expect characters to keep their promises and remain loyal. You can represent this by defining the defense as an EGO Roll or Faith roll (though the rules normally forbid using a roll as a defense to an NND).

Other possibilities include attacks where the defense is to remain calm despite provocation, or to resist greed. A curse might take the form of a power that takes effect whenever the victim performs a certain, specified action. Theoretically, anyone can defend against such attacks — but nobody is automatically safe, and players need some cleverness (and good role-playing) to find the defense. Such attacks do stretch the rules to the limit — but conditional curses and divine powers that ignore mortal magic exist in Fantasy and mythology, so the GM may want them in his game, too.

TIME DELAY

Time Delay's chief use is for curses and magical attacks that harm their victims after a specified time, such as the mystical "Death Touch" some martial arts masters are said to possess. In many cases, however, a variable Trigger works better than a Time Delay to represent this sort of magic.

TRANSDIMENSIONAL

The usefulness of this Advantage depends on what dimensions the GM defines, and what lives in them. If other zones of reality form an important part of a setting, and characters don't need to visit other dimensions in order to interact with their inhabitants, Transdimensional might become an important Advantage. For instance, if spirits dwell in an Astral Plane but can influence or attack people in the material world, their powers need this Advantage.

For this Advantage, however, "dimensions" do not have to be places a character could actually visit. As with Extra-Dimensional Movement, any place, condition, or state of being that people cannot reach by normal means may count as a "dimension." For instance, communicating with the dead may involve Transdimensional Telepathy, even if there's no "afterlife dimension" where every soul now dwells and that living characters could visit. Sending a message to someone in the past or future would be another example of Transdimensional communication.

Page 268 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook notes that a GM could impose a "Range Modifier" based on the distance between the target dimension and the character's current dimension if he wants to. As an example of this, the accompanying table provides a suggested *Dimensional Range Modifier* for Transdimensional attacks used in the Multiverse of the Hero Universe (which is detailed in *The Mystic World*), based on the "distances" between dimensions.

The rules for Transdimensional note that how many dimensions a character can affect with his power, he can only do so one dimension at a time — there's no way to affect multiple dimensions at once (not even by applying Autofire or a similar Advantage to a Transdimensional power). However, the GM might waive this restriction for non-attack powers in the interest of dramatic sense. The *Conqueror's Voice* power in the text box provides an example.

HERO UNIVERSE DIMENSIONAL RANGE MODIFIER

OCV Modifier	"Range"
	Each level difference between the Four Worlds (Assiah, Yetzirah, Briah, Atziluth)
-4	Attacking the Qliphothic Realm from anywhere
-0*	Another dimension in the same sephiroth (*e.g.,* attacking another Malkuth dimension from Earth)
-2*	Another dimension in the same level but a different sephiroth (*e.g.,* attacking another Assiatic dimension from Earth, but not one in Malkuth)
-1 per step	Another layer of the Astral Plane (Lower, Middle, Upper) while in the Astral Plane

For example, if D'ansif the Beautiful uses an Energy Blast, Transdimensional to attack an entity on a Brialic plane, she suffers a -8 OCV penalty — -4 for each of the two steps between Assiah and Briah. If she used the same spell against a target in a Qliphothic plane, she'd suffer a -4 OCV penalty. If she were in the Middle Astral Plane and used the spell to attack a target in the Lower Astral Plane, she'd suffer a -1 OCV penalty.

* Or more, depending on how "nearby" the GM judges the target dimension to be

USABLE ON OTHERS

The *Usable By Other* form of this Advantage can represent any sort of magic a mystic can loan to another character. *Usable Simultaneously* can represent any magical effect a mystic can share with other characters. This is very useful with transportation spells, so a group of characters can stay together. A defensive power with Usable Simultaneously lets a heroic mystic protect innocent bystanders from peril... or lets an evil mystic protect his minions from the heroes.

Usable As Attack enables a number of powerful attacks. Tunneling made Usable Against Others, for instance, creates a spell to bury enemies alive. Gamemasters should carefully examine any use of this Advantage, to make sure one character doesn't have an attack that guarantees instant victory. Remember, every power bought Usable Against Other *must* have some defense that is reasonably common, or that characters can plausibly figure out and obtain; for instance, a Hardened Force Wall or Force Field to block a UAA Teleport or Extra Dimensional Movement. If you can't figure out anything else, how about a Characteristic roll at minuses? With a DEX Roll at (say) -3, the UAA "didn't really hit" because the victim twisted out of the way at the last moment; with an EGO Roll, the victim gritted his teeth and resisted the diabolical attack by sheer force of will; and so on.

VARIABLE ADVANTAGE

This Advantage goes a long way to represent the flexibility that is such a hallmark of mystics. If the campaign has an Active Point limit, this Advantage greatly reduces the raw damage of attacks — but a mystic may still prefer the wider range of options, especially if the campaign does not allow Power Frameworks for magic. Besides, sometimes an attack with only a few dice but a lot of Advantages works better than simply piling on more dice.

VARIABLE SPECIAL EFFECT

This Advantage also helps represent a wizard's trademark flexibility. With a +½ Advantage, a character can make a simple Energy Blast come out as lightning, fire, acid, pure mystical force, high velocity brass bookends, or what have you. The added point cost becomes well worth it if he can identify a foe's Vulnerability!

If appropriate for the setting, the GM should define acceptable classes of special effects for mystics. "Any Elemental Effect" — the classic Four Elements of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth — has precedents in Fantasy fiction, and may include other "elements" such as Cold or Lightning.

"Any Magic," on the other hand, is debatable. In some settings, all mystics draw their power from one source, such as Nature, the gods, or the dead. This one source may permit a class of special

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

The Conqueror's Voice: The awesomely powerful Tyrannon, who has conquered many dimensions, can address all his subjects at once. When Tyrannon wills it, his voice fills every world linked by dimensional portals to his own. For purposes of this spell, separate solar systems are considered separate "dimensions."

Hearing Group Images, +3 to PER Rolls, MegaArea (1" = 10 trillion km; +3½), Indirect (+½), Transdimensional (all worlds and planes ruled by Tyrannon; +¾) (80 Active Points); Set Effect (only amplifies the character's speech; -1). Total cost: 40 points.

Infidel's Fire: An evil conjuror can use this spell to summon a mighty demon to cast hellfire at the king's knights. Unwavering faith and prayer, however, can protect against the all-consuming flame.

RKA 1d6, Area Of Effect (7" Radius; +1), Continuous (+1), NND (defense is an EGO Roll to maintain courage and faith in God in the face of Satanic power; +1), Does BODY (+1), Personal Immunity (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼) (82 Active Points); OAF (Conjuror's Lamp; -1), Extra Time (Extra Phase to cast; -½), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Conjuration Roll (-½). Total cost: 23 points.

Spellcaster's Bane: The super-sorcerer Witchcraft offended someone very powerful. As a result, she's under a curse. Each time she casts a spell, a bit of her body turns to stone. Can she find a way to remove the curse before she becomes a statue? All her mystic protections and cures are worthless against the curse now that she's got it (and only the Wizard's Shield spell, which she rarely has ready, can protect against the attack) — her only hope is not to cast spells.

Major Transform 4d6 (person to person with the Limitation Side Effect [takes 1 point of Major Transform damage per casting, automatically occurs] on all his spells), No Normal Defense (defense is Wizard's Shield spell; +1). Total cost: 120 points.

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Bane Spear: This short spear can magically transform into any form of matter or energy, without becoming less sturdy or dealing any more or less damage.

HKA 1½d6, Range Based On STR (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Variable Special Effect (+½) (50 Active Points); OAF (spear; -1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 12 points.

Knock To Enter: The wicked witch Mother Greedle puts a spell on the door to her workroom: if anyone opens the door without knocking in a certain way, an Ego Attack strikes them.

Ego Attack 4d6, Trigger (someone grasps doorknob without giving the knock; +¼). Total cost: 50 points.

Missile Of Mystic Mastery: This thaumaturgical bolt has little raw power, but the caster can adjust it for almost any purpose. The Variable Advantage enables feats such as selecting an NND to bypass a foe's *known* defenses, making the *Missile* Indirect and with No Range Modifier to attack past walls; or attacking everyone in an Area Of Effect.

Energy Blast 4d6, Variable Advantage (+1 Advantages; +2). Total cost: 60 points.



effects, but "Any Magic" would be limited to that class. In other settings, different groups of mystics exploit different sources of power, but they exclude each other. In settings like these, GMs might restrict Variable Special Effect to the +¼ level, or say that while a +½ Advantage may represent a broad class of special effects, mystics can never produce *every* sort of magical special effect. Then again, in some settings anything goes, and it's perfectly reasonable for a mystic to make his *Magic Bolt* necromantic at one use, a fire bolt the next, and a storm of silver pellets at the third casting.

POWER LIMITATIONS

Different styles of magic often carry a uniform set of Limitations. See Chapter Three for discussions of various magic styles and their preferred game mechanics. This section discusses Limitations that are more or less appropriate for mystics in general. If a Limitation receives no mention, either it's rarely used for magic, or it works for mystics the same as for any other character.

ACTIVATION ROLL

In campaigns where magic is usually reliable (such as superhero settings), an Activation Roll can represent an inexperienced mage, or a mystic whose magic is intrinsically a little out of control. Activation Rolls also make a good alternate option for characters with Variable Limitation.

CHARGES

Magic items frequently take this Limitation. Independent items may well start out with a large number of Charges, but be impossible to recharge: characters must take care not to use the item recklessly, lest they exhaust it too soon.

This Limitation can also represent a mystic who can cast his spells a limited number of times per day (such as the wizards in Jack Vance's early "Dying Earth" stories). Individual spells might receive this Limitation, or a character might have a Power Framework of spells with Charges applied to the entire thing. As the character becomes more experienced, skilled, and powerful, he increases the number of Charges with Experience Points.

CONCENTRATION

This Limitation usually applies only to Heroic-level mystics. It's a common Limitation for ritual magic — especially for powerful spells that take a long time to cast and could lash back at the mystic if anyone interrupts the casting. It's generally inappropriate for Superheroic-level mystics, who dive right into the thick of combat

EXTRA TIME

Ceremonial magic always takes Extra Time, practically by definition. A proper ceremony takes at least 1 Minute to perform. European grimoires describe magic rituals that may require whole days of preparation.

FOCUS

In Fantasy and folklore, mystics often cast their spells with the help of special substances or implements. Hermetic magi have their wands, magic circles, and talismans; tribal shamans carry drums and fetishes; alchemists brew strange ingredients into magical potions. Few styles of magic do *not* include some typical Foci. See *Fantasy Hero,* pages 131-33, for a discussion of and expanded rules for Focus as it pertains to Heroic spellcasting.

GESTURES

In Fantasy, wizards often wave their hands when they cast spells. Not all historical traditions of magic include Gestures, though. Even when a mystic manipulates some implement, such as a Tibetan lama spinning his prayer wheel, this doesn't necessarily count as Gestures. If an attack that harms or hinders the character in any way aborts the spellcasting, the hand or body movements count as Gestures. If not, the movements are merely part of the magic's special effects. See *Fantasy Hero,* page 133, for a discussion of and expanded rules for Gestures as it pertains to Heroic spellcasting.

INCANTATIONS

Many traditions, both historical and fictional, include "magic words," from Celtic bards singing their spells to kabbalists invoking the names of God. Incantations is an extremely common Limitation for spells in almost every genre. See *Fantasy Hero,* pages 133-34, for a discussion of and expanded rules for Incantations as it pertains to Heroic spellcasting.

INDEPENDENT

This Limitation chiefly applies to magic items, but GMs should review all the possible uses for Independent powers. Mystical settings often include rare substances that carry intrinsic magic — Independent character points a mystic can use when making magic items. Enchanted locations may carry Independent powers of their own. Blessings or curses may be represented as Independent powers that help or harm characters (see *Fantasy Hero,* page 134, for rules regarding Independent, non-Focused spells).

ONLY IN HEROIC IDENTITY

This Limitation may be appropriate for Superheroic-level mystics: in the comics, some super-mages seem to do major spellcasting only when in full regalia. It's far less appropriate for Heroic-level mystics, unless a magical style demands that spellcasters wear a distinctive costume (for instance, shamanism).

LIMITED POWER

Several mystic traditions say ceremonial spells can be cast only at special times and places. Some European grimoires, for instance, say a magician can cast spells only during a special hour of the day and week dedicated to the proper planet. Other grimoires say a demon can be summoned only in a ruined and desecrated church, or in a special chamber prepared through months of rituals. Many traditions include "places of power," from caves carved with petroglyphs to sacred groves, where mystics practice their arcane powers. In Epic Fantasy, sorcerous overlords often need to cast their world-conquering spell or summon their dark master at a special time and place. The heroes defeat the overlord if they can reach him in time and disrupt the ritual.

Window Of Opportunity (varies)

This Limitation represents a spell or other ability that only works during certain pre-defined time periods, or when other similar, infrequently-occurring conditions exist. The most common example in Fantasy literature are spells a wizard can only cast "when the stars are right."

As indicated on the accompanying table, the value of this Limitation depends on two things. The first is how often the circumstance occurs; the minimum frequency for this Limitation is once per Month. The second is how long the window of opportunity remains open. The default is 1 Day; this does not change the value of the Limitation. If the window remains open longer, the value of the Limitation decreases by ¼ per step down the Time Chart. If the window remains open for a shorter period, the value of the Limitation increases by ¼ per step up the Time Chart.

Example: *Kasdrevan knows a potent demon-summoning spell that conjures a demon prince (a 1,500-point creature) and binds him to service for a single task. However, the spell only works during a conjunction of the stars Nevara and Pegaros that occurs but once per century. Furthermore, the conjunction remains in effect for just 20 Minutes. Kasdrevan builds the spell this way:*

Summon one 1,500-point demon prince, Slavishly Loyal (+1) (600 Active Points); OAF Expendable (human sacrifice, Extremely Difficult to obtain; -2), Concentration (0 DCV throughout; -1), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -2), Gestures (both hands throughout; -1), Incantations (throughout; -½), Requires A Magic Roll (no Active Point penalty; -0), Side Effects (demon attacks caster; -1), Window Of Opportunity (once per Century, window remains open for 20 Minutes; -7 ¾), Demon Prince Only Performs One Task (-2). Total cost: 33 points.

WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TABLE

Time Period	Value
1 Month	-2
1 Season (3 months)	-3
1 Year	-4
5 Years	-5
25 Years	-6
1 Century	-7
5 Centuries	-8
2,500 Years	-9
10,000 Years	-10
50,000 Years	-11
250,000 Years	-12
1 Million Years	-13

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Loki's Gift Of Mastery: The evil Nazi mystic Dr. Hexenschwarz can use the Mind Control powers gained from the god Loki under three conditions: any time he's in a temple of Loki (a -1 Limitation); whenever he uses the rune-engraved wand Loki gave him (OAF); or if he talks to the victim for five minutes without interruption (Extra Time).

Mind Control 12d6 (60 Active Points); Variable Limitations (requires -1 worth of Limitations, as described in text; -½). Total cost: 40 points.

Qliphothic Gate: Some DEMON Morbanes can open a portal to a horrific dimension of mind-staggering monsters. The ritual takes a week to perform. That week is marked by earth tremors, rains of toads, and other strange events in the area nearby as Nature itself recoils from the coming breach in reality, and these "clues" may alert the heroes in time to stop the ritual.

Extra-Dimensional Movement (to a single location in a dimension ruled by Edomite creatures), Area Of Effect (One Hex; +½), Continuous (+1), Uncontrolled (until Foci disrupted; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Usable By Other (+¼) (75 Active Points); OAF Expendable Arrangement (seven stone blocks shaped and positioned according to an alien geometry, plus seven human sacrifices, Extremely Difficult to obtain; -2¼), Extra Time (1 Week to activate; -2¼), Gate (-½), Visible (Noisy [earthquakes and Fortean events]; -¼). Total cost: 12 points.

LOCKOUT

This Limitation is appropriate for spells and mystic powers that prevent a character from using other powers he could normally use at the same time. For example, if a character has a Telekinesis spell that represents a manifestation of all of his magical power, when he's using it he might not be able to cast any of his other spells, so the Telekinesis spell would take Lockout.

NO CONSCIOUS CONTROL

In most fiction and folklore, mystics have pretty good control over their magic. Spells might not always work, but the power doesn't act on its own. Sometimes, however, a character may possess some supernatural gift he does not understand or cannot control. Dreams that tell the future are a classic example; so is the Evil Eye (see page 129). In Fantasy epics, a character's goal may be to gain control of such a "Wild Talent," which may be very powerful and the key to defeating some terrible enemy. A mystical power with No Conscious Control may also act under the direction of some other powerful entity, like a god. The character doesn't decide when the power activates; the god does.

REQUIRES A SKILL ROLL

Heroic-level magic often Requires A Magic Roll to see if the spell works correctly. This assumes magic is always somewhat unreliable. For instance, the magic from European grimoires requires such long and complicated rituals that a magician could easily make some tiny mistake. In many tales of heroic Fantasy, however, spells always work unless someone actively sabotages the magic, so GMs should not feel they must insist on this Limitation. Superheroic magic hardly ever fails, so this Limitation is often inappropriate for that genre.

REQUIRES MULTIPLE USERS

This Limitation, usually renamed *Ritual,* is extremely appropriate — and in some campaigns, even mandatory — for ritual spells: magics that require a group of wizards to cast by working together. Depending on the culture of the Mystic World in the campaign, the GM might want to consider increasing or decreasing the value of the Limitation. For example, if wizards tend to be solitary, it's harder to get a group of them together, so the Limitation might be worth more; on the other hand, an established guild with a well-populated guildhall has little difficulty scaring up a half-dozen wizards for a ritual.

RESTRAINABLE

At the -¼ level, this Limitation forms a good alternative to Gestures. Striking the mystic with an attack doesn't automatically abort a spell, but grabbing, hog-tying, or Entangling the character stops him from using his magic.

SIDE EFFECTS

In some Fantasy fiction, mystics suffer pain or pay some other price for casting spells — and they suffer worse if they try to cast a spell and fail. Side Effects represent all sorts of backlashes and hidden costs. For instance, a demonologist who fails to perform his summoning ritual correctly might find himself defenseless before an unbound demon. Even if he succeeds, he might corrupt his soul a little more each time he calls on the demon for service, until he damns himself.

Other sorts of Side Effects include Drains against important Characteristics (or against the character's magic), or automatic penalties to Magic rolls and/or other rolls for a defined period of time. Perhaps a character cannot cast a failed or disrupted spell for a certain time afterward. In cases where characters buy all their spells through a Multipower or Power Pool with enough points they can cast two or more spells at once, the Side Effect could be a reduction in the Framework's point reserve.

Powerful ritual spells often include Side Effects as a way to add dramatic tension: "Keep them away! The slightest interruption could be FATAL!" In particular, a spectacular Side Effect when the heroes disrupt the villain's Master Spell lets you end an adventure with a bang — and we all know the awesome mystic backlash didn't *really* vaporize the evil sorcerer....

VARIABLE LIMITATIONS

This Limitation permits mystics to take hefty Limitations on their spells, but leaves them some leeway about which Limitations they use at any given time. For instance, a mystic might normally rely on an enchanted talisman bearing a mystic sigil, an Obvious Accessible Focus. If he loses the talisman, however, he can still cast spells by drawing the sigil and chanting magic words, though the magic becomes less reliable (he replaces Focus with Activation Roll, Gestures, and Incantations).

In many cases the GM should insist on a small, fixed set of Limitations the character can pick from, to prevent Variable Limitations from becoming too effective. Both *Only During Daytime* and *Only During Nighttime* are fair Limitations, but a character who can use either one suffers no Limitation at all.

Greater Power Through Variable Limitations

One way to use Variable Limitations, familiar from Fantasy, is to represent a mystic whose powers become greater at a special time or place: during the night, in a consecrated shrine, on water, or the like. The special time or place is defined with a *Limited Power* Limitation that substitutes for the spell's standard Limitations (such as Extra Time, Concentration, or Increased Endurance Cost). Thus, the mystic becomes more formidable when the special condition applies — he can cast his spell(s) more easily than normal.

POWER FRAMEWORKS

Should the GM allow mystical characters to place their spells in Power Frameworks? In a Superheroic campaign, yes. Super-mages need to know lots of spells. This almost always requires Power Frameworks, especially since super-mages generally do not place many Limitations on their powers.

For Heroic-level characters... it depends. Heroic-level spells typically come with lots of Limitations. A Multipower or Elemental Control of spells, all with their cost reduced by Limitations, can give a mystic overwhelming power compared to a non-magical character built on the same number of points. If the setting's magic system does not let characters take many Limitations, Power Frameworks may be appropriate — especially if you do not want characters to use many spells at once. Otherwise, the GM may not want to let Heroic-level mystics buy spells through Power Frameworks. (See *Fantasy Hero,* pages 239-40, for further discussion.)

Special Powers In Power Frameworks

The *HERO System* forbids putting Special Powers in Power Frameworks without special permission from the GM. Where mystics are concerned, GMs should be generous, at least with non-combat Special Powers such as Enhanced Senses or Life Support. Mystics hardly ever have any sort of Persistent Powers: for instance, a mystic isn't innately immune to cold; instead, he knows a "spell of warming," which lasts a finite time and a foe can Dispel. Many treatments of magic also assume a mystic can use a limited number of magical effects at a time — which suggests choosing among the slots of a Multipower, or allocating points in a Power Pool. If using a Special Power means foregoing the use of other spells, placing the Special Power in a Framework does not become abusive. A small Power Pool works particularly well to represent a mystic master's ability to work out just the right defense if he knows an enemy's magic.

Some Special Powers still should never go in Frameworks. For example, a character should never buy an Endurance Reserve of mystical energy for spellcasting in a Framework, because he needs it to be available at all times. Duplication represents such a drastic alteration to a character that GMs should allow it in Frameworks only with extreme restrictions.

Elemental Control

"Magic" is just barely acceptable as an EC special effect, at least in campaigns that don't pay much attention to the distinctions between styles of magic. More precise magical special effects such as Necromancy, Taoist Theurgy, Thaumaturgy, or Shamanism emphasize that a mystic isn't just another guy with super-powers... or trying to get a Character Point break without justification.

Elemental Controls work well for minor spells and powers a Superheroic-level mystic can use at the same time. For instance, a super-mage's EC might include slots for a mystical Force Field, a Flight spell, and an informational power such as Clairsentience, Mind Scan, or (by special permission as described above) an Enhanced Sense. Given the restrictions on ECs, this usually means all those spells or powers draw from the same "font" of magical power, such that they're particularly vulnerable to being Drained (or the like) — they're effectively "one" magical power that can be used in several distinct ways.

Elemental Controls may also be appropriate for defining a system of Heroic-level magic in which all spells must share a special effect and a few minor Limitations. In a setting with this sort of magic system, spellcasters can use any or all of their spells at once, but they don't know many spells overall.

Multipowers

A Multipower works very well to represent a mystical character with a large number of spells; it's particularly appropriate for super-mages and like characters.

A character can also use a Multipower to define a spell he can use or cast in several different ways, all with the same special effect but requiring different powers or Advantages. (This is most common in Superheroic campaigns, but not at all inappropriate for some Fantasy settings or other Heroic games.) For instance, a super-mage might invoke *Koriol's Crimson Crystals* and have them completely encase a target (Entangle), restrain the target's limbs but leave most of his body unprotected (Entangle with Takes No Damage From Attacks), spray out to encase everyone in a small area (Entangle with Area Of Effect), or hover in the air as a transparent barrier (Force Wall). Each application is a Multipower slot. Alternatively, all the character's attack spells might become slots in one big Multipower, while defense, movement, information, and other spells go in another Multipower or some other Framework. A Multipower with an extra-large point reserve, so a character can use two or three slots at a time, gives a mystic his trademark flexibility, without letting him use every power at once. The character must think strategically, choosing the combination of spells most useful for any given situation.

MYSTIC POWER EXAMPLES

Chaos Flux: The extradimensional magus Zactorian commands the Chaos Flux through his talismanic rings, but the power is unstable. Sometimes a spell fails and one of his rings breaks, reducing the power he can muster until he re-creates the missing ring.

Variable Power Pool (Magic Pool), 64 base + 32 control cost, Powers Can Be Changed As A Zero Phase Action (+1); OIF (talismanic rings; -½), Activation Roll 14- (-½), Side Effects (lose 32 points of VPP reserve until a new ring can be manufactured; -½). Total cost: 90 points.

Ring Of Nogah: This potent mystic artifact channels the power of Nogah, the dimension corresponding to the planet Venus. A mystic can use the ring to create or enhance any magic related to life or visceral passions. The Ring only regains its Charges, however, when Venus has a conjunction with the Sun (which happens every nine months or so).

Variable Power Pool (Magic Pool), 30 base + 15 control cost; OIF (-½), Only For Life Or Passion Powers (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), 32 Charges with Increased Recovery Time (once per year; -1¾). Total cost: 34 points.

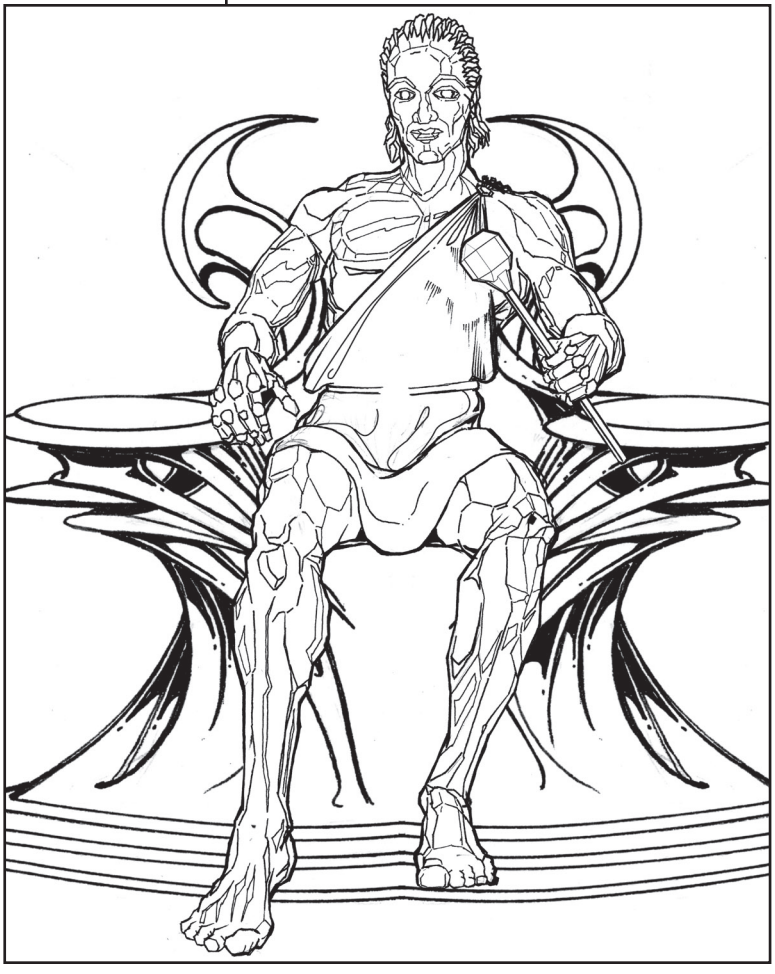
Variable Power Pool

In many ways, the Variable Power Pool expresses the essence of the scholar-mage. In the comics or Fantasy fiction, a top-flight mystic can produce a spell for nearly any purpose, given a few moments to think about it or a chance to consult his grimoires. But GMs should view Power Pools with caution.

First, Power Pools can slow down play as the player decides what powers to build next and calculates their costs. Even if the GM requires the character to use only pre-defined abilities, selecting from a large list of pre-generated spells may take time.

More importantly, GMs may have difficulty challenging a character who can produce *any* power on short notice. Such a character automatically becomes more powerful than any mystic who lacks a comparable Power Pool — so pretty soon everyone wants a Power Pool. The campaign degenerates into a war of wits as the GM tries to find ways to keep Pool-using PCs from knocking over their enemies with contemptuous ease, and the players try to figure out a power that bypasses each new foe's defenses.

Finally, mystics with Power Pools may seem too much the same. "Dr. Weird's powers? Well, he can do just about anything with his Power Pool. What about your guy?" "The Phantasmal Stranger? He can do nearly anything, too."



The solution is not to forbid Power Pools, but to set limits. A small Power Pool so a character can tailor a special added defense, Life Support form, or Enhanced Sense isn't a problem if the character cannot easily change the Pool in combat. But if a character wants to buy his chief attacks through a Power Pool, GMs should follow a few suggestions:

■ Enforce the rules governing Power Pools. Remember that even with a Control Skill Roll, changing powers in a Pool takes a Full Phase (unless the character buys an expensive Advantage).

■ Closely examine the Limitations used to bring down the Control Cost. Make sure the Limitations really restrict the character... and use them! Limitations such as Gestures, Incantations, or Focus help give mystics distinctive styles, and provide GMs a handle for challenging the character. A mage who relies on Incantations, for instance, needs clever strategy to beat a demon who radiates a wide aura of silence. A mystic who can't change powers quickly is also not quite so obnoxious.

■ Insist on a limited magic style or special effect, such as Fire Magic or Planetary Magic. This doesn't reduce the Real Point cost of the powers bought through the Pool, but does make the Pool itself a bit more affordable. For a more elaborate system, the GM might define a set of Knowledge Skills related to various classes of mystical power, and a character can only build effects if he has the requisite Knowledge. For instance, a planetary mage might need KS: Mercurial Magic at 11- to produce spells that involve Flight or Running, 13- for Teleportation, and 15- for Extra-Dimensional Movement. If he wanted to restrict, reduce, or dispel another character's Movement Powers, he would also need KS: Saturnine Magic 11-. Many other possibilities exist.

■ Limit the number of spells a character may produce from the VPP at any one time. If a character must use a fixed set of Limitations — no more, no less — this automatically limits how many major powers the VPP can produce. For instance, if a mystic has a 40-point Magic Pool and every spell requires use of an OAF Wizard's Staff *but no other Limitation,* the character may produce two 40-point spells at once — no more. A GM could also insist on a Limitation such as *No More Than Two Powers At Once* (-½) to prevent the character from producing a bunch of small but very useful spells.

■ Finally, you can limit Power Pools to a list of pre-approved spells. This means a character starts with a list of specific spells he can produce with his Power Pool. The character can add further spells to the list through the course of play by learning them from other mystics, tomes of lore, mystic entities, or through lengthy spell research conducted according to guidelines agreed upon by the player and GM. This is typically only a -¼ Limitation on the Control Cost (at most), but the GM has the final say on the value. This system gives a mystic flexibility while providing enough restriction to prevent anything-goes powergaming.

DISADVANTAGES

Mystical characters can have Disadvantages as distinctive as their powers. Some possible Disadvantages are unusual in and of themselves. Other Disadvantages are unusual because of why the character has them.

SOURCES OF DISADVANTAGES

Mystic characters often get their Disadvantages from specific sources.

MAGICAL ACCIDENT

Learning true magic takes years and years. Would-be mages might lose patience and attempt shortcuts to power. Such shortcuts may have nasty unforeseen consequences: Mystics who try to cast spells beyond their real competence may suffer magical accidents and incur some disability as a result.

Example: *Induced Gluttony: A sorcerer's headlong search for power led him to skimp on his mental discipline. This led to a magical accident that left him with an insatiable craving for rich food. He became immensely fat as a result.*

Psychological Limitation: Gluttonous (Uncommon, Moderate). 5 points.

Physical Limitation: Morbidly Obese (Frequently; Slightly Impairing). 10 points.

DELIBERATE ACT

A mystic might knowingly inflict some deformity or mutilation on himself as a way to gain extra power. You can represent this as Distinctive Features or a Physical Limitation. Only a real fanatic, however, would choose such a course to power.

Example: *Sacrificed Arm: A Satanist is so desperate for power from a demon lord that he hacks off his own right arm as a sacrifice to show his devotion to the "Left-Hand Path." The demon lord is impressed and grants the Satanist the power he seeks.*

Physical Limitation: One Arm (Infrequently, Greatly Impairing). 10 points.

Example: *Hunchback: A rather unpleasant dimension lord marks all its servants by twisting their spines, giving them a hunchback but without any serious disability.*

Distinctive Features: Hunchback (Concealable [with major effort]; Noticed and Recognizeable). 10 points

VOWS AND PROHIBITIONS

Tales of magic and magicians frequently include vows and prohibitions. Sometimes a sorcerer vows to do something: for instance, always to help those in need, or always to wear blue. More often the mystic vows *not* to do something: a vow of celibacy, for instance, or never to show his uncovered face to others. The vow may be as simple as a schedule of rituals the mage must perform. Vows set a person apart from common humanity and therefore seem magical.

Folklore and religions often say some acts are spiritually "polluting" and so make a person unfit to wield magical powers. Similarly, the gods approve certain special standards of behavior and reward them by granting magical powers. The greater the inconvenience for the mystic, the more power he obtains.



You can represent vows and prohibitions in many ways. Some are best treated as Psychological Limitations: breaking the vow has no physical consequence, but the character does not want to do so.

Other vows really affect a character's powers, and if the character breaks the vow their powers *go away* for a time. Such a vow is a Physical Limitation. Such vows probably won't affect the character Frequently, but if the character loses all her important powers then the vow affects the character Greatly or even Totally. Recovering lost powers usually requires a lengthy and difficult ritual of purification — perhaps even a special quest for the character to prove his contrition to the gods.

If a broken vow causes more gradual harm to the character, you could define it as a Dependence or Susceptibility. Breaking such a vow has less drastic consequences, since the character regains his STUN or powers as soon as the condition that violates the vow ends.

Example: *Cannot Attack First: A mystic takes a vow of pacifism as the price for persuading an important spirit to teach him some powerful magic. The mage can fight only in self-defense, once someone else attacks first. If the wizard breaks this vow, he feels some of the pain he meant to cause the other person.*

Susceptibility: to attacking first, 3d6 damage instantly (Common). 20 points.

Example: *Ritual Observance: A mystic must perform a demanding set of rituals every day to keep his power. Perhaps he must spend hours meditating, perform a Mass, invoke the planetary spirit of the day, or make obeisance at the shrine of his ancestors. Each day he goes without such observance, his magic becomes less reliable. The challenge lies not so much in the rituals themselves, as in scheduling the time for them in the middle of an adventure.*

Dependence: *character must perform inconvenient rituals every day, or his magic becomes unreliable, resulting in an 11- Activation Roll for all spells (Uncommon). 10 points.*

Example: *Samaritan's Vow: A mystic vowed to help anyone who is in real danger and asks for help, even his worst enemy. The Ultimate Powers of Good reward the sorcerer's selfless devotion with more power.*

Psychological Limitation: Must Help Anyone in Need (Very Common, Strong). 20 points.

Example: *Vegetarian: Eating meat would contaminate a particular Hindu mage's mystic purity and reduce him to 15 Active Points per spell. Regaining his purity, and the right to use magic, requires a long period of fasting, meditation, and ritual asceticism. Note that the mystic doesn't have to know he consumed meat, or something derived from meat such as a cookie made with lard-based shortening. This Limitation probably won't be triggered in combat, so it's Infrequently restrictive (though an enemy could try shoving a frankfurter in the mystic's mouth).*

Physical Limitation: Vegetarian (see text) (Infrequently, Greatly Limiting). 10 points.

CURSES

Mystics may suffer Disadvantages because someone else imposed them on the character. An enemy wizard might manage to lay a curse on an enemy he does not dare attack directly. A wizard or supernatural being who gives a character powers may impose a curse as a hedge against betrayal: "So you turn on me, do you? Fool! What I created, I can also *destroy!*"

Example: *Bane Of Violet Frost: The wizard who gave the character his powers arranged things so he (the character) would suffer extreme pain in areas with bright purple light and freezing cold. Naturally, the sorcerer has a Change Environment spell to create such an area. (Such an exotic Susceptibility would be worthless if someone besides the character didn't know of it and have the ability to create such a condition.)*

Susceptibility: *to freezing purple light, 3d6 damage/phase of exposure (Uncommon). 25 points.*

DISADVANTAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Many Disadvantages work the same for mystics as for any other character. Some, Disadvantages, however, are particularly inappropriate. Others may take unusual forms. In particular, many Disadvantages need their concept stretched if they are to apply to scholar-mystic characters.

ACCIDENTAL CHANGE

This Disadvantage seldom applies for true mages, but makes sense for spirit hybrids, mythological gods posing as normal humans, were-creatures, and other mystical characters who actually possess a distinct "alternate identity" with powers they lack in their normal, human form. What would a werewolf be without an Accidental Change when exposed to the full moon, after all?

DEPENDENCE

A scholar-mystic can become a drug addict just like anyone else. Mystics can also suffer a Dependence because of a curse, a vow or prohibition, or a magical accident.

Example: *Golden Curse: A greedy wizard tries to steal a temple's treasure. The offended god responds by cursing the wizard: "You like gold so much; let gold be your life!" The wizard will die if he remains more than 5 feet away from at least 10 pounds of gold. Henceforth, the wizard wears cloth-of-gold robes and a lot of jewelry.*

Dependence: must stay near 10+ pounds of gold or suffer 1d6 damage every 5 Minutes. (Difficult to Obtain). 20 points.

DEPENDENT NPC

Wizards, mythological gods, and other magical characters can have the usual DNPC family members, love interests, and the like. Three special DNPCs have become especially well-known thanks to legends, Fantasy novels, and comic book super-mages.

The Enfeebled Teacher

Mystics often have a mentor of some sort. Such a mentor might seem like an odd candidate for DNPC-hood: after all, the mentor must know more magic than the pupil, right? Not necessarily, but even if he does, he might be so old and frail that he needs more help than he could give.

An aged mentor is slightly less powerful than the PCs and has useful noncombat skills, for a cost of -5 points plus whatever the mentor's frequency of appearance might give. The maximum Disadvantage value for an Enfeebled Teacher is thus 10 points. Gamemasters should play up the teacher's physical frailty; otherwise, the teacher would have to be a Contact.

The Familiar

As described under *Followers* (page 40), a familiar is a helpful spirit, usually in the form of an animal, that serves a mystic. Some just perform mundane tasks, while others grant special wisdom or increase their master's arcane power. But a few are more like pets than anything else, and as such might be DNPCs.

The Impassive Servant

At least one famous comic book mage has an impassive Oriental servant who tends his Base. Impassive Servants are highly competent DNPCs, possibly with useful noncombat skills. Perhaps their greatest ability, though, is their knack for keeping a cool head while all Hell breaks loose around them.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

For scholar-mystics, Distinctive Features are usually concealable and not too extreme. The Distinctive Feature is often conditional, in that only a small group of people can detect the feature, or only a small group can appreciate what it means.

Mystic Aura

Supernatural creatures and powerful mystics might have an aura other mystics can perceive. Such an aura reveals the character's true nature despite any mundane disguise. A shapeshifted demon's ineradicable aura of evil is a good example. Some styles of magic (such as Necromancy) mark their practitioners with a mystic aura, too. A mystic aura's value as a Disadvantage depends on how extreme a reaction it provokes from other mystics. A demon's aura probably inspires immediate fear or hatred from any mystic who isn't evil; a pyromancer's fiery aura is simply a (in)convenient way for other wizards to identify him, unless pyromancers are exceptionally unpopular.

Not every mystic needs this Distinctive Feature. In some settings, it might be impossible to detect a sorcerer. A character might also practice a style of magic that doesn't leave any sort of spiritual mark. In either case, identifying someone as a mystic might require careful detective work, or catching them in the act of casting a spell. Gamemasters should evaluate "Mystic Aura" as a Disadvantage based on the needs of their campaign.

Example: *Shaman's Aura: Native American detective Sarah Redhawk's totem animal is a falcon. Anyone with visual mystic senses sees her as both a human and a falcon. So does anyone on the Astral Plane. To a mystically savvy person, this is a clear sign she's a shaman.*

Distinctive Features: *Totem Aura (Not Concealable; Causes Major Reaction; Detectable Only With Unusual Senses). 10 points.*

Membership Token

This Distinctive Feature consists of a symbol that marks the character's allegiances in the Mystic World. The token may be a tattoo, a ring, an amulet worn as a tie tack, or what-have-you. Anyone can see it, but only people in the mystical subculture could appreciate its significance. Cults and occult societies use membership tokens to recognize each other when members meet in public life. On the other hand, the enemies of members may notice membership tokens as well.

Priests and Servants of Higher Powers often wear membership tokens as a sign of devotion, just as many Christians wear a cross. A token might even play a role in spellcasting, so the character won't want to go without it.

Example: *The Dark Sign: In the Terran Empire, members of the Church of the Infinite Dark tattoo one forearm with the cult's sign, a black starburst in a black lemniscate. Only a few people suspect the cult's true horror, so to most people it's just a distinctive mark.*

Distinctive Features: *Cult Tattoo (Easily Concealed; Noticed And Recognizeable). 5 points.*

ENRAGED

This Disadvantage is completely inappropriate for most mystics, who gained their power through long and disciplined study. Enraged works well, however, for sorcerous evil overlords, dimensional conquerors, and some fanatical cultists, lunatics, and demon pacters. Gods, spirit hybrids, and other supernatural creatures may also suffer from an Enraged. For instance, a vampire might become Enraged in the presence of blood when his appetite overpowers his reason, or a proud battle demi-god might become Enraged (or Berserk) in battle or when taunted.



HUNTED

Depending on the setting, mystical characters may endure some distinctive sorts of Hunters. For instance, in a Medieval or Renaissance Fantasy setting, the Holy Inquisition and assorted freelance witch-hunters might Hunt all mystics. This is less of a problem in modern settings, but the occasional fanatic may still view all magicians as Satanists who need burning (or at least shunning). Hunters are almost *de rigeur* for vampires, werewolves, and some other supernatural creatures.

Mystical characters may also be Hunted because of factional differences in the Mystic World. In a High Fantasy setting, good and evil factions of mages probably Hunt each other. In modern or futuristic settings, rival mystical conspiracies may fight a secret war for control of the world, Hunting each other and anyone who stumbles into their plans.

Priests, pacters, and other servants of higher powers are Watched by their spiritual patrons. The consequences for angering the patron might range from a quest of penitence to eternal damnation.

Example: *The Burning Times: Most medieval witch hunts were local efforts led by individual bishops or the secular authorities. As late as the eighteenth century, though, an accused sorcerer could land in the dungeons of the Holy Inquisition, since magic was officially heretical. The Inquisition was more widespread; on the other hand, it didn't appreciate wild or malicious accusations, and you had to be pretty flagrant to attract its ire. Local witch hunts swept up anyone who was unpopular, eccentric, or had property a bishop or burgomaster wanted, and accusation meant almost certain death.*

Hunted: *local witch-hunters 8- (As Pow, NCI, Limited Geographical Area, Kill). 10 points.*

Hunted: *Holy Inquisition 11- (As Pow, NCI, Watching). 10 points.*

Example: *Circle Of The Scarlet Moon: The evil mystics of the Circle of the Scarlet Moon want absolute power as a secret aristocracy of mages. The Circle uses its vast financial and political power, as well as magic, to destroy anyone who interferes with its schemes... or at least it tries.*

Hunted: Circle of the Scarlet Moon 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Kill). 20 points.

PHYSICAL LIMITATION

Many vows and prohibitions can be represented as Physical Limitations, but nothing forbids a sorcerer from having ordinary Physical Limitations. Such handicaps could motivate the character to become a sorcerer, in hopes of finding some way to remove the limiting condition.

Most spirits have formidable Physical Limitations, such as being dispelled when they're Stunned, Knocked Out, or at 0 BODY. Other mystical creatures may have their own restrictions, such as demons being restrained by pentacles. Spirits who are PCs should be exceptions to this rule, for rather obvious reasons.

Example: *Can't Cross Pentacles: Demons cannot cross a properly-drawn pentagram or magic circle, and cannot project any direct attack beyond its boundaries. A clever demon may find a way to break the pentacle by mundane means, however....*

Physical Limitation: Restricted By Pentacles (Infrequently, Fully Impairing). 15 points.

REPUTATION

A mystic's possible negative Reputation as a mystic is limited by communications and whether the setting includes open use of magic. In a typical High Fantasy setting, sorcerers make no secret of their profession, but communications are so slow that only the greatest mystics develop a widespread negative Reputation. In a modern-day Urban Fantasy setting, mystics generally hide their powers from the public, or most people simply don't believe in their magic. In comic books, super-mystics generally conceal their power from the public, but not from other superheroes and villains. A mystic's Reputation, therefore, usually carries some restriction. Most often, a mystic has a Reputation only within the subculture of other mystics.

RIVALRY

If real self-styled occultists are any guide, mystics are intensely prone to personal and factional rivalries. Any character who belongs to a mystic society might have a rival within the group... and schisms, one-upsmanship, and doctrinal differences may produce rivalries between entire groups.

Example: *Schismatic Societies: The struggle between Aleister Crowley and S. L. Mathers for leadership of the Golden Dawn led to Crowley forming his own mystic society, the Argenteum Astrum. If a Victorian Hero character joins the Argenteum Astrum, Golden Dawn members assume a default attitude of rivalry. Gaining any sort of cooperation from a Golden Dawn member requires hiding the character's true allegiance, or some serious flattery, bribery, or threats. Members of the two societies try to undercut or outdo each other's projects.*

Rivalry: Professional (with Golden Dawn members, over who are the real mystic masters; Rival is aware of Rivalry). 5 points.

SOCIAL LIMITATION

Of all the forms of Social Limitation, Secret Identity is most common for mystics in modern settings. Many mystics try to hide their powers from the common herd of humanity. (A mystic may be well-known to the Mystic World, or even extradimensionally, but this is a *Reputation* Perk or Disadvantage.) Only in a modern or post-modern setting could any character become known widely enough to justify a Public Identity, and that rarely happens in comic books and other modern Fantasy settings.

Other Social Limitations probably refer to special features of the setting. Spellcasting could be a Harmful Secret in settings where people view magic with suspicion. A court wizard, junior Mages' Guild member, or apprentice could be Subject To Orders.

One Social Limitation, *Charlatan,* applies specifically to characters who falsely claim to possess mystical powers. During the Renaissance, for instance, many fake alchemists found patronage with Europe's kings and nobles — and some of them hanged when their employers figured out the scams. Not all charlatans realize they're frauds, though. Some are sincerely deluded. Just because a setting includes real magic is no reason not to include crackpots and frauds.

Supernatural creatures such as werewolves, vampires, and demons may have Social Limitation (Harmful Secret) based on the kind of creature they are. People might not know anything about a particular vampire, but they know about crosses, garlic, sunlight, mirrors, and stakes through the heart... or at least they *believe* these things.

Example: *Charlatan: Zantipher Magnificus, Sorcerer Extraordinaire, travels the countryside peddling charms and putting on shows of his awesome powers of transformation and translocation. He's actually a con man who knows just enough sorcerous jargon to fool simple folk with his sleights and phony talismans... and to get himself in trouble when the peasants expect him to deal with a real supernatural menace. He'd also better not run into any real mages.*

Social Limitation: Charlatan (Occasionally, Major [character's pretense of magic can land him in a variety of trouble]). 10 points.

Example: *Faerie Lore: Most modern people don't know the old folk wisdom about the fairy-folk and their weaknesses, but scholars have collected the lore. If anyone figures out that a character in an Urban Fantasy setting is actually one of the Fair Folk, they might learn all his weaknesses through a visit to the library.*

Social Limitation: Harmful Secret (character is a fairy, and thus susceptible to ways of harming fairy-folk and counter their powers) (Occasionally, Major). 10 points.

SUSCEPTIBILITY

Supernatural creatures often suffer Susceptibilities. For instance, holy symbols burn demons and vampires; fairy-folk cannot abide cold iron; fire elementals are extinguished by water. Scholar-mystics, however, are not likely to suffer Susceptibilities except as the result of curses, prohibitions, or magical accidents. Priests, pacters, and servants of higher powers may have a special Susceptibility: they take damage whenever their supernatural patron wants. This helps ensure the character's loyalty.

Example: *Pacter's Pain: The evil sorcerer Giacomo Sylvestri is the chief disciple of the Dragon, Earth's supreme power of evil. Every now and then, the Dragon inflicts episodes of wracking pain on Giacomo, as punishment for*

failure or just to remind the powerful sorcerer that he's still a slave. Giacomo takes days to recover from the damage to his body.

Susceptibility: to whenever the Dragon wants, 3d6 STUN and BODY damage instantly (Uncommon). 30 points.

VULNERABILITY

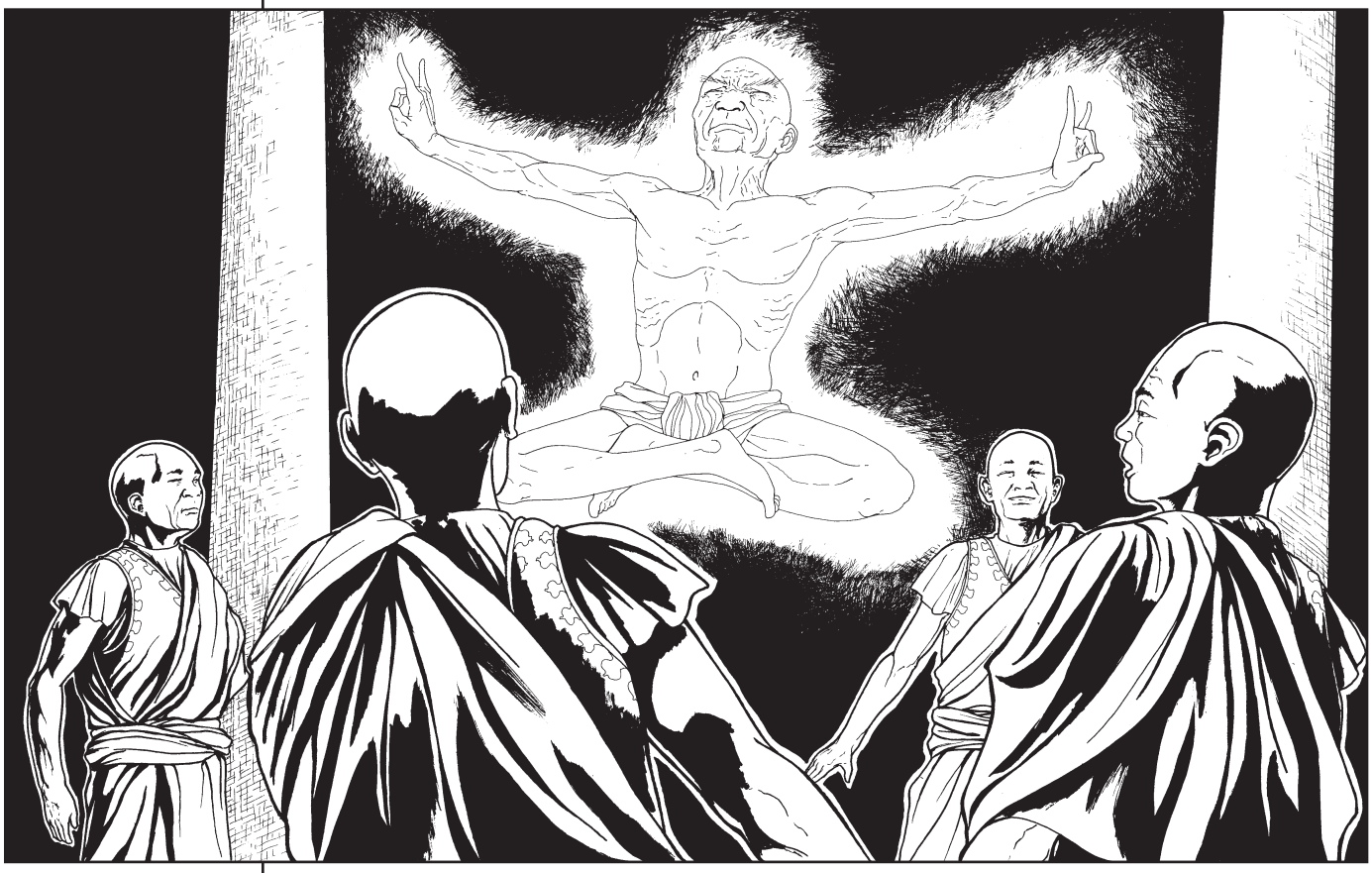
This Disadvantage occurs more frequently for supernatural creatures than for mortal mystics. In the latter case, the Vulnerability probably has a supernatural cause. For one unusual option, a sorcerer who practices one sort of magic might be Vulnerable to an opposed style of magic, or to spells from certain other mystics.

Example: *Vulnerable To Fire Attacks: The Thalassenes of Trell merge their souls with water elementals. They gain greater magic powers, but also suffer extra damage from fire.*

Vulnerability: 1½ x STUN from Heat/Fire (Very Common). 15 points.

Example: *To Higher-Ranking Mystics: The priests of Urizen, High Lord of Order, operate in a hierarchy of absolute mastery and submission. Every priest takes extra effect from the magic of any priest with a higher rank. Many evil cults use a similar curse to keep underlings in line.*

Vulnerability: 2 x Effect from Magic of Higher-Ranked Priest of Urizen (Common). 20 points.



chapter two:



MYSTIC DIMENSIONS

REALMS BEYOND

MYSTIC DIMENSIONS



Before my murmured exorcism
The world, a wispy wraith, shall flee:
A stranger earth, a weirder sea
Peopled with shapes of Faery,
Shall swell upon the waste abysm.

—Clark Ashton Smith,
"Song of the Necromancer"

Strange, supernatural realms form an important part of mysticism. Shamans and mythic heroes travel to the realms of the gods and the dead; ceremonial magicians summon spirits from beyond; comic book sorcerers fight invading tyrants from bizarre dimensions. Even the familiar "dreamscape" story, in which a mystic hero quests through the hallucinatory landscape of another person's mind and memories, is a visit to another dimension.

This chapter discusses the various sorts of mystical dimensions and how to use them in a campaign. It includes suggestions on designing dimensions of your own, in case myth or legend don't provide the dimensions you want. The chapter concludes with a sketch of an example "Multiverse" — a suite of dimensions for a mystical campaign.

Before you start work, don't forget to consider a dimension's importance to your campaign. For example, how often will characters visit a dimension, or interact with its inhabitants? If it's just once or twice, you probably don't need to know a lot of details about the place. Designing worlds can be a lot of work, so don't do more than you need to.

DIMENSIONAL PURPOSE

Before you design a dimension's environment and write up its denizens, give some thought to the dimension's purpose. A dimension can serve a variety of functions in a setting — and in adventures.

BACKGROUND

A dimension might exist solely as part of a campaign's background information. Gods and spirits come from other planes, or wizards tap power from them, but the PCs never actually visit. Perhaps mortals cannot enter the dimension. Perhaps the GM simply doesn't want to run transdimensional adventures.

In this case, the GM doesn't need to define many details about the dimension. A paragraph or two about the main features of the plane may suffice. What gods and spirits live there (if any)? How does it connect to the campaign world? Have any details of the environment become well known? For instance, you can sum up the popular image of Christian Hell in a few phrases: caves of fire and brimstone; people tormented by devils with red skin, horns, cloven hooves and a barbed tail; the Devil himself has a palace, or at least a throne room.

OCCASIONAL VISITS

Characters might take brief excursions to a dimension. In this case, the GM merely has to decide what peril or obstacle, if any, the heroes face; what reward they gain for overcoming the peril; any specific characters the heroes meet; and a few details of the local scenery. The "obstacle" can be as simple as being lost, and the "reward" no more than figuring out how to get home. The GM needs to develop only a few settings in detail: even if the dimension in question is as big as the real Universe (and that is very large indeed), the part the characters see might be just a few hundred feet wide. For example, imagine a superhero team on a raid into Hell, to rescue someone kidnapped by devils and taken to the iron city of Dis, as described in Dante's *Inferno.* The GM brushes up on Dante's description of Dis, decides what sort of devils the PCs must fight, and writes up the other details needed for the adventure. In case of surprises, though, he also reads Dante's description of the circles of Hell near Dis, and jots down a few scenes the heroes might see — and ways to guide straying characters back to the plot.

MAJOR SETTING

Another plane might become a frequent setting for adventures and an important part of the campaign. The GM needs to design this dimension as carefully as the rest of the setting. In time, he must describe several locations in detail and write up a selection of denizens.

Continuing the example above, mystical heroes might find many reasons to invade Hell, and clash with demons and devils many times. In this case, the GM needs to define many features of Hell. If he sticks with Dante, he needs to flesh out descriptions of several areas the heroes might visit, and he may even need a map or two of the dimension as a whole (if for no other reason than to make notes on when he refers to a location, or creates one on the fly in mid-game). Do the devils have some sort of government, to set their tasks and organize

a response to the heroes' intrusions? Do they suffer their own rivalries, which PCs might exploit? How do the fundamental rules of Hell differ from Earth? For instance, what happens to the soul of a mortal who dies in Hell? Do the devils wield powers in Hell they lack on Earth? Can damned souls be rescued from Hell? All in all, the nature of Hell becomes far more detailed than "fire and brimstone, screaming people, devils."

DIMENSIONAL FUNCTION

When you design dimensions, you should also think about their purpose in the setting. How do other planes affect the human world? Do their inhabitants visit Earth? Why would characters ever visit these other worlds? Or why would you, the GM, want the characters to visit?

COOL SETTINGS

Some dimensions make colorful settings for adventures. Visits to other planes give heroes a chance to encounter environments, situations, and people that could never exist in the campaign's principle setting. While an Earthlike world has its uses as a setting for Fantasy, it's also fun to imagine someplace spectacularly different. A vivid description of an extradimensional scene raises the players' sense of wonder.

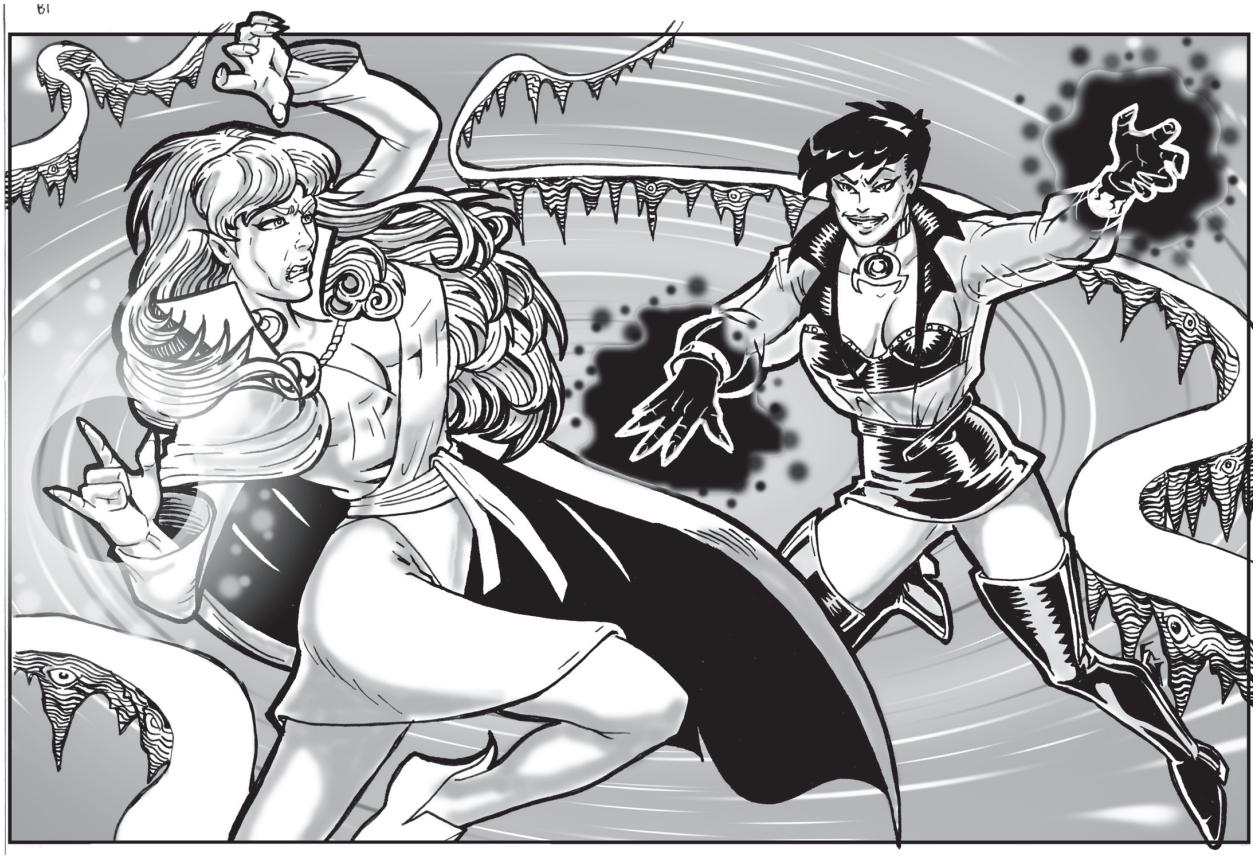
Alien dimensions, like alien worlds, also give the GM a chance to play with bizarre cultures. An alien culture may be no more than another bit of local color ("Hey Dr. Weird, why does everyone wear fruit on their head like Carmen Miranda?") or it may form the focus of the adventure. The dimension's inhabitants might turn hostile when the characters break some odd cultural taboo ("Whaddaya mean, I have to *marry* her because I tried on her fruit hat?"), or try to be helpful but in counterproductive ways. Gamemasters can even try a little social satire by exaggerating some modern trend or fad of their own society, in the style of *Gulliver's Travels.*

Other dimensions can present interesting strategic challenges to the PCs. In an alien cosmos, the different environment can change the rules of combat. To give a few simple examples, the GM can invent dimensions where all combat uses EGO and ECV instead of DEX and CV; where some classes of powers don't work (such as flame powers in a water-filled dimension); where space is so bent and twisted that ranged attacks are as likely to hit the attacker as an enemy; or where space is filled with some continuous harmful effect, such as a continuous Darkness versus one Sense Group, Energy Blast, Drain, or Transform. The special environment makes the dimension a place of danger (see below) as well as a place of strangeness and wonder.

DANGER

A dimension can pose a threat to the characters. The danger may come from the dimension's inhabitants, the environment, the nature of the dimension itself, or all of the above. For instance, a netherworld of the dead might slowly leech away a visitor's life and also provide his enemies with legions of undead servitors.

Heroes can enter a dangerous dimension for several reasons. They might not know it's dangerous. They might need something or someone from



a hazardous plane. Some mystical accident might hurl them into the dimension. An enemy might trick or force the heroes into another world — even if the dimension itself isn't dangerous, he might think the characters have no way to leave.

When you design a dangerous dimension, concentrate on the threats the heroes face, and how they can overcome those dangers and escape. If the characters have Extra-Dimensional Movement powers (as many super-mages do), you must invent some reason why the heroes can't just pop back to Earth.

A dangerous dimension can add excitement and a special strategic challenge to a fight. Reasons why the heroes and villains fight in the dimension range from sheer accident ("I *told* you not to use that spell in the temple") to a formal challenge ("So, pathetic humans, meet me for combat in the Plane of Perilous Pyramids — if you dare!") Perhaps the villain knows how the dimension affects combat and hopes this ensures the heroes' defeat; perhaps the villain is just as surprised as the heroes!

A dimension may also serve as the source of a threat. See *Dimensional Invasions,* page 92, for a discussion of this option.

OPPORTUNITY FOR A GOOD DEED

For a variation on dimension-as-a-threat, the danger could be directed at the inhabitants of the dimension, and the natives want the PCs' help to deal with it. Perhaps the locals can reward the heroes with something they need (making the dimension a resource, too); maybe they can only offer their thanks and a Favor in return. The local problem may or may not bear any relation to the ongoing conflicts of the campaign. In either case, the most important aspect of the dimension is the problem the PCs must solve.



EMBODY A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A set of dimensions can physically represent a system of mystical concepts. The environment and inhabitants of each dimension illustrate the dimension's guiding concept. If the overall setting includes gods, they certainly dwell in conceptual dimensions.

Moral or philosophical concepts make a good basis for a set of dimensions. In the Abrahamic tradition, for instance, the opposing moral forces of Good and Evil each have their own dimension: Heaven, the realm of God, and Hell, the realm of Satan. A setting based on Taoist ideas might feature dimensions of Yin and Yang, the cosmic principles of stasis and energy.

The Hero Universe employs two sets of morally-aligned dimensions. The four cosmic principles of Order, Chaos, Art, and Nature each have their own remote and abstract dimension. Locally, Earth emanates four spirit-realms that represent these concepts projected into the more concrete form of human activities and beliefs: the syncretic Heaven of Elysium for Order and the "ethical" religions; the Netherworld, a fusion of every Hell ever imagined, for Chaos; Faerie, the realm of wild magic and pagan mythology, for Nature; and Babylon, the City of Man, for the secular realm and Artifice. (See *The Mystic World* for a complete exposition of these dimensions.)

A set of dimensions can also embody the forces mystics call upon, or the system of concepts that underlies their magic. For instance, if you base a setting's magic on the classic four elements of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth, you could design a realm around each element, with suitable gods, elemental spirits, and an environment based entirely on that element. A world of Taoist magic might have spirit-realms of Earth, Fire, Metal, Water, and Wood instead. The seven astrological planets, the ten sephiroth of kabbalism, the runes of Northern Europe, the cards of the tarot, or the eight trigrams of the I Ching are other mystical systems around which you could build sets of dimensions... and of course you can always create your own occult philosophical framework and use that as the basis for your Multiverse.

HABITAT

Other dimensions provide a home for creatures of magic and Fantasy, from goblins to gods. This becomes especially important for campaigns set on Earth, such as most superhero, Urban Fantasy, and historical Fantasy games. Gods, demons, dragons, and other magical creatures conspicuously do not exist on Earth: as long as the campaign setting preserves the illusion that it could be the "real" world, the monsters and magical races need to live somewhere else. The "other dimension" can obviously be another world, or it might be a hidden aspect of Earth that most people never see and cannot reach. For example, Clive Barker's novel *WeaveWorld* features a Fantasy-realm hidden inside a carpet.

Fantasy realms with no connection to Earth still may need other dimensions. Spirit-realms and Otherworlds appear in mythology around the world. Netherworlds of the dead are common; so are mystic realms of the gods. Any place beyond a culture's experience tends to become an Otherworld as well: traveler's tales like the *Odyssey,* Mandeville's *Travels,* the stories of Sinbad the Sailor, and the voyages of St. Brendan feature visits to supernatural realms of pure Fantasy, from the Earthly Paradise to the borders of Hell. Other places that normal people can't reach, like the Hollow Earth or the interior of a fairy mound, might be treated as other dimensions as well.

Magic can also be hidden in the past or future. For instance, a campaign might involve creatures and magic from ancient Atlantis intruding on the modern world. The Atlantean Age (a time and place of High Fantasy) becomes the other dimension from whence the threat comes. In the course of the campaign, the heroes might even travel back in time to visit Atlantis themselves.

RESOURCE

Some dimensions give characters something of value. Substances from a supernatural plane may have uses in magic. For instance, a wizard who wants to craft a powerful magic wand might visit a faerie realm in search of a unicorn's horn or dragon bones, while a demonologist could forge a deadly magic sword in the fires of Hell. Alternatively, heroes might need a legendary magic item owned by an inhabitant of a mystic realm. Imagine superheroes who need Thor's magic belt of strength to subdue an unstoppable villain, for example.

Dimensions may offer that most important of resources — information — in the form of knowledgeable spirits or records long lost to the mortal world. European grimoires describe several demons who specialize in arcane lore. In H. P. Lovecraft's *The Dream-Quest Of Unknown Kadath,* dreamer Randolph Carter consults scrolls written by sages "too wise to be born in the waking world." Of course, some gods traditionally know the future or all the lore hidden from mortals: if you can't get an answer from Apollo's oracle at Delphi, go to Olympus and beg an answer from the god in person.

Gods and other powerful entities may become the patrons of characters. A patron deity may offer advice and the occasional helpful miracle. On the other hand, patron deities demand a lot of service in return. Of course, Servants of Higher Powers accept this sort of arrangement already.

Characters may even find ways to exploit the natural (or supernatural) features of a dimension. Sometimes, mystics already know the utility of a dimension. In occult tradition, for instance, visitors to the Astral Plane can travel in spirit-form around the world, or to various other mystic realms.

In these cases, the GM must decide what resource a dimension offers to characters, and what obstacles they must face to get it. Depending on the campaign, the resource might turn the dimension into an important part of the milieu, or it might be the setting for a one-shot treasure hunt. If the GM develops a dimension in much detail, though, odds are good that players will exploit the dimension in ways the GM never planned.

DESIGNING DIMENSIONS



But infinitely beautiful the
wondrous work arose
In sorrow and care, a Golden
World whose porches round
the heavens
And pillar'd halls & rooms
receiv'd the eternal wandering
stars.

William Blake, The Four Zoas

Mythology, Fantasy, and comic books offer many sorts of mystic otherworlds. Some dimensions resemble Earth; others look completely alien. Once you decide what kinds of dimensions you want in your campaign, invent their environments and the creatures that dwell in them. Once again, though, don't worry about details that won't actually appear in adventures. For most dimensions, you can get by with a few paragraphs about the nature of the dimension, what it looks like, and who lives there, with a few specific locations and creatures described in detail.

TYPES OF DIMENSIONS

Here are some types of dimensions that frequently appear in mythology, Fantasy stories, and comic books. Select the types that suit your campaign. For instance, a *Fantasy Hero* campaign based on Greek myth would only need a divine realm (Olympus) and a realm of the dead, with "heaven" and "hell" subdivisions (the Elysian Fields and Tartarus). A mystical *Champions* campaign, on the other hand, might include every sort of dimension.

Abstract Dimensions

Some dimensions are built around concepts such as numbers, fear, colors, or time. Such dimensions exist as representations of the concept. For instance, you could build a dimension of time around some familiar metaphor or image, such as a river, a clock, or a calendar. A visitor to a "Plane of Time" might see a river with images of historical events flickering across its surface — upstream for the past, downstream for the future. Another possibility is a realm consisting entirely of timepieces, such as clocks, hourglasses and sundials. Cosmic entities often dwell in abstract dimensions.

An abstract dimension provides more than just surreal images. The inhabitants of such dimensions — talking numbers on a mathematical dimension, incarnate phobias and anxieties on a plane of fear, and so on — know a great deal about their particular concept. For instance, the dwellers on a Plane of Time can see the past and future, and the creatures on a Plane of Fear know what scares everyone, including the characters' arch-enemy. Encounters with these creatures emphasizes role-playing more than combat — the environment is so abstract there just isn't much for characters to affect. How do you get in a fight with "red," "5," or "July 13, 1964"?

Afterlife Realms

Just about every culture has some notion of an afterlife. The earliest distinct lands of the dead take the form of dismal subterranean realms such as the Egyptian Duat or Greek Hades, where the spirits of the dead mope around in a perpetual grey funk. When the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh summoned the ghost of his dead friend Enkidu, the slain hero said he'd rather be the poorest man among the living than king of the entire Underworld. Somewhat later, various cultures invented separate realms of the dead where the righteous dwelled in perpetual joy, and the wicked received perpetual torment. The Greeks, for instance, supplemented the dreary Underworld of the common dead with the bright and pleasant Elysian Fields for heroes and the virtuous, and the dungeon-realm of Tartarus for extraordinary sinners and enemies of the gods.

HEAVENS

Afterlife realms that reward the virtuous can generically be called Heavens. In addition to the shining cloud-land of pop Christianity, notable Heavens include Muslim Jannat, the ultimate pleasure-garden; the Field of Reeds from Egyptian myth, an idealized version of life along the Nile; the Norse Valhalla, where heroes fight and feast while they wait for Ragnarok; and the bejeweled Buddha-Land paradises from Buddhism.

Heavens emphasize the parts of life that people enjoy. Valhalla is simply a Norse hall with a party that never ends, only no one gets hurt (permanently) or suffers a hangover. The people of the arid Middle East saw Heaven as a well-watered garden. Jews and Christians living in the urbanized Roman Empire added an idealized city of the blessed — a heavenly Jerusalem. Heavens also feature extravagant luxury: everything is made of gold and jewels, including the flowers and trees; perfume and music

fill the air; fountains flow with milk, honey, or wine. No one has to do chores or go to the bathroom.

HELLS

Hells are afterlife dimensions where the wicked receive their punishment. While some theologians may speak of Hell metaphysically, as separation from deity or simple annihilation, many cultures imagine Hells of very concrete torture: the damned burn, freeze, boil; are crushed, pierced, sliced, and torn; endure stench from excrement, burning sulphur, or blood; receive their torment from demonic spirits or ferocious beasts. The two most creative and extensive visions of Hell are the *Inferno* of Dante Alighieri and the manifold Hells from Chinese popular religion.

The demons who populate a Hell often have perverse motives. On the one hand, they exist to punish sin. On the other hand, many traditions say they encourage those sins, or readily torment the virtuous if they can escape into the world of mortals. Hell dimensions not only receive evil, the infernal powers try to spread it. Hell-gods like the Sumerian Ereshkigal, Greek Hades, or Abrahamic Satan make excellent arch-villains for a mystical setting.

Alternate Worlds

One important class of dimensions consists of different versions of the Earth. It's the same world... but some crucial factor is changed.

ALTERNATE HISTORIES

In the most common sort of alternate world, history took another path. Alternate histories are based on "What If" questions: What if the South won the Civil War? What if Christianity never caught on? The modern world could be very different, in both gross and subtle ways.

Alternate histories based on big changes usually come from Science Fiction. Some SF stories posit alternate histories resulting from meddling time travelers. One interpretation of quantum mechanics suggests that all possible histories could exist, and another set of SF stories explores the possibility of contact and travel between these worlds of What If.

Gamemasters may hesitate to include alternate histories in a Multiverse with mystical dimensions, gods, and cosmic entities. When Earth's history splits, do other dimensions split as well? For instance, do damned souls from alternate Earths go to separate, alternate Hells? In a mystical Multiverse, alternate histories provoke many such questions. Fortunately, only comic book worlds give characters the option of visiting both alternate histories and mystical dimensions, and comic book writers generally ignore the resulting complications.

Some stories send characters to more personal alternate histories. The most famous example is the movie *It's A Wonderful Life,* in which a man sees what his town would be like if he'd never lived. Alternate histories also occur because someone makes a wish to be President, or to make some other change to his personal circumstances. Such personal alternate worlds have long been a staple of Fantasy. However, these "dimensions" exist only in relation to one character: other people don't usually travel back and forth between the world where Joe Schlumpf is a janitor and the world where he made a wish to be a billionaire.

ALTERNATE GENRES

A world can be more drastically altered by showing it in terms of another genre. Typical examples include contemporary Earth turned into a Fantasy world, or a world where everyone is a humanoid, talking animal. It's hard to imagine how any change to history could result in such a world. Alternate-genre worlds sometimes exist to make a satiric point, but more often they are pure whimsy.

A few Science Fiction writers combine alternate genres with alternate history. Stories like Poul Anderson's *Operation Chaos* or Robert Heinlein's *Magic, Incorporated* portray alternate worlds where magic supplements and partly replaces technology. These stories presume magic is an alternate "technology" the real world neglected. Though these stories tend to be whimsical in intent, they develop their magic with the rigorous internal logic of Science Fiction.

Most Fantasy worlds are Earth translated more completely into another genre. The Fantasy world has different continents, as well as sorcerers, dragons, elves, and whatnot — but humans are still human. They ride horses through forests of Earthly trees, and raise Earthly crops and animals on their farms. But some write Humanity out of the picture altogether, such as an alternate Earth where the dinosaurs evolved to sentience and humanoid form, and primates never had the chance to leave the forests.

OTHER PHYSICAL UNIVERSES

Another dimension might be a universe as large as Earth's, but with somewhat different natural laws. For instance, matter in Earth's universe collects in spheres. In another universe, gravity might pull matter into lines, doughnuts, or other shapes. This is a more science-fictional sort of dimension, but such a universe could include magic, too — just not as the defining feature of reality.

Astral Planes

The Astral Plane is a new idea with ancient roots. Philosophers and mystics in Greece and India thought souls might dwell among the stars, and be made of the same celestial substance — so they spoke of spirits with astral bodies, dwelling in astral worlds. Occultists like Eliphas Levi and Madame Blavatsky updated the idea and imagined a spiritual extension of the universe called the Astral Plane.

Philosophy aside, mystics generally describe the Astral Plane as an aspect of reality that most people can't see or touch, but in which spiritual phenomena take place. Ghosts and spirits dwell on the Astral Plane; souls of the living may travel the Astral Plane as well, clothed in a body of spirit

instead of flesh. Astral creatures can travel around the world instantly. The astral substance responds to and records human thoughts: thus, a mystic attuned to the Astral Plane can obtain visions of the past, and a magician can shape the astral substance by force of will, creating "thought-forms" to help or harm the spirits of other people.

Mystics generally agree the basic Astral Plane coexists with the Earth. A dream about a distant place may actually be a confused memory of an astral visit to that location. Some occultists say all dreams play themselves out on the Astral Plane, or at least *an* Astral Plane — some mystics believe several tenuous dimensions exist, of greater or lesser corporeality, with God dwelling in the most abstract and immaterial plane. Other mystics say the Astral Plane has layers representing various mystical concepts and stages of enlightenment.

For practical magicians and mystics, the Astral Plane matters most as a medium for spiritual travel. In their astral bodies, they can visit distant locations, hobnob with spirits, and spy on unsuspecting people. An Astral Plane may also grant access to various other dimensions. The basic Astral Plane has no environment of its own: it's just an aspect of Earth that most people can't visit. The GM can add features such as ghost buildings — the astral shadows of buildings destroyed in the material world, created by the thoughts of the people who lived and worked in them.

If the Multiverse includes an Astral Plane as a "between place" giving access to other dimensions, a GM can give this realm any appearance he wants — occultists haven't provided detailed or consistent descriptions. In comic books, this limbo between worlds often looks like a colorful chaos of blobs and streamers. Such a "between place" usually doesn't have inhabitants of its own, but dimensional travelers may encounter visitors from other planes.

Divine Realms

In mythology, gods often dwell up in the sky, below the earth, in the deeps of the sea, or otherwise beyond the normal world. For the Norse, their gods lived in the realm of Asgard, literally over the rainbow. The Sumerian god Ea lived in Apsu, the primal sea underneath the world. Divine realms overlap with afterlife realms: some god typically rules the dead, such as the Greek Hades or the Indian Yama. Many divine realms also serve as a Heaven for the virtuous dead.

Aside from the magnificent temple-palaces of the gods themselves, though, divine realms tend to look much like the natural world. The halls of Asgard are thatched in gold — but a giant built the town wall of ordinary stone. The Greek gods sleep in beds, not on clouds. In Chinese myth, the peaches of Heaven make people immortal, but they grow on a tree like normal fruit.

The most important inhabitants of a divine realm are, of course, the gods themselves. Supernatural animals may also appear, such as the horses that pull Apollo's sun-chariot, the giant rat steed of Ganesha, or Odin's ravens and wolves. A few mortals may find themselves in a god-realm as servants: Zeus brought at least two mortal lovers, Ganymede and Hebe, to serve as his cup-bearers in Olympus. If a divine realm is also an afterlife realm, the spirits of the dead also dwell there.

Elemental Planes

Elemental dimensions emphasize a particular form of matter or energy. For instance, a Plane of Water might be an endless ocean, while a Plane of Air might feature cloud-islands with no ground beneath them. Other potential elements include Fire, Earth, Wood, Metal, Light, Darkness, Ice, or Electricity. Science and technology suggest more exotic possibilities such as a Plastic Plane or a Realm of Radioactivity. If a setting's magic concentrates on elemental effects, that Multiverse probably includes elemental planes. Elemental spirits often come from such realms.

When designing an elemental plane, consider whether humans can visit the dimension, and how easily they can survive. For instance, if the Plane of Earth is entirely solid, visiting becomes quite difficult, while a Plane of Fire might be deadly. That's fine if you intend such visits to be rare feats requiring powerful magic. If you want characters to visit elemental planes more easily, adjust the environment to make it more hospitable. The Plane of Earth, for instance, might include vast cave networks; while a Plane of Fire might only be uncomfortably hot in some places, not completely filled with flame. Alternatively, adjust the visitors: the dimension might transform visitors into its own substance.

Faerie Realms

In myths and fairy tales, when people venture beyond the fields they know, they enter a fantastic world of elves, monsters, and enchantment. These faerie realms often take the form of islands, mountains, or other places set apart from the rest of the world. Faerie realms may superficially resemble Earth, but with extravagant additions: a castle is made of gold and spins like a top; an island can perch atop a mile-high pillar; a mountain is made of glass, too sheer to climb. Normal-looking animals can talk, and share their realm with dragons, unicorns, manticores, and other creatures of fancy. Supernatural people and nature-spirits such as elves, trolls, dryads, or tengu live in faerie realms as well. Any humans are probably witches or wizards, princesses held captive in enchanted palaces, or humble woodcutters or peddlers who offer valuable advice or a magical item in return for some act of kindness.

Depending on the needs of the setting, a GM might create a dimension based on one mythology, several realms based on different mythologies, or throw multiple mythologies into one realm. In some stories, anyone can enter a faerie realm by sailing into unknown waters or walking into the forest. Other stories separate Earth from Faerie to a greater degree, with few portals between them.



Perhaps people need magic to enter a faerie realm, or the favor (or curse) of a native. Faerie realms also range from the size of continents, where heroes cross seven kingdoms and seven seas to reach their goal, to enchanted elven palaces hidden beneath a single hill.

Country folk of long ago created fantastic versions of the everyday world around them, such as trees, springs, cottages, and the castle on the hill. But why should mythmaking stop with the Middle Ages? Gamemasters can bring Faerie up to date by placing a Fantasy twist on the modern world. Perhaps modern cities have their own Faerie analogs. Instead of forest, mountain, and sea, you enter the Otherworld down a disused subway tunnel or driving the wrong way down a certain one-way street. Instead of a hut on fowl's legs, the witch lives in a suburban bungalow built of human bones, with a two-dragon garage. You receive oracles at a drive-through window. The princess lives in a penthouse apartment instead of a golden tower, with a robotic steel manticore to hold her captive. A modern faerie realm could make a splendid addition to an urban Fantasy campaign.

Pocket Worlds

A "pocket world" is a space entirely tucked within some object; for instance, a painting you can step into and it becomes real. A djinn bottle (such as Darmondrat's Palace, described beginning on page 86 of *Fantasy Hero Battlegrounds*) is another example: the interior of the bottle is a "dimension" whose defining attribute is that once once you enter, you cannot leave until someone outside uncorks the bottle. A pocket world can have any properties imaginable.

Mystics cannot reach pocket worlds from just anywhere, no matter how complete their Extra-Dimensional Movement. Instead, a mystic must find the object that contains the pocket world. Extra-Dimensional Movement works at that point. Often, the object itself carries the magic to bring people to the pocket world (in game terms, it has an Extra-Dimensional Movement power built into it).

Weird Places

Some dimensions are simply strange places for characters to visit. The plane's environment is not at all like Earth. The world might be made of different substances... or matter might not gather in a "world" at all... or the dimension might not be made of Earthlike matter at all. The strange environment may well impose tactical challenges to visitors, if the dimension is intrinsically harmful or difficult for people to live in. Weird Places may change the rules of combat, too, or give everyone some new power. For instance, a strange dimension might give everyone 1" of Teleportation for every point of EGO they possess, but impose a Range Penalty of -1 per 1" of distance.

Weird Places usually lack any connection to human myths or magic. Such dimensions are especially common in comic book settings. Extradimensional tyrants who want to conquer Earth typically come from a Weird Place dimension. In some Fantasy stories, however, hells may have completely alien environments — the realms of the chaos-gods and demons in Michael Moorcock's "Elric of Melniboné" stories are good examples.

For a quick-and-dirty Weird Place, open a dictionary at random and pick out the first concrete noun or adjective that catches your eye. Repeat several times. Build the dimension around as many of these words as possible. Pull out more words if the first set leaves you stumped.

Example: *"sickle," "gable," "anchor," "strawberry," "white," "dinosaur."*

The heroes fail a Dimensional Navigation roll and find themselves in a weird dimension, and their Dimension Travel Device won't let them try again for several hours. At first they have a hard time distinguishing any features of the environment, because everything is stark white (giving the GM more time to think). All Sight Perception rolls and attacks are at -2 because of the low contrast between objects.

As they learn to see the slight differences in light and shadow around them, the characters recognize that they're in some sort of forest. They're surrounded by giant strawberry plants lined up in rows — some sort of farm. As they push through the plants, they spot the gable of a house in the distance, and head in that direction. They find a dinosaur tethered outside the house. Around the corner walks a man, or at least a manlike figure; he has an anchor for a head. He screams and recoils when he sees the heroes (even stranger since he has no visible mouth), and whips out a pair of large sickles....

It's not a great dimension, but it only took five minutes to design. The fight scene will give the GM time to think of ways to put the adventure back on track.

DESIGNING THE ENVIRONMENT

After you determine a dimension's story function, you should select the dominant features of the environment. If the dimension is meant for more than a brief visit, you may also want to think about the overall shape of the world and space.

Most of the work is already done if you crib a dimension from mythology. This discussion is mostly about dimensions you build from scratch — especially the Weird Places so common in comic books about mystics — but you might want to make a mythic realm more otherworldly than in the old legends.

Cosmology

How big is the dimension? A cosmos might be billions of light-years across, like the real Universe, or a dimension might be no larger than a city block, or anything in between.

Assuming the dimension is big enough, does matter collect in stars and planets of some sort, or does this dimension create less familiar structures? The "world" could be flat, or doughnut-shaped, an endless cylinder, the *inside* of a sphere, or some other shape — or have no shape at all.

"Ditkospace"

Comic books often show chaotic dimensions of taffypull blobs, drifting platforms and streamers, tunnels and doors in space, and similar oddities. The most notable depicter of such dimensions was Steve Ditko, so these chaotic planes are called "Ditkospaces," in tribute to the master.

"Pathway" Dimensions

Many minor dimensions are essentially linear. Characters have only one way to go in them, or at least only one way worth going. The lone path might be a road, a tunnel, a staircase, or a series of platforms hanging in the void. Sometimes the "pathway" works more subtly, by giving the characters strong reasons to go in one direction: for example, going in toward a lone planet instead of out into the fiery rings bounding the dimension, or following special paths that increase the characters' movement rate.

Theme Environments

Ditkospace is just about the outer limit of dimensional strangeness. Dimension designers can also obtain interesting effects by taking one bit of reality and patterning an entire world around it.

Landforms

A dimension might be all mountains, all river valley, all ocean, all desert, all plains, all swamp, all caverns, all badlands (*Roadrunner* cartoon style), all glacier or icecap, all volcanic, all canyon, and so on.

For instance, imagine a world that's all canyons. The PCs arrive in a little canyon. At its mouth, they see this is a gully in the walls of a bigger

canyon. If they try to get out of the big canyon, they find it's just a channel of a vastly greater canyon, hundreds of miles wide with furrowed walls a dozen miles high. Beyond those walls lies another vast channel, and another....

Organic Forms

One life-form might dominate a dimension, or a dimension could take its shape from some living thing (or part of a living thing). Possibilities include trees, flowers, vines, insects, fish, animals, birds, humans, or body parts such as hands, heads, eyes, or bones. Imagine a Ditkospace with giant heads floating among the blobs, their dreams visible through their eyes, or a dimension consisting of mile-wide endless vines floating in the void, with people building cities in the flowers. Dimensions based on organic forms can be especially eerie or poetic.

Artificial Forms

Man-made objects such as buildings and machines provide more themes for dimensions. At least, these things are man-made on Earth; on other dimensions, they might occur naturally, or seem to. A dimension might be all one huge building: all castle, or all factory, bureaucratic office building, or whatever, with no "outside."

A factory dimension would overlap with dimensions based on machinery. Imagine a dimension filled with clockwork, giant computer circuits, or the pipes, boilers, and cooling towers of an infinite oil refinery.

Other manufactured items can suggest striking dimensions as well. A fight in a dimension of mirrors could get interesting. A world that's all graveyard or ruins works well for a moody, downbeat adventure.

The Dutch graphic artist M. C. Escher produced marvelous pictures of warped architectural spaces where up, down, and sideways intersect in mind-twisting ways. Dimensions in this style, where one person's floor becomes another person's wall or ceiling, can be called "Escherspaces."

Geometric Forms

Pure geometric forms provide another option. Dimensions based solely on geometric forms tend to be very simple, suitable only for one-shot use, but geometric forms combine well with other sorts of themes. M. C. Escher, for instance, did a picture of a strange planetoid shaped like a tetrahedron (a 4-sided pyramid) entirely covered with city: a combination of geometry with an artificial form.

Unusual Substances

Another way to make dimensions more exotic is to change what objects are made of. On Earth, for instance, trees are made of wood, animals are made of meat and bone, and the ground is rock or soil. On another dimension, perhaps everything is mineral: the trees are rock and the animals are metal and crystal. Or perhaps the trees are made of meat and bone, while the animals are made of wood or other vegetable substances. A dimension where everything, including the ground, is animal, alive, and mobile could be very strange and dangerous. Other substances to consider include ice, gelatin, plastic, various liquids, clouds, and luminous force.

Color Scheme

What colors are most common in the dimension? Earthly skies are blue, except when grey or white clouds cover them, or at sunset. What color is another dimension's sky, assuming it has one? What color are the inhabitants, if any? Some dimensions might have a more limited range of colors that Earth. A dimension might even lack colors entirely: everything is in shades of grey.

Supernatural Bias

Does the dimension have an intrinsic bias toward some forces and away from others? Worlds where magic works and technology doesn't occur often in Fantasy fiction. Utopian worlds of goodness and hellish dimensions of evil are common too. Some Fantasy writers posit worlds dominated by Order or Chaos, or caught in conflict between those forces. *The Mystic World* adds Art and Nature as conceptual forces that could dominate a world. Any combination is possible: one dimension might be oriented to Order, Nature, and evil, with technology dominant; another is neutral on the Order/Chaos axis, and tends toward Art, Good, and Magic.

Dimensions dominated by Order display tightly-knit societies with restrictive laws and well-defined social classes. They're the safest dimensions for visitors who follow the rules... but the deadliest for visitors who don't. In some Orderly dimensions, simply being a visitor may be against the rules!

Chaotic dimensions, on the other hand, emphasize personal freedom, with many options open to individuals. The cost of such freedom, however, is the loss of security that a strong collective can offer. Even if most of the inhabitants are kindly, rogue elements might attack visitors. On the other hand, if the people tend toward evil and hostility, it's easier to hide in a Chaos-realm and the heroes might find an "underground" willing to help.

Art-dominated planes could have any sort of society; Art shows itself in people's relationship to their environment. Their inhabitants either shape Art planes to their will; or in the dimension, apparently natural processes produce objects that on Earth must be made by people.

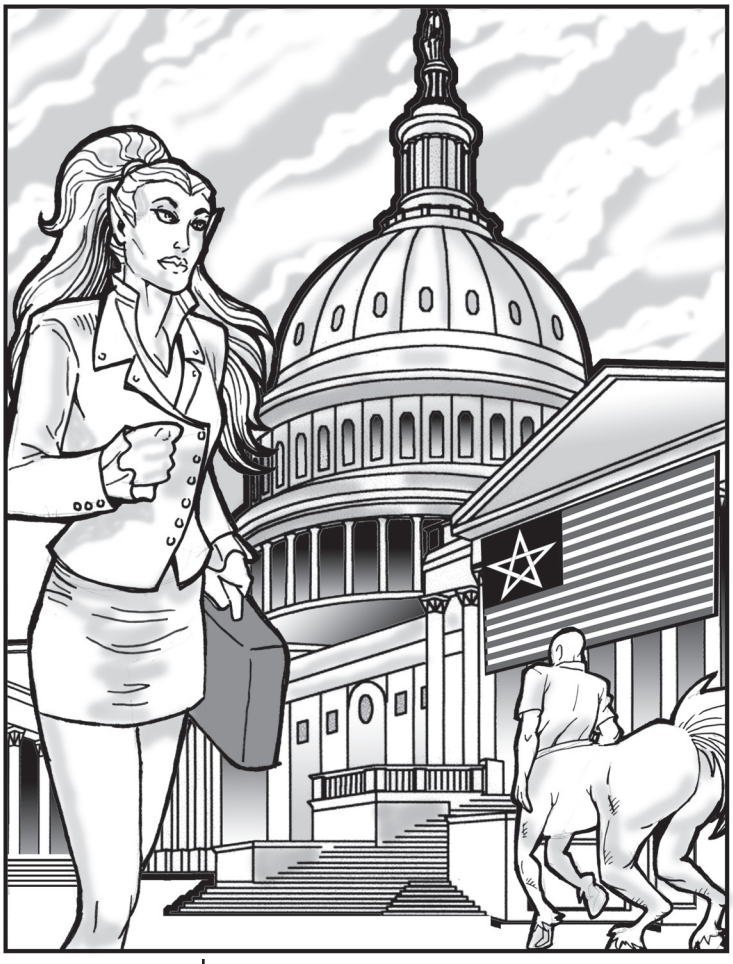
Theoretically, a Nature plane could have any sort of society, but tribal societies seem more "natural" to many people in the developed world. Nature-dominated dimensions may be wildernesses of some sort, or at least dominated by Life. A garden could be considered the intersection of Nature with Order.

In extreme cases, worlds dominated by one force might act as consecrated ground. A Nature spirit might suffer damage on an Art plane, just like a devil would on holy ground.

THE PASSAGE OF TIME

Time doesn't necessarily pass at the same rate in another dimension as it does on Earth. If time passes more slowly, characters might spend a few hours in another dimension and find that a much longer time passed on Earth. Conversely, if time passes more quickly, a week in another dimension might be a day or less on Earth — perhaps only a few seconds. The Time Chart provides an easy standard for time passage that differs from Earth. One dimension might operate on a 1 day = 1 Earth-week ratio, another on a 1 day = 5 Earth-hours ratio, and so on.

Time differentials, especially cases where time passes very slowly compared to Earth, can really screw up a character's life. A GM shouldn't have the PCs spend a day in another dimension and return to find a year has passed on Earth and everyone thinks they're dead or skipped out unless he plans to craft a whole adventure or two around this problem — and you know the players won't be upset at the gratuitous disruption of their characters' lives.



If a dimension embodies some source of mystical power, that particular energy or force dominates the plane's environment. Elemental planes, of course, are dominated by their particular elements, such as Fire, Air, or Metal. A plane that embodies the Taoist concept of Yin would be dark, quiet, and discourage motion (perhaps through a perpetual Suppress on Movement Powers). A plane of Yang, on the other hand, would blaze with light, energy, and movement. Of course, magic that calls upon the dimension's favored element, force, or principle becomes more powerful in that dimension... perhaps dangerously so, if a mystic cannot control the results. Magic based on contrary principles becomes weaker, and might not work at all.

INHABITANTS

What about the people and other creatures? Anything is possible in another universe, but remember that the players need something they can interact with. Presenting a truly alien being is a formidable challenge: it's great if you can do it, but difficult. A GM can achieve a feeling of strangeness by shortcuts such as combining familiar elements in unfamiliar ways. For example, people who talk are familiar, and mountains are familiar. Talking mountains are strange. Humans are ordinary, and things made of silver are ordinary; humans made of silver are exotic.

Classic Types

Comic books, Fantasy fiction, and folklore establish certain traditions for the people of other dimensions. You might even call them clichés, but they work.

Pretty Much Human

No matter how bizarre and unearthly the dimension looks, the people resemble humans in most important ways. They may have blue skin, funny hair, bumps on their heads, or antennae, but they still look awfully human.

The inhabitants of mythological Otherworlds tend to follow this pattern. European faerie-folk usually look quite human, albeit sometimes much larger or smaller than normal people. (Insect wings and antennae, and even the pointed ears, are modern additions.) Many cultures think their gods look human, though sometimes with modifications: Hinduism gives its gods extra arms, legs, and heads; the Egyptian gods often had human bodies with animal heads.

Lone Dimension Lord

In the comics, many dimensions have only one inhabitant, a powerful spirit who's invariably hostile and usually psychotic. (Well, what do you expect? He's been in solitary for centuries.) These funny-looking humanoids possess enough magic powers to give a group of PCs a decent fight, but most of them are just petty obstacles. Similarly, some dimensions are populated, but utterly dominated by a dimension lord who's so powerful his existence and presence influence everything that goes on in that plane (see below).

Humanoid Animals

People in other dimensions sometimes look like humanoid versions of familiar Earthly animals. Cat-men, lizard-men, and bird-men seem especially popular in comic books, though not in mythological otherworlds. In Fantasy, humans sometimes share the world with races of animal-men.

Gods sometimes have animal attributes. Totemic gods, such as the Native American Coyote or African Anansi, take either human or animal form. The Egyptian gods took animal forms as well, and were portrayed with animal heads to show this duality.

Spirits and other supernatural creatures may combine the human form with animal parts that symbolize the creature's moral qualities or power. The common image of an angel is simply a human with white, feathered wings: angels fly up and down from Heaven, so they're part bird. Devils fly too, but they have bat wings to show they belong in darkness and the caverns of the underworld.

Mythological Creatures

The GM can show that another dimension is a place of Fantasy by populating it with creatures from familiar Earthly mythology. For some reason, dragons seem especially popular, but mythology offers plenty of other wondrous and hideous creatures.

Spirits

Some of the classic dimension types have spirits as their chief inhabitants. Spirits of the dead, of course, dwell in afterlife realms (this may include the Astral Plane), while elementals live on elemental planes. Spirit realms often include gods, too. Less standardized dimensions may host types of spirits you invent yourself.

Culture

The societies in mystic dimensions are often as stereotyped as the inhabitants themselves. Nothing keeps you from inventing complex and original cultures, but sometimes an adventure is best served by a cliché (or at least, that's what the myths describe).

Just Like The Mortal World

People tend to imagine the gods and spirits living just like the people themselves. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Christians imagined both angels and devils forming imperial bureaucracies or feudal hierarchies, complete with noble titles and civil service appointments. The totemic gods and eerie spirits of the Australian Aborigines live by hunting and gathering. The Egyptians believed the blessed dead received an eternal life along a sunlit Nile-land of peace and plenty, with the god Osiris as their pharaoh.

Romantic Feudalism

Many Fantasy novels send heroes from Earth to sword and sorcery worlds with kings, knights, and an evil wizard causing problems. This is so familiar it needs no further explanation. Faerie-folk and demons sometimes live in quasi-Medieval societies as well, mimicking the cultures that invented them. European elves have knights, attendants, kings, and queens. Some Indian demons live in otherworldly cities ruled by kings and priestly Brahmins, while the occasional demon becomes a mystical ascetic.

Dimension Lord Despotism

Comic books favor planes ruled by a "dimension lord." Most dimension lords are not nice people. They command far more power than anyone else in the dimension, and power corrupts them. The government consists of the dimension lord (and perhaps a few minions), who holds the rest of the populace in terrified subjection. The only law is the dimension lord's whim. Since the heroes' usual reason for visiting these dimensions is to fight the dimension lord as quickly as possible, characters might not get much opportunity to see the details of how people live under tyranny; they just know it's not good. If the dimension lord tries to conquer other worlds he is, of course, a "dimensional conqueror."

Exotic Human Cultures

Societies on Earth are a rich source of material for cultures of other planes. Humans have tried a dizzying variety of social arrangements, ranging from despotic empires to Utopian communes. Some societies plan everyone's life from cradle to grave; others allow virtual anarchy. Leaders? Humans have followed god-kings, Commissars, Presidents, family elders, warlords, merchant princes, and dozens of other sorts of leader. A GM doesn't need a degree in history or anthropology, either: a stack of National Geographics can provide exotic cultures by the dozen. Or, just read the world news section of the local newspaper.

Satiric Exaggeration

Other dimensions present opportunities for social satire. To do this, create a society based on some aspect of your own, exaggerated to comedy or horror. Science Fiction writers have done this sort of thing for decades. Why should they have all the fun? Just be sure your players agree with you — or make the adventure enough fun that they don't care about your politics. The best satire, however, pokes fun at human foibles without reference to current events and conflicts.

Social satire is sharpest if set on an "alternate Earth." On the other hand, setting the story on a fully invented world lets the satire sneak up on the audience — like in Aesop's fables, where the animals stand in for humans.

STRUCTURING THE MULTIVERSE

Once you decide what planes you want, you have to figure out how they fit together. It helps to imagine different planes as finite locations with a particular spatial arrangement. Even if each dimension is really infinite, or they fit together in topologically impossible ways, a spatial metaphor helps you visualize how the various dimensions relate to each other, and how and where people can move between them. Many arrangements are possible, but they fall into a few broad categories.

Coterminous

In this arrangement, each point in one dimension corresponds to one and only one point in another plane. This is easiest if the two dimensions have the same geography; for instance, alternate histories of the same world. One dimension may be a "hidden" aspect of the other, such as a spirit realm that remains invisible and intangible to most people.

The tight correspondence between coterminous dimensions implies some deep connection between the planes. If some dimensions are coterminous and others are not, the coterminous dimensions are probably "near" each other, compared to other planes. More travel takes place between them, and the inhabitants may show strong similarities. For instance, the people of a "Terra Mythica" might look just like the people who live in the corresponding part of the real world as of a thousand years ago or so, but they live beside the spirits, gods, and monsters of each region's culture.

AFTER THE DARK LORD?

In some campaigns, the heroes might heroically overthrow the tyrannical dimension lord/conqueror. In that case, the GM has some juicy story possibilities as the dimension's society turns upside down. With the old despotic government gone, things get very unstable. (Just look at what happened in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia.) Some factions will certainly try to recruit the PCs to help them; others may try to kill the PCs, if only to prevent them from allying with the opposition. The PCs may wish they'd left well enough alone! Rebuilding a dimension's society could be a truly epic adventure, though.

Embedded

Worlds may exist within pockets of a larger cosmos, like raisins in a muffin. Each dimension might be quite large from inside. In the supercosmos that contains them all, though, the various dimensions seem enclosed within quite small areas. It may simply be that a natural portal to each dimension is quite small; but characters might have no alternative than to use these portals.

C. S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew* features an example of embedded dimensions. Portals to Earth, the Fantasy world of Narnia, and an indefinite number of other worlds take the form of pools in a forest, the Wood Between the Worlds. People leave their world by wearing one sort of ring, and can enter another world by putting on another sort of ring and jumping in that dimension's pool. A campaign world might be similarly embedded in some greater "between place" through which all dimensional travelers must pass.

Alternately, the campaign world itself might be the greater world, with all other dimensions as pocket worlds within it. Dante's *Divine Comedy* hints at such an arrangement, since the nine layers of Hell exist inside the Earth, descending toward Satan at the center. In a Fantasy world, each god or pantheon might rule its own pocket realm, with access to particular parts of the material world but not to each other.

In an Embedded Multiverse, all travel between dimensions might require use of the "Between Place." From the embedded planes, Extra-Dimensional Movement leads only to this greater realm; from there, Extra-Dimensional Movement can lead to any world — but perhaps you must locate the appropriate access point. In the latter case, characters only need Extra-Dimensional Movement to one dimension, the Between Place, since that dimension itself provides access to all other worlds. On the other hand, some types of Extra-Dimensional Movement might allow the character to bypass the Between Place and move directly from one dimension to another.

Equidistant

In another simple arrangement, all dimensions are be equally accessible from each other. None are "nearer" or "further away" than any other. The number of dimensions may be large or small.

Equidistance implies that no dimension is easier to reach than any other, and the connections between them are equally strong. In the TV show *Sliders,* the many alternate Earths all seem to be equally accessible, since the characters travel between them at random.

If all the dimensions in a Multiverse are equidistant, the GM may want to remove the option for Extra-Dimensional Movement that accesses a limited group of dimensions. No dimension has a stronger connection or similarity to one plane than another, so what ground exists for defining one group of dimensions as accessible and the others as beyond the Power's reach?

Geometric Form

In this arrangement, you can imagine the dimensions arranged in a simple geometric shape such as a square or a ring. Even if the various worlds aren't literally arranged in some greater space, the way they interact with each other suggests the geometric form. For instance, a set of Elemental Planes might be connected so you cannot travel directly from one element to its opposite; to pass from the Plane of Fire to the Plane of Water, you must go by way of the Plane of Air or the Plane of Earth. The connections between the four planes suggest a square, even though each plane really is a universe all its own. If you couldn't travel from one Elemental Plane to any others, but had to go by way of the material world, the four planes might be better imagined as a cross, with each plane as an arm extending from the material world.

Geometric arrangements of planes are most appropriate for settings with a limited number of dimensions, and where all the dimensions follow some common plan. Other sample patterns for a geometrical arrangement of dimensions are the *pakua* wheel of the eight I Ching trigrams, or the "Tree of Life" arrangement of divine emanations from kabbalism.

A geometrical Multiverse might be just a convenient metaphor mystics use to visualize the various dimensions, or it might reflect actual connections or disjunctions between planes. In the latter case, characters might not be able to jump from any dimension to any other. Extra-Dimensional Movement might be restricted to a limited group of planes: characters can only travel to "adjacent" worlds in the pattern.

Layers

Many mythologies describe spirit worlds in a specific geometrical arrangement — a vertical stack. Most often, spirits of the dead go to a literal Underworld under the corporeal world, while gods dwell in a heaven above the sky. Some mythologies propose multiple Heavens and Underworlds. Dante's *Divine Comedy* adapted the layer scheme for Christian cosmology, with nine circles of Hell, seven terraces on the mountain of Purgatory, and seven Heavens. The Aztecs had a thirteen-level heaven and a nine-level underworld.

Layered cosmologies work best when the Multiverse includes a finite number of dimensions that all fit within some predefined scheme. Occult theories provide many vertical arrangements of concepts besides the basic Overworld-Mortal World-Underworld pattern. You could create planes linked to the concentric planetary spheres of Ptolemaic astronomy (as Dante did with his Heavens), or the ten emanations from God in kabbalism. Some modern occultists say the astral world is divided into 33 "Aethyrs" through which a spirit-voyager must pass in turn.

In a layered Multiverse, Extra-Dimensional Movement might be restricted to a limited group of planes: characters can only travel to the worlds immediately above or below them in the stack.

Network

Large numbers of dimensions may exist, but some are "closer" than others. The dimensions may form definable groups within which travel is relatively easy. Alternatively, each dimension might permit travel to a limited number of other planes: in some cases, you can reach a certain dimension only by traveling through a number of intermediate worlds. The number of dimensions is large enough that the Multiverse doesn't form a simple, easily comprehended structure. Instead, it's like a complex network, with each intersection representing a dimension. Extra-Dimensional Movement can take you to any plane connected by a line to the world where you begin.

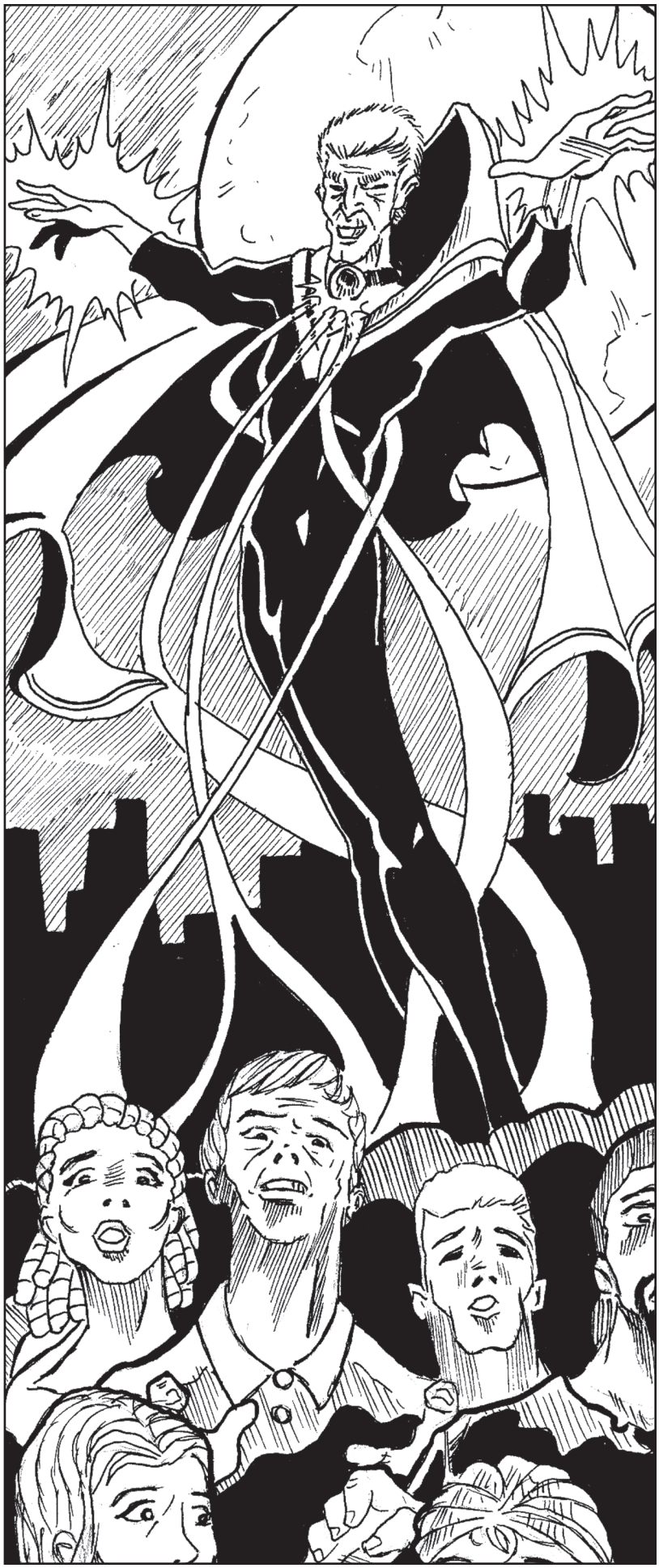
For a variation, people might be limited to traveling a limited number of steps from their world of origin. Tom Dietz portrays a Multiverse with this restriction in the Fantasy series that begins with *Windmaster's Bane.* As in this series, one world (such as Earth) can become a battleground between forces who cannot invade each other.

In such a restrictive Network Multiverse, characters cannot have Extra-Dimensional Movement to reach every dimension. At most, they can travel to a group of dimensions — the cluster immediately accessible from whatever plane they are on.

In a less restrictive Network, characters can possess unlimited Extra-Dimensional Movement, but distinct clusters of interrelated worlds may still exist. For instance, a Multiverse might consist of a set of "Inner Planes" with a strong connection to the principal campaign world, and an indefinite number of "Outer Planes" with a weaker connection. Whatever conflicts may erupt between supernatural factions of the Inner Planes, they might pull together to resist an invasion from the forces of an Outer Plane. The main comic book Multiverses follow this plan: the realms of the Greek, Norse, Egyptian, and other pantheons cluster around Earth, but the world often faces conquest by the godlike masters of wholly alien dimensions.

Combination

A large and complex Multiverse might include more than one of these structures. For instance, the Multiverse as a whole might consist of a network. Some of the dimensions in that network might cluster in a set of layers, or some simple geometric form. Other planes might contain embedded sub-worlds. Dimensions within some clusters might be coterminous, though most planes are not. Or, the Multiverse might consist of clusters of dimensions in layers or geometric Forms, but each cluster is equidistant from the others. For a third arrangement, whole classes of dimensions might be segregated in layers or a geometrical form, such as Worlds of Law, Chaos, and Neutrality, but the worlds within each layer are equidistant from each other. A combination Multiverse can be as large and complicated as you want, or as small and simple: whatever suits the needs of your campaign.



CONTACT AND TRAVEL



How all things live and work,
and ever blending,
Weave one vast whole from
Being's ample range!
How powers celestial, rising and
descending,
Their golden buckets ceaseless
interchange!

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part I

Once you decide what dimensions exist in your Multiverse, ask yourself: how do they affect each other? Obviously, other planes don't matter much if people on one dimension can't affect anything on other worlds. For maximum dramatic benefit, there has to be at least some possibility of travel between planes, and/or the capacity for one dimension to affect another somehow.

Would-be plane travelers face a numbler of questions. So do GMs, as they define the ways characters can move between dimensions, and how plane travelers find their way between the worlds.

FINDING YOUR WAY

When characters move between dimensions, they probably want some way to know where they're going. The *Navigation (Dimensional)* Skill enables characters to find their way. See pages 35-36 for the mechanics of this Skill; this section discusses Dimensional Navigation from a character's point of view. What activity does Dimensional Navigation represent? And what are the consequences for a mistake?

Every form of Navigation assumes the character follows certain cues and procedures to reach where he wants to go, whether that involves recognizing landmarks, programming trajectories through hyperspace, following a blazed trail, or something else. The structure of the Multiverse and the possible methods for moving between planes influence the special effects for Navigation (Dimensional). These examples illustrate some of the simpler methods.

NO DIMENSIONAL NAVIGATION

In some settings, Dimensional Navigation might be less important... or completely irrelevant. For an extreme case, travel between dimensions might follow fixed paths, or depend on nexus points the characters cannot control. In short, the characters have no choice where they go. For a less extreme case, consider a Multiverse of coterminous dimensions where characters can only go to corresponding locations. An error in Dimensional Navigation takes characters to the wrong dimension, but they still know where they are. If there aren't many dimensions, the GM might not bother using *Navigation (Dimensional)* Skill at all, because characters have so little chance of making a mistake.

CALCULATE THE FORMULA

Whatever method characters use, from a magic spell to a hyperspatial tube, they cannot steer along the way. They define their destination using some sort of formula, such as a magic circle with the proper words written around the rim, or a quantum resonance pattern programmed into a computer. The formula is very complex, though, and the slightest error can send them to the wrong place in a dimension... or the wrong dimension entirely.

In this system, Navigation (Dimensional) is an Intellect Skill. Once characters work out a formula, however, they can always reach that destination... assuming the dimensions don't move relative to each other, in which case they must re-calculate the formula each time. If formulae don't change, cautious mystics might prefer to use ones worked out by other mystics: they can't go anywhere they want, but they known they can reach certain locations without difficulty.

FOLLOW THE SIGNS

In some settings, interplanar travel involves passage through a "between place," such as hyperspace or an Astral Plane (see *Embedded,* above). Characters steer themselves through this "between place" by sensing certain cues: floating disks that offer views into other dimensions, complex musical chords that indicate what world lies beyond the dimensional barrier, an actual road network with offramps to different times and places (as in Roger Zelazny's *Roadmarks*), or whatever. If they don't spot the right cues, or misinterpret them, they end up in the wrong place in a dimension, the wrong time, or the wrong dimension.

In this system, Navigation (Dimensional) is an Intellect Skill. Perception Rolls might be Complementary. Mystics might compile actual maps of the Between Place, showing the routes to reach particu-

lar destinations and giving a bonus to attempts to reach those places.

PURE WILL

A dimensional traveler must visualize where he wants to go and let no other thought enter his mind. Any distraction could send him to the wrong location. In this system, Navigation (Dimensional) might be based on EGO instead of INT, or at least EGO Rolls could Complement the Skill. The most important modifier, however, would be familiarity. Dimensional travelers would receive a bonus to reach destinations they know well, and suffer penalties if they know a dimension only through hearsay. The more severely a character fails his Navigation (Dimensional) roll, the further he is from his desired location; failing by -5 or more certainly means the character is in the wrong dimension entirely.

TRAVEL METHODS

Here are the usual methods characters use to move between dimensions. Just about every method described in fiction and folklore fits within one of these methods. Each technique for dimensional travel offers its own benefits, limitations, conditions of use, and consequences for failure. Gamemasters can select one possible means of interplanar travel for their setting, or more, or all of them.

NO TRAVEL

Perhaps character cannot visit other dimensions. They can view them using Senses with the *Dimensional* Sense Modifier, or affect them using powers with the *Transdimensional* Advantage, but they can never leave their own continuum... not while they live, anyway.

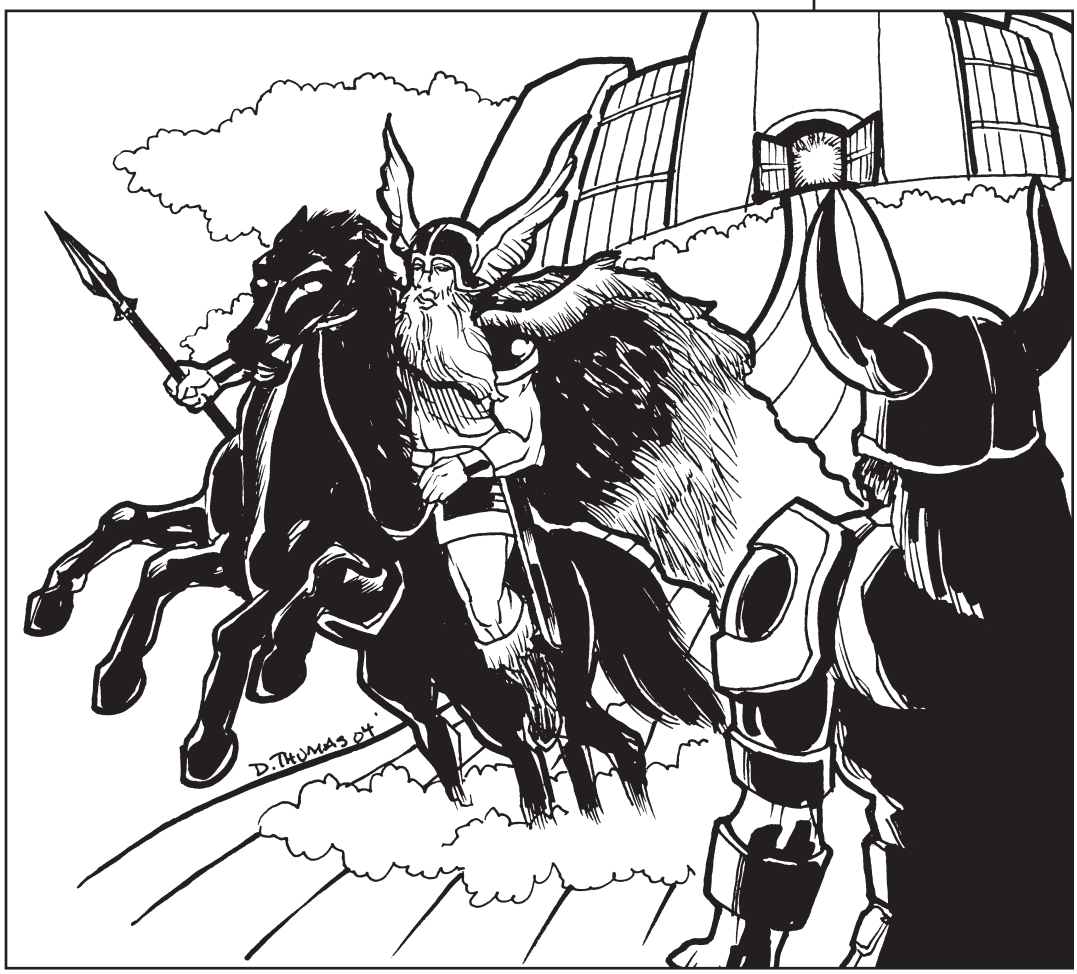
This system renders most Multiversal questions moot. Gamemasters don't need to worry how characters move between dimensions, or what Navigation (Dimensional) represents. Other dimensions may provide information, and can even pose a threat if the inhabitants have powers that cross dimensions, but it's harder to make them an important feature of the setting.

One option is to forbid humans from entering other dimensions, but allow the dwellers on other planes to visit other worlds. This is most plausible in a setting where all other dimensions are spirit-realms, such as afterlife dimensions. Angels, devils, and ghosts might enter the world, but mortals cannot follow them back. The Multiverse becomes especially interesting if spirits from the various planes can visit Earth, but not each other's realms. That means the material world becomes the sole venue and prize for their battles and intrigues.

ASTRAL FORM

As described elsewhere, some mystical characters can separate their souls from their bodies to act as spirits (see pages 54-58 for various game mechanics to represent astral projection). In some versions, a character's astral form automatically exists in another dimension — an Astral Plane. In any case, an astral character may have the option of using the Astral Plane as a "between place" to reach other spiritual dimensions. The GM can structure his Multiverse so astral characters can enter other dimensions simply by knowing the right path, and perhaps succeeding at a Navigation (Astral) roll (see page 36). Alternatively, GMs may decide that an astral character still needs an Extra-Dimensional Movement power to reach other planes.

A further question: is the astral form visible and solid to the inhabitants of other dimensions? If the GM decides astral forms are genuine spirits, it makes sense for them to be visible and solid to other spirits, especially in their special realms. On the other hand, perhaps astral bodies cannot leave



the Astral Plane. An astral character can watch events on other planes, invisible and intangible, but can affect that world only if he has powers with suitable Advantages (Transdimensional or Affects Physical World, as appropriate).

These options are not exclusive. In a Multiverse that includes a variety of planes, astral characters might materialize on spiritual dimensions, but remain invisible and intangible on material dimensions.

Some portrayals of astral travel say it's instantaneous and infallible: imagine a place and you appear there. Other versions of astral travel take time. Characters might fly through the Astral Plane, finding their way by watching the landscape of the material world. Travel to other dimensions may require recognizing other cues, or visualizing a special sigil as a portal. Depending on what system the GM ordains, Navigation (Astral) might involve Calculating a Formula, Following the Signs, or Using Pure Will. The mildest consequence of failure is that the character appears someplace he didn't want to go; he returns to his body and tries again. A more exciting Astral Plane, however, may offer hazards such as astral predators and nightmare zones that trap lost characters. Perhaps returning to your body is not so easy... and a lost character must find his way back before his body dies. Gamemasters need to define the penalties for failing an Astral Navigation roll, as well as a definition of what the Skill Roll represents.

INNATE POWER

Spirits may possess an innate ability to move between dimensions. In a superhero setting, the occasional mutant or victim of a lab accident may gain this power as well. In some cases, GMs might consider restricting what dimensions different sorts of characters can access. A character with shrinking powers can access "microverses," for instance, but can't find microscopic portals to Hell, Fairyland, or the Elemental Plane of Earth. On the other hand, why would a character who's merged with an earth elemental have the power to enter microverses, or slip into hyperspace to hitch rides on alien spaceships? Still, the comic books (not to mention some Fantasy stories) often blend everything together. Players and GMs should draw the line where it feels right, not according to some rigid system.

MUNDANE TRAVEL

In some settings, people can reach the realms of gods and the dead through ordinary travel. In Greek myth, for instance, Odysseus sailed west to the land of the dead, across what we now call the Atlantic. Certain caves led to the realm of the dead as well. Celtic myth includes many tales of heroes sailing to otherworldly islands; St. Brendan is the most famous example. Other mythologies describe mystic otherworlds reached by climbing certain mountains. The cloud-kingdom of the giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk" could be another example, though climbing a magical beanstalk stretches the definition of "mundane" travel. Gamemasters can decide for themselves whether such realms count as other dimensions or as parts of the world where the supernatural shows itself more strongly.

NEXUS POINTS

Sometimes small portals connect two dimensions, letting creatures travel both ways. For instance, the eponymous item of furniture in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe* was a portal to the Fantasy world of Narnia. These nexus points might stay open continuously, but be hidden so few people discover them. Alternatively, a nexus point might open only at certain times. For instance, anyone who visits a particular stone monolith at midnight under the full moon might find himself transported to Faerie.

Nexus points can overlap with Spells and Mundane Travel. A mystic might create a nexus point using a spell for Triggered or Continuous Extra-Dimensional Movement. Unlike many Gate spells, though, anyone can use a nexus point. On the other hand, nexus points are more localized than the dimensions one can reach through mundane travel, and are more obviously different worlds rather than supernatural parts of one world. Transient nexus points also make returning home more difficult.

For a variation, nexus points might require some sort of magic to open them. Mystics would still need a spell for Extra-Dimensional Movement, but the spell would carry the Limitation that it only works at certain rare and predefined locations.

For another variation, short-lived nexus points might spontaneously appear and disappear. These portals might be limited to dimensions that resemble the starting location. For example, nexus points to elemental planes might open in large concentrations of that element: portals to the Fire Plane in forest fires and erupting volcanoes, portals to the Water Plane on the sea floor, and so on.

Depending on the dimension it leads to, a stable, controllable nexus point could be a precious asset for a mystic, or a terrible danger that needs to be guarded. For instance, if no one can reach the magical lands of the Djinn except through six nexus points, any mystic who can regulate travel though a nexus can charge other mystics for access to the Djinn. On the other hand, if demon invaders can enter the world only through six cursed locations, mystics have a great incentive to keep those sites under guard. Nexus points become even more valuable if they're the only way people can enter other dimensions. Mystics might also develop spells to detect spontaneous, short-lived portals, and seek out locations where nexus points are likely to open.

SPELLS

In much genre fiction, mystics often travel between dimensions using spells. Sometimes the spell merely transports the mystic and his companions — poof, they disappear from one world and reappear in another. Other spells create mystical Gates that may last quite a while (perhaps even permanent Nexus Points).

Spells for dimensional travel don't force GMs to make many assumptions about the nature of the Multiverse and the relationships between planes: you're here, then you're there, and you don't have to worry what's in between. If spells provide a setting's chief means of travel between planes, the GM only has to decide what dimensions a mystic can reach, and how easily mystics can learn and cast dimensional travel spells.

SPIRITS

Perhaps mortals cannot travel between dimensions, but spirits can. A mystic who wants to visit another dimension must summon a spirit and persuade it to carry him. Transport by spirits is most appropriate in settings where all magic comes from spirits, directly or indirectly. Still, this method could appear in any setting where mystics can summon spirits.

In some settings, spirit travel may simply provide a more complicated special effect for Extra-Dimensional Movement spells. In other cases, spiritual transport may require a contest of wills between magician and spirit, or careful negotiations to buy the spirit's service (in game terms, this usually involves the *Summon* Power).

If mortals cannot enter other dimensions, period, then contact between dimensions is largely one-way. A magician who wants to obtain materials from another dimension, or otherwise work his will on another plane, might need a spirit to do the job for him. Gamemasters may hesitate, however, to create a setting that encourages mystical characters to act by proxy instead of having adventures themselves.

SUMMONING AND BANISHMENT

Some mystical traditions say that when sorcerers call spirits from the vasty deep, or suchlike, they merely put out a call; the creature they want chooses to respond... or not. In fiction and folklore, however, many traditions portray the magician *making* creatures come from the Great Beyond. Summoning creatures thus often involves forcing them to travel from another dimension. Banishing a creature involves forcing it to make the return journey.

As long as summoned and banished creatures are limited to spirits, Nameless Horrors From Beyond, and other NPCs, GMs and characters don't have to worry about this transportation aspect. But what if characters themselves can be summoned? For example, in the *Myth Adventures* series by Robert Asprin, wizards on different planes regularly summon each other as "demons" when they need help or want to impress the yokels. In this case, the *Summon* Power may provide the surest way to travel between dimensions: you can't get lost, because someone on the other end is reeling you in. On the other hand, you need someone on the other plane to do the Summoning.

Additionally, travel-by-Summon means the character runs the risk of being forced home prematurely through a sufficiently powerful Dispel, or whatever other conditions the GM may decree. For example, a GM might decide that in his campaign, Summoned creatures automatically return from whence they came if they lose consciousness, or are commanded in the name of that dimension's gods. If the GM wants to make Summoning a common means of interdimensional travel, but less reliable, he might compensate by waiving the *Specific Being* Advantage.

TECHNOLOGY

Last but not least, advanced technology (which Clarke's Law tells us may be indistinguishable from magic) may permit travel between dimensions. The time machine is perhaps the most familiar example of dimensional travel via technology. In pulp, comic book, and Science Fiction settings, though, other sorts of extradimensional travel may occur. In some SF settings, spaceships travel between stars by entering another dimension — a hyperspace — where distances are much shorter. By the end of E. E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensman* series, the heroes and villains moved entire planets between dimensions. Pulp scientists sometimes built portals to weird dimensions; in "From Beyond," by H. P. Lovecraft, a mad inventor's device enables humans to see other dimensions... and be seen by their deadly inhabitants. In a comic book setting, of course, anything's possible. A scientist could try to open a portal to hyperspace and reach Asgard instead.

High technology may send characters across dimensions in some Fantasy settings, too. It all depends on the arrangement of the dimensions and what "advanced technology" is possible. For instance, in a Fantasy world where the gods live above the sky, characters might reach heaven using a rogue artisan's hot-air balloon.

EASE AND PREVALENCE

So you've decided which methods characters use to move between dimensions. How easily can mystics perform this feat? This question really comes in two parts: how easily can characters obtain the means to cross dimensions; and how safe and easy is the travel itself?

In some settings, access to other dimensions may be difficult to obtain. Perhaps only a few people, even among mystics, can travel between worlds: some mystical force may prevent most people from leaving their own world. For instance, dimensional travel might be limited to people descended from gods or demons. If the lucky few can carry other people with them on dimensional jaunts, they become extremely valuable to mystics. Perhaps the magic is so difficult that only the most learned and powerful mystics can master it. Alternatively, dimensional travel might be rare because the necessary materials are hard to obtain. For example, the spell for dimensional travel might require a large yellow diamond, so few mystics could get the chance to cast it; or a time machine might require several pounds of plutonium fuel. For a variation, planar travel might be possible only at special times or places.

Dimensional travel also may be intrinsically difficult or dangerous. What if reaching other worlds is easy, but it's very difficult to steer yourself to a specific location? Dimensional travel might be such a gamble that few mystics care to try it. Alternatively, crossing between worlds might require a supreme effort of will, or dimensional barriers might wound travelers who lack special protections. Being in other dimensions might be unavoidably dangerous, too. For example, visitors to other worlds might slowly transform into native creatures and forget their original identity.



In many settings, of course, no such restrictions apply. In comic books, for instance, the spells to travel between dimensions seem readily available to expert mystics. Some dimensions are dangerous to visit, but the magic itself seems fairly safe and reliable.

DIMENSIONAL INVASIONS

Under most circumstances, the entities who move between dimensions don't want to disturb the world(s) they visit, at least not in a systematic way. A demon may kidnap someone to Hell, and a wizard may lead a rescue and revenge mission, but neither one tries to exterminate all humans or all demons. Gods set up cults and smite the unfaithful now and then, but leave most people alone. Faeriefolk, ghosts, and other interdimensional creatures cause small disturbances, but on the whole they don't change the status quo.

Sometimes, however, creatures from other planes attempt more. They try to conquer a world, or destroy it. Interdimensional invasions can be some of the most epic adventures a mystic ever faces.

Dimensional invasions occur in several genres. In comic books, the most common invasion scenario involves a vastly powerful sorcerous tyrant who tries to conquer Earth and add it to his dimension — a patchwork plane built from all the other dimensions he's conquered. Another common story has human cultists acting as fifth columnists, striving to deliver the world to Satan or some other dark power. This plot often appears in pulp adventure, modern supernatural thrillers, and Fantasy. Now and then stranger invasions occur, as in Andre Norton's "Witch World" novels in which the high-tech Kolder invade a Fantasy world.

For a stranger menace, the dimension itself may invade. In some Fantasy stories, one reality tries to supplant another. A number of Science Fiction stories deal with time-traveling agents from alternate histories, each trying to make their history the real one. The Jorge Luis Borges short story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" describes a fictional reality, invented by a cabal of scholars, that infiltrates the real world. Stopping an invasion like that could be quite a challenge.

To run a dimensional invasion adventure, you need an invader, a means of invasion and conquest, and a reason for invasion. An invader may be a single powerful entity, such as the aforementioned sorcerous tyrant, an evil god, or a Nameless Horror From Beyond Reality Itself. An invasion may also involve an army of less powerful creatures, like the Kolder. In between, a powerful entity may command a cadre of lieutenants and army of soldiers, cultists, or other minions. The invaders may be able

to cross dimensions themselves, or they may rely on cultists, evil mystics, or other native agents. The invasion may involve physical occupation of the target world, or simply forcing people to live the way the invader wants (as in the usual Satanic plot to make the world more evil). Means of "conquest" range from eating the world to secretly installing a cultist as President. Invaders may come in search of food, slaves, natural resources, an escape from their dying world, conversion of the infidel, or just to be nasty and make everyone miserable.

How long do you want the invasion storyline to last? If you want a long series of adventures, the invader probably needs frequent or easy access, or starts the story arc by sending a lot of invaders at once. The characters can't have a simple way to stop the invasion, either because the invader can easily try again or because the invaders aren't easy to find. For an extreme case, subversion and invasion can form the basis of an entire campaign: every adventure the heroes uncover a little more of the world-wide plot to enslave and corrupt the world.

At the other extreme, an invader might rely on a rare and fragile circumstance. For instance, a Nameless Horror might be able to enter the world only during a rare celestial alignment when its priest conducts a special ritual using a unique artifact. The invader has limited access and few resources, and the heroes have many ways to stop the plot: steal the artifact, kill the priest, or delay the ritual, and they've saved the world in one adventure.

PTOLEMY RESURGENT

The commonest and gravest error of modernity lies in believing that antiquity is dead.

Clark Ashton Smith, "Epigrams and Apothegms"

"Ptolemy Resurgent" is an example of Multiverse construction. The name refers to the basic idea: a set of dimensions based on the Ptolemaic model of the universe, with the Earth at the center and the planets spinning around it. Heaven and Hell form part of the system too. The basic mythology, however, is based on the Gnostic Heresy: the true God left subordinate spirits to manage the world, and these subordinates — the Archons — pretend to be Gods themselves, so mortals will worship them instead of the Creator.

This Multiverse is designed for use in a superhero setting with a strong admixture of the weird and fantastical, where many heroes have supernatural or mystical origins. Gamemasters could also use it in pure Fantasy campaigns (including some Urban Fantasy games), or, by diminishing the presence, prevalence, and power of the magic, for *Dark Champions* campaigns that feature mysticism.

Ptolemy Resurgent only describes the *mystical* dimensions of a Multiverse. A GM could include "scientific" planes as well, such as a hyperspace for starships. This Multiverse also takes no account of states of being represented as dimensions for convenience, such as a character who has stopped time or made a wish to change reality.

Functions

The dimensions in Ptolemy Resurgent serve these functions within the campaign:

■ Gods and spirits live in them. These spirits may journey to Earth under certain conditions, or when mystics Summon them. Gods and spirits from myth can give people superpowers, or become heroes or villains themselves.

■ They make concrete the premise of the campaign, that superbeings bring ancient notions of divine power, heroism, and villainy into the modern world. The dimensions of Ptolemy Resurgent come from an older model of the universe that seeks to make itself real again.

■ Most forms of magic draw their power from these astrological dimensions. This setting emphasizes Hermetic Theurgy and other forms of high ritual magic that use astrological concepts.

■ The dimensions and their inhabitants are a threat to civilization — in fact, the principal threat, though heroes won't know this right away. The rulers of these planes, the Archons, want to restore the Ptolemaic cosmos and make Earth a magical world again. This incidentally means the death of most of humanity when technology stops working and people must return to subsistence farming.

■ Eventually, the heroes must visit the dimensions themselves. They may seek magically-potent substances from these mystic realms, or information about the Archons. They might pursue villains to other planes. Ultimately, they may have to fight the Archons themselves to save civilization as they know it.

Background Mythology

As the year 1000 A.D. approached, people throughout Christendom feared the End of the World. They were right: the world ended... but not completely. The sorcerer-pope Sylvester II won a reprieve from the Supreme Being. Instead of passing the Last Judgment, God rebooted the world. This time, however, the Supreme Being made the world run by the laws of science instead of magic. Humanity would choose its destiny without interference from subordinate spirits with delusions of grandeur. The Sun became a giant ball of fusing hydrogen; the planets became smaller balls of rock and gas; and the Earth, now billions of years old instead of a few thousand, wasn't the center of the universe anymore.

The Creator did not destroy the spirits he had assigned to manage the world, any more than he had destroyed the rebel spirits who became devils. Instead, the Supreme Being banished them to a shadow-reality. After all, most of these



Archons had not actually rebelled against the Creator... merely overstepped their bounds and pretended to be Gods themselves. They would receive another chance.

Another thousand years passed. Once again, the world faces judgment and possible destruction. The spirits of the banished Ptolemaic cosmos don't initiate the Age of Superheroes — that's part of the millennial crisis of reality — but they exploit it. The Archons empower both heroes and villains as catspaws in their plan to regain mastery of the Earth. Their renewed influence has already restored magic to the world, at least for a lucky few with sufficient knowledge and talent. Now they wish to make magic dominant. The Archons want humanity to prove it lacks the courage and sense to rule itself — that people would rather bow to a master and pray for a miracle than take responsibility for themselves and their world. The Archons believe if they can show humanity's unworthiness and unwillingness to rule itself, the Creator will give the Earth back into their hands.

Access

Most of the methods of dimensional travel are possible, though not every method can reach every dimension.

Astral Form: Basic astral projection only gives access to the Astral Plane around Earth. To enter the planetary realms, an astral traveler needs Extra-Dimensional Movement. Astral bodies become solid and visible in the planetary realms. Astral projectors cannot pass beyond the Lunar Sphere, however, until they learn the passwords for the guardians at each planetary realm.

Extra-Dimensional Movement Spells: Characters can learn spells to send them instantly to a single planetary realm, to any of the seven planetary realms, to the Sphere of Fixed Stars, or to Hell. Spells cannot send people bodily to the Astral Plane, or to Heaven. Matter doesn't exist in the Astral Plane, and entering Heaven requires special permission from the Supreme Being. Time travel magic might be possible, but no spell for this exists yet.

Innate Power: Spirit and spirit hybrid characters can have Extra-Dimensional Movement to the planetary realms or to Hell. Superpowers spawned by mutation, science, or other methods cannot grant access to the mystic planes.

Mundane Travel: The mystical dimensions exist completely outside material reality, so characters cannot reach them by mundane travel.

Nexus Points: Short-lived nexus points to the planetary realms or Hell may appear in surroundings that resemble some aspect of the destination. The Archons create these nexus points to draw mortals into their realms. Nexus points may also appear spontaneously, as mystical forces grow more powerful on Earth. Uncontrolled mystic energies may create nexus points as Side Effects for clashing, miscast, or disrupted spells.

Spirits: Some kinds of spirits can carry people to their native planes, or to Hell. Spirits cannot carry corporeal beings onto the Astral Plane.

Summoning and Banishment: Mystics can summon and banish spirits from and to all the mystical dimensions. The Archons and other powerful spirits can Summon mortals who pact with them. This is a Disadvantage imposed on such characters. Normally, people cannot be Summoned at all.

Technology: Advanced technology cannot really send people to the mystic planes. Experimental technology may give an Archon access to the material world, though. The Archon makes the device seem to work, but other scientists cannot duplicate the results.

The Dimensions

The mystical Multiverse takes the form of concentric spheres embedded in an Astral Plane. Ghosts dwell on this Astral Plane, and spirits use it to watch events on Earth, but most of the Astral Plane is simply empty space. Away from Earth, the Astral Plane functions purely as a space in between other realms.

In this system of concentric spheres, the inmost sphere consists of Hell, located at the center of the Earth — or rather, where the center of the Earth would be on the Astral Plane. Hell is an endless labyrinth of caves full of fire, smoke, and lava, with pockets of other nasty environments such as ice caves or fetid swamps. The various demon lords, taken from religions and mythologies around the world, owe fealty to dark Ialdabaoth, the mightiest Archon and the one who actively rebelled against the Creator, and his queen Acharamoth. Even the other Archons fear this pair. The king and queen of Hell do not want to regain the Creator's favor; they want to make themselves Supreme Beings and turn the cosmos inside-out, so Hell becomes Heaven.

The realm of Earth's ghosts forms the next shell on the Astral Plane. It has no Archon, because the Supreme Being made humanity responsible for Earth.

Rising up from Earth, an astral traveler eventually reaches an unbreakable crystal shell. If the astral traveler flies toward the Moon itself, he enters *Levaneh,* the sphere of the Moon, which lies inside the crystal shell. This realm of silver half-light is the home of the faerie-folk and all gods of illusion, intoxication, and dreams, as well as all gods of the sea. Of all the worlds, Levaneh has the closest connection to the element of Water. Illusion is omnipresent in the lunar realm, and visitors run the risk of becoming dreams themselves.

Astral travelers cannot move beyond Levaneh unless they force a god of Levaneh to give them a new name, which serves as their password through the crystal shell to the next layer of the Multiverse. Beyond the Lunar Sphere, an ascending traveler next reaches *Kokab,* the Sphere of Mercury. Kokab is the Plane of Thought, with a strong aerial aspect. Trickster-gods, messenger gods, and gods of knowledge dwell in Kokab, as well as the djinn and other airy, shape-shifting spirits. All powers of movement are greatly enhanced on Kokab; so are all cognitive abilities. Mercury's intellectual power carries the risk of abstraction and obsession, though — the sort of crazed logic and unconcern for other people that lets dictators plan genocides.

A traveler who extorts a new name from a god of Kokab may ascend to *Nogah,* the Sphere of Venus. Gods of love and sex, the life cycle, plants, and animals dwell in this realm of visceral passion and superabundant life. Totem-spirits make Nogah their home as well. The power of Nogah may infect an unwary visitor so he loses control of his passions, or suffers transformation into some other creature.

Beyond Nogah lies *Shemesh,* the bright Sphere of the Sun. As well as solar deities, Shemesh holds spirits of light and fire, the lesser angels who manifest on Earth. The energies of Shemesh can heal when properly controlled, but more easily burn and destroy. This is the Plane of Power itself, dangerous to a visiting mystic because it may overwhelm him by granting more power than he can control.

Above Shemesh rises *Madim,* the Sphere of Mars. Shemesh is the realm of Light; Madim is the plane of grosser fire, the element of destruction and violence. Fire, lightning, earthquake, and other raging energies constantly wrack Madim. The plane has its creative aspect, though, because the plane of Fire encompasses the blacksmith's forge. War-gods and smith-gods dwell on Madim, as well as fire-spirits.

When a traveler wrests a new name from one of Madim's gods, he can move on to *Tzedeq,* the Sphere of Jupiter. Tzedeq is the realm of corporeal Air and the weather; air elementals come from this plane. Sky-gods make this cloudy realm their home; many of them rule pantheons, making this the premier dimension of secular power — law, politics, charisma, rank, and wealth.

The outermost planetary realm is *Shabatai,* the Sphere of Saturn. Shabatai is also the Plane of Earth, a realm of cold, bare stone and eternal night. Gods of darkness, aging, and death live in Shabatai, as do calendar-gods and the gods of mountains and the earth. This plane's nature emphasizes binding, restriction, and the unconscious mind. Visitors to Saturn's Realm face their own fear and self-doubt, as well as mystic forces of aging and decay.



Shabatai is not the outermost dimension overall, though. Beyond it lies *Masloth,* the Sphere of the Stars. Masloth is the realm of Time itself. Its gods are the most abstract of all: primal gods of creation, destiny, and eternity, such as Ptah and Ouranos. The gods and spirits of Masloth do not join their fellows' quest to regain mastery of the Earth: as gods of prophecy, existing in the past, present, and future all at once, they already know what will happen. They're also closer to the Supreme Being than the other gods. The gods of Masloth set the limit to what the Archons may see and know, but see beyond that limit themselves. Visitors to Masloth risk becoming lost in the past and future, or going mad from seeing too much at once.

Outside the Sphere of the Stars lies Heaven itself — mystically called *Rashith ha-Gilgalim,* the Center of Whirling Motion, the seat of the Supreme Being who set the spheres turning in the first place. A mystic who wants to reach Heaven while living must first pass all seven planetary realms (getting a new name-as-password in each one), and then hope the Creator allows him to pass the boundaries of Masloth.



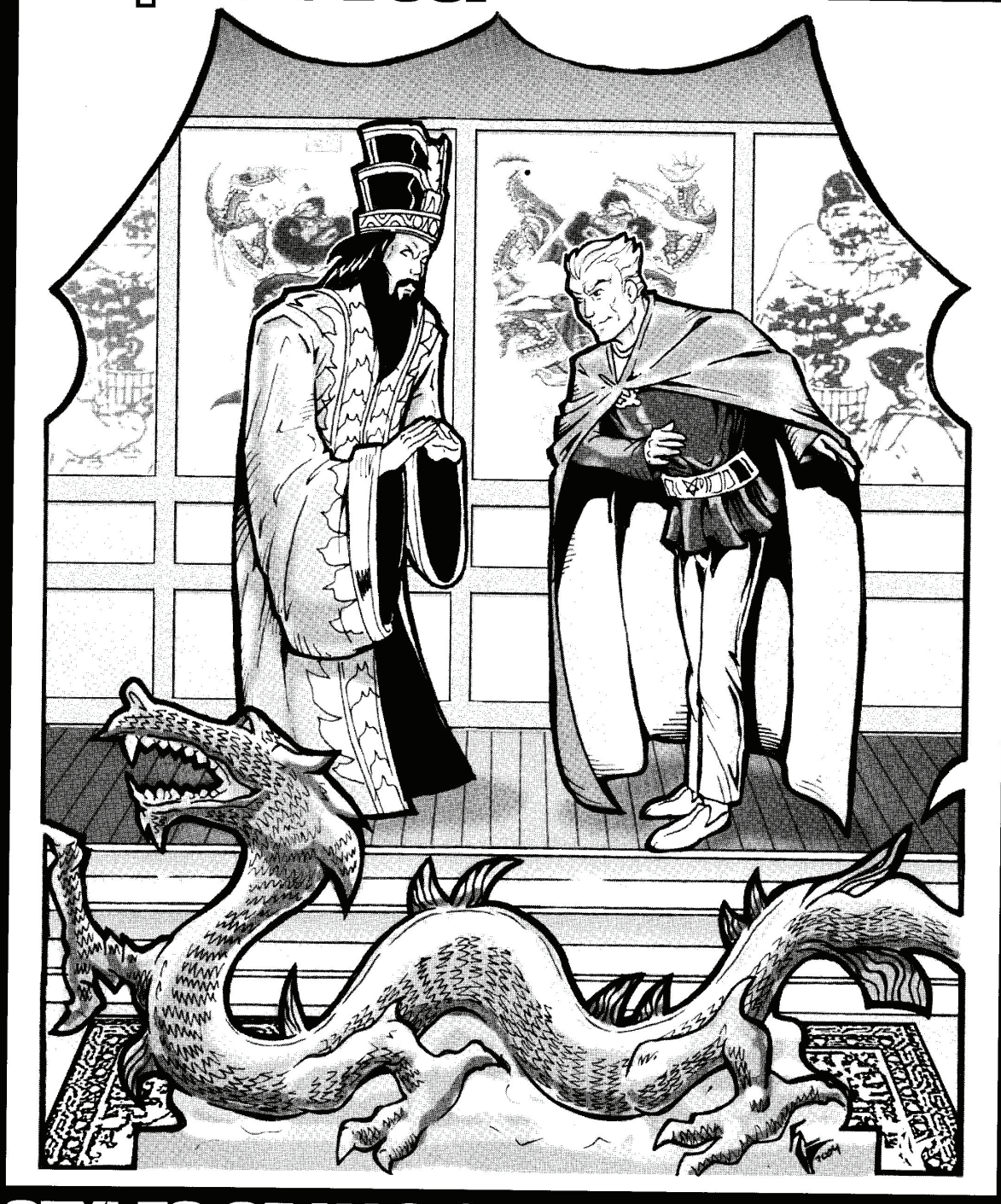
Inhabitants

Godlike spirits called Archons rule Hell and each of the seven planetary realms. (No one knows if Masloth has an Archon.) Some dimensions have two Archons, a king and queen; others have a single, androgynous Archon. As the cosmic entities of the setting, the Archons need no character sheets: they're plot devices, able to do anything the GM wants but with little ability to affect Earth directly. They pursue their plans through intermediaries. Archons have strange, nigh-unpronounceable names such as Erathaol and Khoolkh.

The Archons' chief vassals are gods of mythology, such as Zeus, Thor, and Isis. In Hell, the archdevils are demon-gods like Moloch (Semitic), Ereshkigal (Sumerian), or Emma-sama (Japanese). Each god has his own domain within a dimension, with a population of lesser spirits. The Archons and mythic gods are not monolithic in their goals and methods. They have their own rivalries, and may follow different goals and methods. Some gods play along with the Archons' schemes for reasons of their own, even though they don't think the Archons can succeed, or don't want them to succeed. Some gods, for instance, think they can win the Supreme Being's forgiveness by helping humanity as superheroes.

Many sorts of lesser spirits also dwell in these dimensions. Hell, of course, has demons and the souls of the damned. Some spirits are purely fantastical, while others are drawn from diverse mythologies, such as the Maskim from Mesopotamian mythology, or the Oni from Japanese legend. All sorts of mythical spirits, races, and monsters come from the planetary spheres, as do elementals. Angels are a special case: spirits of light who look like the usual image of angels — winged people in white robes, with shining haloes — serve the Archon of Shemesh. True angels, who bear messages from the Supreme Being, appear as thousand-winged figures, taller than mountains and blazing with supernal glory. On Earth, they appear only in visions, but might manifest in the planetary realms.

chapter three:



STYLES OF MAGIC

ARCANE ARTS

CLASSES OF MAGIC



I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped and let 'em forth
By my so potent art.

William Shakespeare, The Tempest

Spellcasting practically defines mystical characters. Even charlatans pretend they have magical powers, or believe they do. Mystics are seldom described as just "doing magic" with no hint about *how* they do it. Fiction portrays few mystics as able to do anything and everything, either. Typically, a mystical character practices a particular school of magic — an arcanum, in Hero Games terminology. A character's arcanum sets limits: what the character' magic can and cannot do, and how the character casts spells.

Other *HERO System* books (notable *Fantasy Hero* and the *Fantasy Hero Grimoires*) describe numerous arcana and provide hundreds of spells for players and GMs (though admittedly primarily from the perspective of High Fantasy, which may not be what you want). These works emphasize the structural aspects of designing arcana: whether to allow Power Frameworks, which spells characters can learn, and the like. There's no need to repeat that material. Instead, *The Ultimate Mystic* looks at types of magic from the character's point of view. Each arcanum presupposes a certain view about what magic is, how it works, and what procedures a mystic uses to gain magical powers and cast spells (and thus, what sorts of powers and spells he can possess).

To this end, this chapter describes several arcana inspired by real magical beliefs — some more directly than others. Gamemasters and players can use these arcana directly for historical or contemporary Fantasy games. You can also use them for invented worlds by changing the historical details. More ambitious GMs can use these arcana as patterns for designing their own schools of magic.

Each description begins with an overview of the arcanum's history. Next comes the magical theory — how mystics believe the magic works. A section of style notes describes the tools and procedures a practitioner uses, and suggests special effects for the magic. The next section discusses ways to represent the style in rules terms, including any standard Advantages or Limitations on spells. Each description concludes with a few sample spells.

This chapter covers a lot, but it's not universal: describing all the styles of magic from real history and folklore would take a very fat book indeed, and not even touch the many more arcana from fiction. But styles of magic tend to fall into a few general categories — natural magicians, whose power comes from the substances they use in their spells; ritual magicians, who cast spells using elaborate ceremonies and occult theories; and high magicians, who cast spells by act of will — and *The Ultimate Mystic* covers each of them in sufficient detail to satisfy most GMs and players. The Bibliography lists plenty of books with which you can do further research if you like.

Some arcana can fit in more than one class of magic, depending on the style of the campaign or the skill of the mystic. For example, comic book super-mystics all tend to be high magicians, whatever style of magic they say they use: a super-mage casts spells practically at will, with little need for the tools and procedures of lesser mystics.

High Magic

In its pure form, "high" magic works without any instrumentality at all — no magic words, talismans, or herbal brews, nothing. This is the magic of gods and spirits themselves. Mythological deities, demons, djinn, and the like don't muck about with drawing magic circles or other hugger-mugger, they just wish for something and it happens. People with the Evil Eye possess a form of high magic as well. But in most settings and genres, though, mortals need to perform long or dangerous mystical exercises if they want to gain innate magical powers.

Comic books emphasize fast-paced, flashy action, not explanation, so superheroic mystics usually employ high magic. Many of the wizards in Fantasy novels and *Fantasy Hero* campaigns are basically high magicians, too. High Magicians in fiction may keep a veneer of ritual magic — they may say some magic words, wiggle their fingers, or wave a magic wand — but the author never explains precisely how the magic works. The mystic can get along without these props if it suits the author's purpose.

Natural Magic

Natural Magic assumes that various substances possess intrinsic magical properties. Casting a spell is like baking a cake: you assemble the right ingredients, combine them in the right way, and the magic happens. The magic comes from the ingredients, not the person casting the spell. "Ingredients" for natural magic include herbs, stones, parts of animals (or humans), or water from various sources. Alchemy is the best-known school of natural magic.

A natural magician might choose ingedients based on *Sympathy,* the idea that appearances indicate magical properties. By this reasoning, a plant with lung-shaped leaves relieves breathing problems and a charm of feathers makes bad luck fly away. More literally, a fire spell might involve a drop of gasoline, while a death-spell could employ poison.

The principle of *Contagion* holds that things once in contact can still affect each other. Thus, a natural magician would cast a spell on someone by doing something to a snippet of their hair or clothing.

Any *Exceptional Object* can seem magical. A four-leaf clover, for instance, only seems magically "lucky" because most clover plants have three leaves. The first or last of anything often seems exceptional and magical.

Of course, some magical attributions are pure *Tradition.* Why is a rabbit's foot lucky, when it didn't help the rabbit? Why does the Yoruban god Orunla favor the colors green and yellow, or the Greek god Dionysus use the panther as his totem instead of some other animal? If there was a reason, people forgot it long ago.

Ritual Magic

Some magic uses complex rituals to evoke and control mystic power. Magic ceremonies involve magic words and prayers, the names of spirits, special gestures, magical diagrams and talismans, pictures and images of gods, sacrifices, and various symbolic tools.

Although ritual magic requires lengthy preparation, a character might not need to chant a ten-minute incantation and draw a rune-struck circle every time he wants to do magic. Ritual magicians often prepare their magic in advance so they can call upon it at need. Traditionally, they consecrate magic items such as wands and talismans, or they extort magical powers from powerful spirits. Getting the power or enchanting the tool requires a long, fancy ceremony. After that, however, the magician can trigger the magic whenever he wants. (In game terms you can simulate this with Delayed Effect, Charges, Focus, or other Power Modifiers, depending on exactly how you conceive of a particular ritual working.)

Appeals To Spirits occur in many forms of ritual magic. Either the spirits perform a task at the magician's command, or they grant some magical power to the magician. Many mystic rites include some form of sacrificial offering to the spirits.

Asceticism is another source of power. Fasting, meditation, breathing exercises, chanting magical phrases thousands of times, twisting your body in strange postures, and various sorts of self-torture are supposed to increase a mystic's spiritual force.

Names, Words, and Symbols are widely believed to carry magical power. Many traditions say a name carries the mystical essence of the person or god it refers to. "Magic words" come from archaic and scholarly languages, or are generated by occult theories. Symbols like the circle, the pentagram, or the Hindu *yantra* may derive from ancient cosmological notions or religions. Some traditions treat writing itself as a magical act, and so scribing mystic symbols and incantations becomes an important part of their magical practice.

Occult Sciences like astrology, kabbalism, and the *I Ching* often start as fortune-telling methods and develop into complex theories about the mystic forces of the universe. These theories give mystics a reason why their magic should work, and tell them what factors to include in a ritual.

Sympathetic Magic and *Special Substances* turn up in ritual magic as well as natural magic. Occult theories may supply connections between metals, herbs, animals, colors, perfumes, and other substances and qualities that are not immediately obvious from the principles of sympathy or contagion.

Most of the well-known real-world arcana are forms of ritual magic. A Kabbalistic magician, for instance, commands angels and devils through their names and the omnipotent Names of God. The Hermetic magic of the European Renaissance assumed the planets radiated mysterious influences that a mystic could direct by rituals. Hindu magicians cast spells through elaborate ceremonial sacrifices and prayers.

Witchcraft

Folk magic often blends together a little of everything. Folk magicians — "witches" — craft charms and talismans like theurgists, but invoke gods and spirits in a more overtly religious fashion, and draw upon folk traditions more than the complex occult theories of ritual magic. They use herbs, potions, and other mystical substances, so their art has a strong element of natural magic. Folk magicians often gain powers they use at will, too, for bits of high magic. Voodoo is an example of witchcraft.

TOO MANY WITCHES

"Witchcraft" has an awful lot of meanings. In common usage, it can mean any sort of black magic, European folk magic, Satanism, or the practices of modern neopagan groups such as Wicca. Anthropologists describe the Evil Eye as "witchcraft," along with vampiric powers such as projecting your soul to suck a person's blood. *The Ultimate Mystic* uses the term for any sort of eclectic magic, especially magic based on folk traditions, with Voodoo as the premiere example.

Why not use European folk magic? Chiefly because it's too diverse and fragmented. Voodoo has a well-documented origin, and a large, somewhat coherent body of practices shared by most of its sects. It's also an example of non-European magic, and a perfect example of a style of magic fused with a religious tradition. Besides, a Fantasy version of European witchcraft has already seen print in *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire,* and that should do for most games — just reduce or increase the power levels if necessary.



MAGIC BY CAMPAIGN TYPE

Magic styles also vary by the type of campaign. One sort of magic works in Superheroic campaigns; other sorts in Heroic games (particularly various forms of Fantasy), campaigns of consiracy and intrigue, and so on. This doesn't necessarily match the power level of the campaign: a conspiratorial horror campaign, for instance, might feature powerful but subtle magic, even though the characters are Heroic-level or even Competent Normal.

Heroic

The differences between magic styles are most pronounced in Heroic-level campaigns, since the characters have fewer points to spend and thus have to represent the restrictions on magic styles with Limitations to make spells more affordable. Mystics use the full panoply of ceremonies, tools, special times and places, and other paraphernalia when they cast spells. Mystics may know spells for attack and defense they can use in combat, but heavy Limitations still prevent them from becoming front-line fighters.

Typically, each arcanum features a range of magical effects and special feats of magic unique to it, which are denied to other styles of magic. A shaman can astrally project; a Hermetic magus, Hindu sadhu, necromancer, or alchemist cannot. The shaman summons totem-spirits; the Hermetic summons demons and elementals; the necromancer summons ghosts; the alchemist and sadhu cannot summon spirits at all. Even the feats of magic common to most magical traditions, such as healing disease or seeing omens of the future, use such different methods that no one could possibly mistake one sort of mystic for another. These differences not only help to distinguish the arcana, they give characters a motivation to study multiple styles.

Heroic-level magic is the default for the arcana described later in this chapter. The descriptions presume characters can produce flashy, obvious magic, but must take significant Limitations on their magic. Even Heroic-level high magicians suffer significant restrictions on their power level and the steps they must take to retain their magic.

Superheroic

In a Superheroic-level campaign, magic must be as fast and flashy as any other superpower or ability. Super-mages apply few, if any, Limitations to their spells and make extensive use of Power Frameworks. On the other hand, Superheroic magic also tends to be direct: super-mages don't curse someone from a hundred miles away, they fly in and blast him with a mystic bolt.

In terms of game mechanics, at least, very little separates a super-shaman from a super-kabbalist — or a mutant, for that matter. The differences between mystic traditions become mere details of special effects or visual style. For instance, perhaps an image of the Thunderbird flashes around the

shaman when he casts a lightning bolt, while the sigil of an angel briefly glows before the kabbalist. Mechanically, though, their lightning bolts differ not a whit from those of the supervillain Thunderbolt (who got his powers from a reactor) or the weather-controlling heroine Tempest.

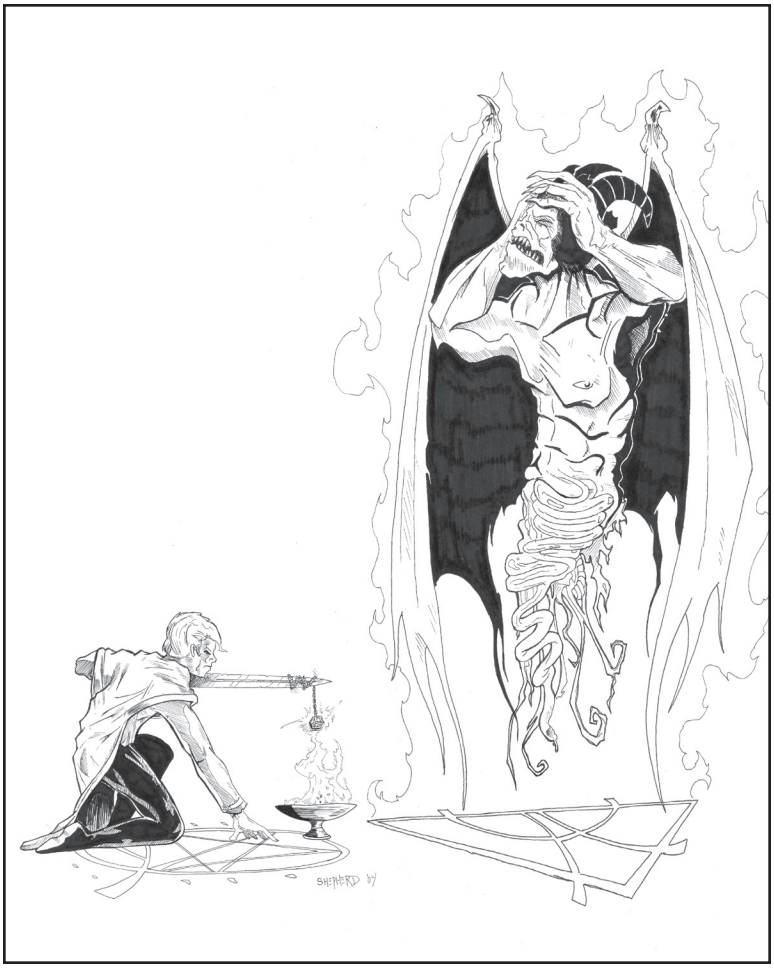
The distinction between Heroic-level and Superheroic-level magic is not absolute. Novice super-mages, in particular, may apply significant Limitations to their spells. But their magic remains as quick and easy to use as any other superpower. A super-mage defines his *Focus* Limitation with a wand, while a Heroic-level mystic might need a wand, a magic circle, and a brazier of incense. Thus, to convert spells described in *HERO System* products like *The Fantasy Hero Grimoires* to Superheroic forms, just strip away most (if not all) Limitations and adjust the Active Points to the level of the campaign.

"Realistic"

In the real world, self-styled magicians don't claim they can throw lightning bolts or turn people into toads. The contemporary magician says his powers are entirely nonphysical. He manipulates minds, unseen spirits, and luck. He can't *prove* his spell was responsible for the result. His "mind reading" could be a lucky guess. It could be a coincidence that someone fell ill or suffered an accident after a "curse." A determined skeptic could always explain the result as luck, mundane skill, psychological pressure, or even a fraudulent set-up by the mystic and accomplices unknown.

Example: *Three mystics all try to open an office safe by invoking Surgat, a demon with power over locks. The Superheroic-level mystic waves his hand and says, "Open in Surgat's name!" The safe glows and springs open. The Heroic-level mystic paints Surgat's sigil on the safe door and chants a five-minute incantation in Latin. The demon appears, receives its traditional offering of three hairs from a fox, and opens the lock. The "realistic" mystic draws the demon's sigil, chants the incantation, and burns the fox hairs, then searches the office. He finds the combination to the safe taped under a desk drawer. Coincidence? Maybe. But the "realistic" mage knows the combination wouldn't have been there if he hadn't conducted the ritual. In all three cases, the basic Power is the same: a Transform, "locked to unlocked." The methods and effects, however, are quite different.*

"Realistic" magic suffers far greater restrictions than Heroic-level magic. All effects must be deniable, all Powers undetectable by normal senses. Attacks are limited to Mental Powers and powers with Invisible Power Effects. Defenses against physical attacks are even more restricted: a "realistic" mystic could give himself extra DCV, or Combat Luck, but if an enemy holds him down and stabs him, he has no deniable way to resist the damage.



For all that, "realistic" mystics can wield great power. Their magic may be subtle and slow in its effects, but an accident can kill someone just as dead as a fireball, and it's a lot harder to trace the attack to its source.

Standard Heroic-level spells often do not translate into "realistic" terms. In many cases, you have to create a spell that achieves a similar purpose, but with deniable special effects.

REAL MAGIC STYLES



Some people assert that the feelings and conceptions of our souls can by the force of the imagination be rendered volatile and corporeal, so that, in accordance with their quality, they can be carried up to certain planets and, affected and strengthened by the power of the planet, they will come down again to us and will obey us in whatever we want.

Fabio Paolini, Hebdomades

These arcana are game adaptations of real magical styles — at least, some people say they're real. Hermetic Theurgy is a game version of Western ceremonial magic, from early grimoires to the Golden Dawn and other modern magicians. Tribal cultures around the world practice Shamanism. Sadhana is high magic found in India, while Voodoo is the magic of Afro-Caribbean religions such as Voudon, Santería, and Candomblé. The theories behind each arcanum are simplified and systematized more than they are in real life, and of course "real" magic is less flashy than these game versions. Nevertheless, the occult theories and spells are all based on what real-life mystics say they can do.

HERMETIC THEURGY

I invoke, conjure and command thee, O Spirit N., to appear and show thyself visibly before this circle, in fair and comely shape, without deformity or guile, by the Name of ON; by the name Y and V, which Adam heard and spake; by the name of JOTH, which Jacob learned from the Angel on the night of his wrestling and was delivered from the hands of his brother Esau; by the Name of God AGLA, which Lot heard and was saved with his family; by the Name ANEHEXETON, which Aaron spake and was made wise; by the Name SCHEMES AMATHIA, which Joshua invoked and the Sun stayed upon his course...

Lemegeton (Lesser Key Of Solomon)

Hermetic Theurgy is the dominant European form of ceremonial magic, built up over the course of 2,000 years. Occultists never agreed on a name for the European tradition of ritual magic. Many modern occultists just call it "Magick," with the "k" to distinguish it from stage illusions. The name used in *The Ultimate Mystic* comes from the history of Western magic.

The Neoplatonists practiced an art they called *theurgy* ("god-working"). Through rituals, they sought to obtain visions from the gods and imbue statues of the gods with magical powers. Christianity suppressed theurgy, but Renaissance Europe rediscovered the ancient world's magic along with its art, law, and science. Theurgic magical texts such as the *Picatrix* and *The Emerald Tablet* were attributed to an Egyptian wizard called Hermes

Trismegistos ("Thrice-Great Hermes"). Renaissance mystics referred to themselves as "Hermetic Philosophers": calling yourself a philosopher was a lot safer than calling yourself a wizard!

At the same time as the Neoplatonists, Jewish mystics invented *kabbalism,* which likewise offered visions of God and control of spirits. Enterprising magicians adapted kabbalism to more worldly ends such as amulets and curses. This "practical kabbalism" led to grimoires like the *Testament Of Solomon,* which tell how to summon and command demons using mystic symbols and the names of God. Some Renaissance occultists also devised a "Christian Kabbalism" that slid uneasily between spiritual mediatation and magic.

Late in the Renaissance, mystics combined Hermetic and kabbalistic magic in grimoires like the *Key Of Solomon.* Jewish Kabbalism itself remained little known until the nineteenth century. Occultists such as Eliphas Levi and Aleister Crowley later added older theurgic ideas such as the Astral Plane and pagan gods to the grimoires to invent the mainstream of modern Western magic.

Players and GMs can use Hermetic Theurgy as a pattern for other styles of ritual magic such as Taoist sorcery or Tibetan Tantric magic. The particular Foci differ, as do the relative emphasis on Gestures, Incantations, and other elements, but that's just window dressing. The technical differences between styles of ritual magic do not matter much in game terms.

Magic Theory

Western magical theory has evolved greatly in the last 800 years. Practicing mystics, however, might follow the Hermetic theory of past centuries in their spellcasting.

The Astral Plane

Renaissance Hermetics believed an invisible, intangible substance called *pneuma* ("breath") filled the universe. Classical mystics called this the ether, or quintessence. Later mystics called it the Astral Light. Spirits — including the human spirit — are made of pneuma. The Astral Light responds to thought and force of will. It also carries signals. Thus, a strong emotion or intense thought can stir a person's spirit and send an impulse that disturbs someone else's spirit, even though no physical connection seems to exist or arise.

Astrology

From ancient times, people believed the planets foretell or control earthly events. Renaissance astrologers decided the planets do not predict absolute destinies. Rather, they radiate a mysterious influence that predisposes events on Earth to happen in various ways, depending on their angles to each other and their place in the Zodiac. For instance, a committee of savants blamed the coming of the Black Death on an especially baleful conjunction of Mars (which influences disease) and Saturn (the planet of death).

Various gems, metals, plants, animals, perfumes, colors, and musical tones concentrate the energies of each planet. For instance, Mars has an affinity to iron, the color red, weapons, fire, stinging or thorny plants, and predatory animals. By combining these elements in a ritual, a magician attracts the power of Mars and shapes it to his will. He can also use the affinities to attract spirits associated with Mars. Each planet's power becomes stronger on certain days and hours, so a ritual is most effective if performed at the proper time.

Kabbalism

Ancient theurgy involved prayers to pagan gods, which was heresy in Christian Europe. Instead of pagan gods, however, the kabbalists gave each planet a ruling angel or demon. A magician could invoke these spirits to increase that planet's effect on a spell, or use planetary correspondences to draw power from the spirits.

The names of God carry his power, so magicians include them in their rituals. Numbers are perfect, abstract entities from the mind of God, so magicians use them, too. Each planet is associated with certain numbers. Mars's number is 5, for instance, so a Martial ritual includes that number in as many ways as possible.

In the nineteenth century, European mystics rediscovered the old literature of true kabbalism. They learned the concept of the ten *sephiroth,* or emanations from God. The sephiroth gave them an alternate classification system for mystical concepts and ritual elements. The occultists *very reluctantly* admitted that the Sun and planets do not orbit the Earth in crystal spheres. They matched the planets and signs of the Zodiac to the sephiroth, however, and so the sephiroth acquired the planets' affinities. For instance, Mars is associated with Geburah, "Greatness," the sepher of force and destruction, so a mystic can invoke Geburah using the metals, jewels, and other substances associated with Mars. Tarot cards, pagan gods, kabbalistic angels, and other mystic ideas extend this mammoth, tangled web of symbolism even further. The modern Hermetic now uses the kabbalistic "Tree of Life" (a diagram of the sephiroth) as his filing system and guide to designing magic rituals.

Synthesis: The Modern Hermetic Ritual

To cast a spell, the modern Hermetic performs a more or less complicated ceremony. Through intensive concentration on symbols, substances, and Words of Power, the magician creates a "thought-form" on the Astral Plane. Modern occultists say it doesn't matter whether the symbols of astrology, kabbalism, and pagan gods refer to external powers or aspects of the unconscious mind. Either way, these symbols can charge a thought-form with enough power to affect the physical world.

Once a magician builds a spell out of thought-forms, he can fire it off right away or store the power for later use. Hermetic theurgists prefer to bind the spell to a talisman. Once the magician consecrates a talisman, he can use it again and again. Other mystics personify their spells as spirit servants, or bind the spell-spirit to their own spirits

APPROPRIATE ANGELS

The old rabbis recorded the names and powers of dozens of angels, far too many to describe in detail. Here are several of the more important "elemental angels," with the phenomenon they control. These would be useful for the elemental spells that form such an important part of a Fantasy wizard's arsenal. Creating specific powers is left, as they say, as an exercise for the reader.

AFRIEL: force
AMABAEL: winter
ARARIEL: water
BARADIEL: hail
BARAKIEL: lightning
DUMIEL: silence
GABRIEL: fire, light
GARGATEL: summer
JEREMIEL: souls
KOCHBIEL: darkness
MAKTIEL: trees
MATHARIEL: rain
RA'AMIEL: thunder
RA'ASHIEL: earthquake
RACHAB: the sea
RUACHIEL: wind
SAHAQIEL: sky
SAWAEL: whirlwind
SHAMSHIEL: daylight
SHALGIEL: snow
SIKIEL: sirocco
THURIEL: wild beasts
TRSIEL: rivers
ZAKKIEL: storms



so they can use the power at will from then on. Again, whether the magician summons a real spirit or just imagines one doesn't matter: the power *acts* as if it were a spirit. In these ways, Hermetic theurgists gain magic powers they can use without performing a long ceremony. The greatest feats of magic, however, always require a complete ritual, which may take hours to prepare.

Style Notes

The literature of the Western occult tradition gives a wealth of information for GMs and players who want to add color to Hermetic characters. See the sidebars and below for quick-and-dirty summaries of Hermetic tools, spirits, and planetary affinities.

The special effects of Hermetic spells should reflect their occult background. For many spells, the special effect is a spirit appearing to perform some action. For superheroic mages, glowing symbols appearing in the air would make a good special effect: Hebrew letters for kabbalistic and angelic spells, astrological symbols for planetary magic, flaming sigils of demon lords for Satanic magic, and so on.

True Summoning

The acme of Hermetic Theurgy is to summon a spirit into visible, solid manifestation. Devils are the most powerful spirits available to a Hermetic magus, but also the most dangerous to evoke. They require especially intricate ceremonies. Just making the tools for such rituals can take months. Even the tools for making the tools must be handmade and consecrated! The magician must craft his own sword, knife, sickle, wand, staff, bell, trident, trumpet, pen, ink, cloth, paper, and book. Without such elaborate preparations, however, a summoned devil could escape restraint and destroy the magician. Elementals and other spirits aren't quite so dangerous to summon, and so require less preparation, but no summoning is ever completely safe.

Talismans

A *talisman* is a small object that confers some magical power on its bearer. If the talisman confers a passive, protective, and continuous power, the talisman is an *amulet.* Amulets and talismans can be as simple as a four-leaf clover, or as elaborate as an engraved and jeweled pendant.

The old Hermetics believed their amulets and talismans gained their powers from their materials, their shape, and the words, pictures, and symbols drawn upon them. In the nineteenth century, occultists such as Eliphas Levi and the Golden Dawn decided a talisman actually received its power from the labor of its creation. In shaping the talisman and consecrating it in a ritual, magicians impressed their own psychic force on the talisman and directed that power to some particular goal. The materials, form, and symbols merely helped the magician reach the right frame of mind. A talisman made of cardboard would work as well as one made of gold and jewels.

Consecrating talismans is one of the chief spellcasting methods of Hermetic Theurgy. Modern talismans are usually just simple disks, squares, or other shapes, inscribed with magic sigils and

sacred names. Some talismans include Bible verses written in Hebrew. Other traditional forms for talismans include rings, brooches, and pendants. The magician chooses all the details of the consecration ritual — the colors of the talisman, the time of the ritual, the incense burned, and more — according to astrological and kabbalistic correspondences.

Divine Names And Words Of Power

According to the kabbalists, every object, force, and process in the Universe has its own special angel. If you know the name of that angel, you can control it — and thereby control whatever the angel controls.

If you cannot find the name of the requisite angel, you can still employ the ineffable Names of God. Much of kabbalism was actually devoted to searching for divine Names hidden in the Pentateuch. The name YHVH held such power that even the term used to describe it — *Tetragrammaton,* literally "Four-Letter Word" — became a Word of Power.

Hermetic spellcasting usually includes divine names and Words of Power. A full ceremony involves chants and invocations to banish hostile forces, attract desirable energies, and command spirits to obey. The character can "key" a spell to a word, such as the name of an angel. The spell itself might be personified as a spirit with a name. The spell goes off when the caster incants the name of the spirit.

Planetary Associations

The Renaissance German occultist, Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, codified the magical associations of each planet. Since Agrippa, however, astronomers discovered three more planets! The discovery of Uranus, the first planet beyond Saturn, threw astrology into a spin from which it has yet to recover. Associations for the outer planets are still shaky, and few mystics invoke them. In the real world, astrologers haven't suggested metals or colors for the new planets. Mystics don't agree on Sephirothic attributions for the outer planets, either.

One occult theory says new planets take their mystical character from the dominant trends on Earth at the time of their discovery. (Well, from the dominant trends in the *Western world* at the time of their discovery. Asian astrologers return the favor by ignoring the new planets.) Each outer planet seems like a more intense version of one of the inner planets — the inner planet is raised to a "higher octave," in the words of one astrologer.

Sun: Fire; yellow; gold; Tiphereth. Astrologers associate the Sun with light, will, and the life force. By invoking the Sun, mystics not only create brightly luminous magical attacks, they can heal, enhance the magic of their friends, and banish spells that call on Dark Forces such as demons.

Moon: Water; white; silver; Yesod. Western astrology associates the Moon with change and things that change: emotions, mirages, illusions, and magic itself. It is a feminine planet, often considered quite sinister, or at least ambiguous. Mystics invoke the Moon's fluid power for spells of illusion and transformation. They also use Lunar energies to increase or decrease the power of other spells, or for secrecy.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS

Hermetic Theurgists use many special tools in their rituals, and might consecrate them as talismans to carry magic powers. At the very least, a magus must consecrate each tool separately by sprinkling it with holy water and passing it through smoke from special incense. Most tools bear mystic sigils as well. A Hermetic who uses diverse Foci for spells should still take a single *Focus* Limitation for his spells: the Focus is his satchel full of tools.

The major implements are:

Aspergillus: A bundle of dried herbs used to sprinkle holy water or other liquid. Magicians use it to consecrate other tools and as part of the initial rite to banish unwanted forces from his magic circle.

Athame: A ceremonial dagger. Magicians use athames to break magical connections, banish hostile forces, and perform other aggressive magical acts.

Baculum: A magic wand that's been to college, for especially pretentious Hermetics.

Censer: A bowl with some charcoal and incense burning in it. Hermetic rituals need special incenses depending on their purpose. Not only does the incense help set a mood, spirits form temporary bodies out of the smoke.

Chalice: A consecrated cup, also called a grail. It's used, naturally enough, for containing and receiving — often literally, as a container for sacred anointing oil, or filled with water for scrying. A chalice also represents the Communion cup: mystics like to say they have God on their side, even when they summon devils.

Crown: A symbol of authority. In the *Key Of Solomon* the Crown is just a paper circlet bearing the inevitable symbols. In a superhero campaign, a Hermetic mystic could enchant the mask of a costume as a Crown.

Magic Circle: Every Hermetic ceremony must be performed in a special diagram. Not all of them are circular. The classic five-point star (the Pentagram) is the simplest example. Elaborate magic circles may include candles, braziers, bundles of herbs, or exotically noxious substances such as the skull of a parricide and a bat drowned in blood.

Magic circles concentrate and direct the energies of the ritual. They also protect the mystic from hostile entities, either by keeping them outside the circle or keeping them inside a designated part of the diagram. This is not a spell or power: any spirit summoned by a Hermetic mystic has the Disadvantage that it cannot cross a properly drawn and consecrated magic circle. The proper drawing and consecration may require a Skill Roll, though.

Pentacle: Another name for a talisman. Confusingly, the term may also refer to a magic circle.

Ring: To summon some spirits, the magician needs a magic ring to protect him. Rings make an excellent form for talismans, too (Inaccessible Focus).

Robe/Costume: Hermetic ceremonies require special clothing. The traditional mage's costume was based on an old-time scholar's gown, but modern Hermetics might wear up-to-date symbolic garb: "Obey, spirit! By the Power Tie of Solomon, I command it!" A century and a half of stage magicians give powerful symbolism to a top hat and tails, too.

Sword: A magician threatens reluctant spirits with a magic sword, or attacks hostile forces. The sword doesn't have to touch its target: the symbolism of the weapon is enough. The grimoires all say ceremonial swords must be made of unalloyed metal.

Tarot Cards: The Tarot cards have grown far beyond mere fortunetelling to become an important part of Western occult symbolism. Modern theurgists say Tarot cards make excellent talismans. The 22 "Major Arcana" work best since they have the most vivid symbolism, but in some decks all the cards carry distinctive illustrations.

Wand: Wands and rods symbolize authority, like the bishop's crozier or the monarch's scepter. Sorcerers use wands to summon and direct magic forces. A Hermetic adept could own several wands for different purposes, each made of different materials or in different designs.



Mercury: Air; grey; quicksilver; Hod. The swift motion of Mercury led to associations with thought, travel, and exploration. Mercury's qualities of restlessness and impersonal, abstract thought give it an amoral aspect. Hermetics invoke Mercury to gain information through mind-reading and various forms of Clairsentience, or for movement.

Venus: Earth; green; copper; Netzach. Brilliant Venus is associated with love, beauty, pleasure, fertility, plant life, and the gentler emotions. The "Lesser Beneficent" is more useful for calming opponents than overwhelming them. Yet Venus is not an entirely benevolent planet; it is also Lucifer the Morning Star. Venus can be used to manipulate and seduce — as, for instance, love charms.

Mars: Fire; red; iron; Pachad. From the most ancient times, people associated the red planet with bloodshed, fever, war, and all violent emotions. Yet the "Lesser Maleficent" also supplies courage, energy, and force of will. Magicians employ Mars for works of violence, hate, and destruction, but also for defense.

Jupiter: Air; blue; tin; Chesed. The planet named for the King of the Gods carries associations of rulership, law, and justice; also money, faith, morals, truth, the sky, and weather. Mystics invoke the "Greater Beneficent" for magic of authority, domination, and all forms of social power, though it also has use in weather control and storm-based attacks. Jovian energies are also nearly as good as Mercury for getting at the truth.

Saturn: Earth; black; lead; Binah. Slow-moving Saturn, the outermost planet known to the ancients, has associations with time, slowness, weight, age, and death, as well as boundaries and restrictions. The "Greater Maleficent" is the planet that binds and destroys. Yet Saturn has its purpose in the scheme of things: it forces people to face their own limitations and overcome them. Saturn also provides stability and perseverance. Magicians, however, usually employ Saturn's darker aspects to hinder or harm their enemies.

Uranus: Sir William Herschel discovered Uranus in 1781, when the Age of Reason bore the fruit of revolution and laid the foundations of modern science. Uranus governs science, technology, electricity, and revolutionary change. Its element is Air. In many ways Uranus echoes Mercury. Aluminum would seem like an appropriate metal: it was discovered just a few decades before Uranus and is manufactured using electricity. None of the yet-unassigned colors seem appropriate for Uranus, so it receives Transparence — no color at all, not even white. Alternatively, it receives orange, on the grounds it's the only color left.

Neptune: This planet was discovered in 1846, a time of confusion and uncertainty. Romanticism reached its full hysteria; Communism, Anarchism and other -isms challenged the political Establishment; just two years later, a wave of abortive revolutions swept Europe. Neptune mystically resembles the Moon. It governs mysticism, madness, dreams, gasses, and other unbounded, indefinite things. This character makes Neptunian magic peculiarly difficult to defend against. Neptune's element is Water. Magnesium (extracted from sea water) might be an appropriate metal, and cyan (blue-green) an appropriate hue.

Pluto: The newest and outermost planet — so far — was discovered in 1930. Scientists penetrated the structure of the atom while Nazism, Fascism, and Soviet totalitarianism consolidated their power. Pluto raises the traits of Mars to fearsome intensity. Mars rules violence and war; Pluto rules holocaust and death. Mars governs willpower; Pluto governs mass movements, the "Triumph of the Will" over reason and conscience. Mars is fiery, but Pluto is *thermonuclear,* the planet of radical, shattering transformation. Pluto also governs everything "underground," literally or metaphorically, such as mines and tunnels, espionage, secrecy and treachery. The perfect metals for Pluto would be plutonium or uranium, but platinum is pretty good: the platinum family of metals fall right below iron in the periodic table of elements — a fair analogy to the metal of Mars raised to a "higher octave." As a suggestion, Pluto receives purple, the dark hue of royalty and absolute power.

Game Mechanics

Summon is the most characteristic Power for Hermetic mystics. A Hermetic magus buys the Power with massive Limitations: Bulky or Immobile Foci (to represent the numerous tools involved), lots of Extra Time, Concentration, Incantations, the Side Effect of an outraged and unbound spirit if something interrupts the ritual, and *definitely* a Magic Roll to reflect how it's so easy to make a mistake in such a complicated project.

If a Hermetic Theurgist wants a spirit he can call at will to fight or serve, he can evoke the spirit in a full ceremony, bind it to serve, and then key it to a talisman. By invoking the talisman, the sorcerer can make the spirit instantly appear to fulfill its obligation. In game terms this is Summon bought through a Focus, probably with Charges and Incantations. The spirit is at least Amicable, since it has already agreed to serve; the *Specific Being* Advantage usually isn't required, since the specificity of the spirit is just a special effect with no game effect. At the GM's option, a magus might instead gain a spirit as a Follower, or simply buy the spirit's power(s) outright as abilities through a Focus (for example, a thunder-spirit bound to a wand for the purpose of projecting lightning bolts could be bought as an RKA 4d6).

ADVANTAGES

Describing a talisman as "stored magic" may suggest Trigger or Delayed Effect. Players can use these Advantages as they want, but it isn't obligatory. The talisman is adequately represented as a Power on a Focus.

LIMITATIONS

The magical ceremony may impose a variety of Limitations. Characters can reduce the cost of noncombat spells (such as summonings and divinations) by requiring a full ritual each time they casts the spell.

Charges: Charges represent a magical Focus that carries a limited amount of energy, or a power the character cannot use more than a certain number of times per day. Perhaps a ritual only grants a magical power for a limited time, and the magus must perform a small "booster ceremony" every day to replenish or regain it.

Concentration: Ceremonial spellcasting demands all the character's attention. Moving even an inch beyond the magic circle, because of carelessness or stepping away from an attack, can ruin the spell — perhaps dangerously so.

Extra Time: A grand ceremony to summon a demon lord might require a full week of preparation as the magus prays, takes special baths for purification, and engages in other rites to the exclusion of all other activities. Most ceremonies take at least an hour. For a Heroic-level Hermetic, even the weakest spell takes at least five minutes to cast. That's why Hermetics rely so much on the "stored" magic of talismans or Independent magic items.

Focus: A Hermetic Theurgist needs a wide variety of special tools to cast spells, as described above. Most talismans are Universal Foci. Any sorcerer (at least, any Hermetic) can use any talisman if he makes a Magic Roll, although talismans quickly burn out when used by anyone but their creator. A talisman's maker can keep it working indefinitely by repeating its consecration every few months. Some sorcerers, however, might enchant talismans no one else can use (Personal Foci).

Gestures: Gestures can represent waving the magic wand or ritual "god-form" postures used to invoke pagan gods.

Incantations: A Hermetic ceremony includes long Incantations replete with divine names and other Words of Power. The magus commands the spirit to appear and threatens dire consequences if it does not.

Independent: Some talismans may be Independent as well as Foci.

Limitations of Time and Place: A character might be able to cast powerful spells only at a special time or place. Such "ritual conditions" can be as simple as *Only At Night* or *Only In A Church* (suggested value: -½) to *Only On A Mountaintop, At Midnight, With The Full Moon In Pisces* (at least -2). In the Hermetic grimoires, many spells only work if they are cast on the day and hour of the proper planet; the *Window Of Opportunity* Limitation (page 63) simulates this.

Requires A Skill Roll: Heroic-level Hermetics always must succeed in a Magic Roll for ritual spellcasting. Invoking a prepared talisman might not require a Skill Roll every time, but the first use in a scene may call for a Magic Roll adjusted to make it Jamming (as if it were an Activation Roll), to see if the talisman has exhausted itself.

Side Effects: Summoning ceremonies always carry this Limitation. If the theurgist makes even the slightest mistake (*i.e.,* fails the Magic Roll), he faces an angry spirit that can cross his magic circle. Interrupting the character's Gestures, Incantations, or Concentration, or damaging the magic circle, may also result in this Side Effect.

Variable Limitation: This Limitation greatly increases a Hermetic Theurgist's flexibility, allowing him to have a "preferred method" for casting his spells, but with a "backup" method or two if he needs it.

DISADVANTAGES

Hermetic Theurgists can use a Vow to justify a number of Disadvantages: they must keep up a schedule of rituals and consecrations to retain their power. If this rarely interferes with adventuring, the Vow is worth only a small Disadvantage. The Vow might be represented as an Activation-based Dependence, a Susceptibility, or a Physical Limitation, depending on the details of how the character's Powers diminish. If the power loss is rapid and severe, the Vow may be worth more points.

Sample Spells

LIGHTNING BOLT

Effect: RKA 3d6
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 225"
END Cost: 4

Description: This typical attack spell conjures a bolt of lightning that flashes from the mystic to his target. A Hermetic who invokes planetary energies would cast this spell using talismans of Jupiter (for air and weather) and Mars (for war and celestial fire). A mystic who prefers kabbalism could invoke Barakiel, angel of lightning, while holding a dagger (symbolic of fire) or wand (symbolic of air). A modern syncretist might use the Tarot card called the Tower Struck By Lightning, with an appeal to the Egyptian sky-god Shu. The base version assumes a Heroic-level campaign in which magical attacks seldom exceed 40–45 Active Points.

Game Information: *RKA 3d6 (45 Active Points); OAF (suitable talismanic items; -1), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 15 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell I: Increase to RKA 4d6. 60 Active Points; total cost 20 points.

2) Strong Spell II: Increase to RKA 5d6. 75 Active Points; total cost 25 points.

3) Weak Spell: Decrease to RKA 2d6. 30 Active Points; total cost 10 points.

4) "Realistic" Spell: The magician curses his enemy in a lengthy ritual. Sometime within the next week, lightning strikes his enemy. Or maybe not. Add Area Of Effect (One Hex Accurate; +½), Indirect (always strikes from above target; +½), MegaArea (1" = 10,000 km; +1¼), Time Delay (random number of days; +¼), Extra Time (1 Hour; -3) and Limited Power (can only be cast in character's sanctum on propitious days and times; -1), and change the Skill Roll penalty to -1 per 20 Active Points. 157 Active Points; total cost 23 points.

5) Superheroic Spell: Increase to RKA 4d6; remove all Limitations except OAF. 60 Active Points; total cost 30 points.

SIXTH TALISMAN OF JUPITER

Effect: Armor (6 PD/6 ED)
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
END Cost: 0

Description: The *Key Of Solomon* says this talisman "serveth for protection against all earthly dangers, by regarding it each day devotedly, and repeating the versicle which surroundeth it. Thus shalt thou never perish." The talisman can be drawn on parchment in blue ink, but a mystic might prefer a sturdier version engraved on tin. A character activates the talisman by concentrating on it for one minute while repeating the versicle scribed around the talisman's rim: "They pierced my hands and my feet, I may tell all my bones" (Psalms 22: 16–17). The mystic can carry the talisman in his pocket or wear it as a brooch or necklace. Removing the talisman ends the protection.

Game Information: *Armor (6 PD/6 ED) (18 Active Points); IAF (talisman; -½), Concentration (0 DCV to activate; -½), Extra Time (1 Minute to activate; -¾), Incantations (to activate; -¼), 1 Continuing Charge lasting 1 Day (+0). Total cost: 6 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Armor (10 PD/10 ED). 30 Active Points; total cost 10 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to Armor (4 PD/4 ED). 12 Active Points; total cost 4 points.

3) "Realistic" Spell: Replace with Combat Luck (6 PD/6 ED). 12 Active Points; total cost 4 points.

4) Superheroic Spell: Increase to Armor (13 PD/13 ED); remove all Limitations except IAF. 39 Active Points; total cost 26 points.

SOLAR SPELL PACKAGE

Effect: Varies
Target/Area Affected:
Duration: Varies
Range: Varies
END Cost: Varies

Description: This is an example of a Multipower of spells suitable for a Superheroic-level Hermetic magus. Some slots are 60 Active Points or so; others are 30 Active Points. In practice, a Hermetic supermage specializing in planetary magic might have a Multipower of spells based on several planets. A Multipower with a 93-point reserve would let the character produce a 60-point and 30-point spell at once. The mystic must wear a talismanic ring of each planet's metal and jewel, and invoke the ruling spirit of each planet. For the Sun, this is a golden ring set with a topaz, ruby, or garnet.

Game Information:

Cost	Power
35	*Solar Spell Package:* Multipower, 62-point reserve; all powers OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	1) *Banish Dark Forces:* Dispel Magic 16d6, any Darkness Magic one at a time (+¼); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	2) *Enhance Magic:* Aid Magic 5d6, any Magic Power one at a time (+¼); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	3) *Solar Flare:* Sight Group Flash 6d6, Area Of Effect (3" Radius; +1); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	4) *Sun Bolt I:* Energy Blast 12d6; OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	5) *Sun Bolt II:* Energy Blast 8d6, Affects Desolidified (+½); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	6) *Sun Bolt III:* Energy Blast 5d6, AVLD (defense is Sight Group Flash defense; +1½); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
2u	7) *Light Of Life:* Healing 2½d6, any Characteristic one at a time (+¼); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
2u	8) *Solar Ward:* Force Field (10 PD/10 ED/5 Sight Group Flash Defense), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)
3u	9) *Sunlight:* Sight Group Images, +4 to PER Rolls, Increased Size (32" radius; +1¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OIF (talismanic ring; -½), Incantations (-¼)

Total cost: 60 points.

SOLOMONIC SUMMONING

Effect: Summon one devil built on 1,000 points
Target/Area Affected: One devil
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 0

Description: This spell is a full ceremony for evoking a demon lord, as described in the *Key Of Solomon, Lemegeton,* and other grimoires. (See Chapter Five for a list of sample devils.) Preparation for the spell involves a full week of fasting, prayer, and purificatory rites. The slightest error in consecrating the multitude of tools, or in drawing the magic circle, leaves the demon lord able to attack the magician. As it stands, the spell gives no control over the powerful devil: the summoner must rely on other magic, or his skills, to negotiate an advantageous pact with the devil.

Game Information: *Summon one demon prince built on 1,000 points, Expanded Class (members of the Descending Hierarchy or their minions; +½) (300 Active Points); OAF Fragile Bulky Arrangement (magic circle and a wheelbarrow-load of specially consecrated tools; -2), Concentration (½ DCV throughout; -½), Extra Time (1 Week; -4½), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (no Active Point penalty; -0), Side Effects (unconstrained demon lord can attack caster; -1), Window Of Opportunity (final rite must be performed during the proper hour, which occurs once per month; -2½), 1 Charge (-2). Total cost: 21 points.*

SHAMANISM: TRIBAL RITUAL MAGIC

Hermetic theurgy is one of the most "bookish" styles of magic. At the other extreme, shamanism began long before writing and is taught entirely through direct experience and apprenticeship.

Shamanism is a widespread and extremely ancient religious and magical tradition. Cave-paintings suggest it may date back to the Paleolithic Age. Shamanism's classic form occurs in Siberia (the word "shaman" comes from a Siberian tribal language) but the Inuit, Native Americans, Indonesians, and many other cultures also practice shamanism, each in their own way. There's evidence of shamanism practiced long ago in Europe, India, China, and Tibet. The art is also alive and well in the modern world. Mexican *brujos* and *curanderos* shamanize for rural peasants... and the wealthy elites of California.

Defining shamanism isn't easy. It blurs into other religious and magical professions such as priest, exorcist, and healer, but the core feature of shamanism is the shaman's ability to put himself in a trance. While in a trance, the shaman separates his soul from his body and sends it great distances through this and other worlds. This enables the shaman to deal with the gods and spirits directly.

In his spirit-body, a shaman escorts the spirit of a sacrificed animal to the gods. He can search for wild game and people lost in the wilderness, and queries spirits about their activities. If the tribe suffers a period of bad luck, for instance, the shaman finds out what god or spirit the tribesfolk angered and how they can placate it. He exorcises evil spirits. Conversely, a shaman can send evil spirits to plague an enemy.

Most importantly, the shaman deals with soul loss. Many cultures believe a person can lose his soul from a bad scare, conflict with another person, an evil spirit, or simply by accident. People who lose their souls become too listless and depressed to function normally. What's worse, a case of soul loss can frighten other people so much that they lose their souls, too. An epidemic of soul loss can wipe out a tribe or village that lives hand-to-mouth. The shaman finds lost souls, puts them back in their bodies, and stops the contagion. To rescue a soul, a shaman may have to quest far into the spirit worlds. He climbs the cosmic tree or mountain that links Earth to the heavens; he descends the dark caverns to the land of the dead. Shamanism is not for cowards — but shamans know the spirit realms better than any other mystics in the world.

Magic Theory

A person can deliberately set out to become a shaman, but traditions agree the best shamans are chosen by the spirits themselves. Great shamans are always wild talents; scholar-mage shamans can never equal their power. As a young man (or, less often, woman), a future shaman suffers a period of moody, erratic, or hysterical behavior. This ends when he understands and accepts his shamanic calling. The shaman-to-be receives training from an older shaman, or from the spirits (often the ghost of a dead shaman).

The final step of a shaman's initiation into power comes through death and resurrection. In a vision, he experiences his own death and dismemberment. Then his spiritual patrons reassemble his body, or create a new one for him, and bring him back to life. The shaman now can travel the spirit worlds and serve as intermediary between the mortal and immortal worlds.

A shaman also absorbs some of the powers of a spirit himself. While in trance, a shaman may pick up burning coals or slash at himself with knives, to show they cannot hurt him. For more active magic, however, a shaman must ask the spirits for help. He can bargain with spirits for direct and immediate service, or bind a spirit into a magical item called a fetish.

Style Notes

The classic shaman enters his trance by drumming, dancing, and singing. In some cultures the shamans use drugs as well. In his trance, the shaman narrates and mimes his journey through the mortal and spirit worlds, supplying the voices for all the spirits he meets.

Shamans often wear a special costume when they work their magic. A Siberian shaman's costume consists of trousers and a caftan-like garment of cloth or deerskin, decorated with fringes, bells, metal plates or small mirrors, chains, cowrie shells, appliqué patches, or other ornaments. Deerskin boots and gloves, a tippet, an ornamented lamen or breast-cover, and a hat or skullcap complete the ensemble. Some shamans wear a crown of iron horns or a copper mask. A Siberian shaman's all-important drum, the "horse to the Otherworld," consists of a supple branch, said to come from the World Tree, bound in a circle and covered by a skin membrane painted with figures of spirits. Shamans also employ homely Foci such as bullroarers, rattles, and charms made from wood, bone, feathers, and other natural substances.

Game Mechanics

Some shamans may be nothing more than clever conjurors, using Acting, Oratory, and Sleight Of Hand to fool their clients. A shaman with real magic should have these Skills anyway, as well as Conversation to psychoanalyze patients, Persuasion or Trading to make deals with spirits, Paramedics for first aid, and Knowledge Skills for herbal medicine, the spirit world, and detailed knowledge of the community. A shaman needs to know his people inside and out so he can identify dangerous conflicts and guide the individuals back to harmony.

A basic shaman needs no magic except Astral Form (see pages 54-58). The shaman gets things done in the spirit world by knowing who to talk to and what to say, not by raw power. Other spells consist of services the shaman can reliably gain from spirits. For instance, his astral form can fly because his bird-spirit familiar is always ready to carry him. A shaman can lay a curse on someone because another spirit is always ready to work malice on his behalf. A more fantastical shaman permanently buys powers from the spirits (for example, the "Spirit Claws" of a totem animal), which he may have to invoke using talisman-like Foci. A shaman may also own Independent magical fetishes.

A "realistic" shaman, like any other "realistic" ritual magician, is limited to mystic feats with no obviously visible special effect or connection to the shaman, such as a curse that makes the victim fall sick or gives him bad luck so he breaks his leg the next day. A shaman probably has spells to influence the spirits, such as Summon to call them, Mind Control to persuade them, or Dispel to drive them away. Mental Powers let him affect mortal souls, too. A Heroic-level shaman might have spells for



any effect you can connect to the gods and spirits of the shaman's culture. Shamanic magic emphasizes natural phenomena such as plants and animals, weather and water, earth, sky, health, and disease. A few modern shamans seek to understand the strange new spirits of the city (see *Technomancy,* page 149).

Finally, real shamans must know herbal medicine. A Fantasy Shaman could expand this into knowledge of powerful magic drugs like those employed in Voodoo.

ADVANTAGES

Like a Voodoo practitioner, many of a shaman's spells need Invisible Power Effects. They also compensate for the heavy Limitations on their spellcasting through BOECV targeting and Mind Scan, or Area Of Effect (One Hex Accurate) with MegaArea to strike targets from far away.

LIMITATIONS

A "realistic" shaman requires at least 20 minutes of Extra Time before spellcasting, as he places himself in a trance. The process may also require Gestures (dancing), Incantations (singing), and a Focus (the shaman's drum, rattle, drugs, or other implements). You might even simulate the shaman's costume with OIHID.

Unlike most astral travelers, an entranced shaman's body does not lie in an oblivious stupor. The shaman continues to dance, mime, and sing, and he doesn't crash into obstacles. Shamans should use the Duplication form of Astral Form, because body and spirit both remain active (though you could define the special effect of "fleshly body remains inactive" as "fleshly body can do nothing but dance around in a circle," if you prefer). The shaman's trance may still count as Concentration, though.

A shaman's immunity to wounding and burning requires no further Limitations. Other magic may require Gestures, Incantations, or Foci, at least for "realistic" and Heroic-level shamans. Since shamanic magic isn't completely reliable, spells should also carry Requires A Magic Roll, and possibly Side Effects (the spirits strike back at the shaman in some way). Superheroic-level shamans in a *Champions* or high-powered *Fantasy Hero* campaign might cast their spells as effortlessly as any other comic book sorcerer.

DISADVANTAGES

A shaman must work constantly to remain friendly with the spirits. He is Hunted (Watched) by the spirits and gods. He may also be Hunted by rival shamans, especially from other tribes. Typical Psychological Limitations include, *Never Questions The Dictates Of The Spirits* or *Doesn't Care About Anyone Outside The Tribe.* A *Gunslinger Mentality* when it comes to confronting other shamans is possible, too. In some cultures, shamans take Vows or Prohibitions. A shaman's costume may count as Distinctive Features.

Sample Spells

POINTING THE BONE

Effect:	RKA 1D6, BOECV, Does BODY
Target/Area Affected:	One character
Duration:	Instant
Range:	LOS
END Cost:	5

Description: Every shamanic tradition includes death-curses. For Australian Aborigines, this takes the form of "pointing the bone": aiming a short section of kangaroo bone at the victim while concentrating on the curse.

A spell with normal, Heroic-level Active Points isn't strong enough to kill outright. A shamanic spell, however, seldom kills quickly. Instead, the cursed person gradually sickens and dies. In the tight confines of a small, tribal community, a shaman can use this spell repeatedly with no one the wiser. Most often, though, the victim and everyone else knows about the curse. Sheer terror and the certainty of death finish the curse's work as the victim stops eating or sleeping, and the rest of the community treats him as someone already dead. A victim who rallies support from his friends and neighbors can make the shaman back down.

Game Information: *RKA 1d6, BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1), Does BODY (+1), Invisible to Sight Group (source of power is visible, power itself is not; +¼), Delayed Effect (+¼) (52 Active Points); IAF (rod of kangaroo bone; -½), Extra Time (20 Minutes, storing Limitation; -2½), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), Side Effects (2d6 RKA from offended spirits; -½). Total cost: 10 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to RKA 2d6. 105 Active Points; total cost 21 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to RKA ½d6. 35 Active Points; total cost 7 points.

3) Superheroic Spell: Remove Delayed Effect and all Limitations except Focus. 49 Active Points; total cost 33 points.

SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Effect:	Multiform
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Persistent
Range:	Self
END Cost:	0

Description: In legend, shamans often turn into animals. This Heroic-level spell enables a shaman to become one sort of animal — his personal totem. A "realistic" shaman could only do this in his astral form. This example uses a grizzly bear (from *The HERO System Bestiary*) as the shaman's animal form, with extra points so the shaman can retain human intelligence.

Game Information: *Multiform (become a 150-point bear with a human mind) (30 Active Points); OAF (drum, animal skin, or other ritual paraphernalia; -1), Concentration (½ DCV; -¼), Extra Time (20 Minutes to activate; -1¼), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼). Total cost: 7 points.*

Options:

1) Multiple Forms: The shaman can take four animal forms, none built on more than 150 points. 40 Active Points; total cost 10 points.

2) Quick Spell: Reduce Extra Time to 1 Turn to activate (-¾). Total cost 9 points.

3) Focus-Free Spell: Remove Focus. Total cost 10 points.

4) Unreliable Spell: Add Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost 7 points.

5) Superheroic Spell: Remove all Limitations. Total cost 30 points.

SPIRITUAL ARMOR	
Effect:	Armor (6 PD/6 ED)
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	Self
END Cost:	0

Description: This spell represents a shaman's immunity to wounds and fire. It's a Heroic-level version, in that protection lasts after the shaman's trance-inducing dance ends, but ends once he's Stunned, Knocked Out, goes to sleep, or the like.

Game Information: *Armor (6 PD/6 ED) (18 Active Points); Concentration (½ DCV to activate; -¼), Extra Time (20 Minutes to activate; -1¼), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), OIHID (shaman's costume; -¼), Nonpersistent (-¼). Total cost: 5 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Armor (10 PD/10 ED). 30 Active Points; total cost 9 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to Armor (4 PD/4 ED). 12 Active Points; total cost 3 points.

3) Unreliable Spell: Add Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost 4 points.

4) "Realistic" Spell: Spell requires Concentration, Gestures, and Incantations throughout. Total cost 4 points.

5) Superheroic Spell: Remove all Limitations except OIHID. Total cost 14 points.

SADHANA: INDIAN HIGH MAGIC

India boasts one of the richest mystical traditions in the world. Self-styled sorcerers practice their trade openly and receive enthusiastic support from all levels of society, from peasants to government ministers. Of course, many wonder-workers are frauds or, at best, entertainers who promise nothing more than an hour's amusement. Hundreds of thousands of Indians, however, sincerely devote their lives to mystic arts.

Although India has a tradition of ritual magic (see *Mantra-Vidya,* page 132), early foreign visitors were most impressed by mystics who seemed to work magic by will alone. Instead of casting spells, they possessed intrinsic magic powers. The most amazing were the ascetics who performed superhuman feats such as lying on a bed of nails without suffering injury. Indian ascetics claimed their meditations and strange exercises gave them the power of gods. Indians call the magic of asceticism *sadhana,* "Gaining," and specific magical powers are *siddhis,* "Achievements." A Sadhana adept is a *sadhu.*

Hindu asceticism began more than 2,000 years ago as a revolt against the extreme ritualism of the Brahmin priest-magicians. Ascetics claimed anyone could achieve magic powers. More than that, they promised magical transcendence — that sufficient austerities and mystical enlightenment could literally turn a mortal into a god.

Asceticism remains an important part of Hindu religion and mysticism, and became central to Buddhism and other offshoot religions as well. Eastern philosophers promote asceticism as a way to discipline the mind and explore altered states of consciousness. In the popular imagination, though, asceticism is the easy way to magical power. Saying a mantra 100,000 times, or standing in a river for a week without eating or sleeping, may not seem "easy" — but you don't actually have to know anything, wrestle with dangerous spirits, or possess any special moral virtue. True mystics warn you can't gain magic by mechanically following a set of instructions, but many Indians try nevertheless.

Magic Theory

Asceticism grants mystical power in several ways. Like Hinduism itself, Sadhana embraces multiple doctrines, not all of them mutually consistent.

Hindu doctrine says the world is nothing but an illusion, called *maya* — a sort of mirage or trick played on the mind. Meditation and austerity place a mystic in altered states of consciousness in which he can perceive the illusory nature of the world. Asceticism also strengthens the mystic's will so he can take control of the world's illusion and change it for himself and others.

The biggest illusion of all is the illusion of human identity. Hindu doctrine says the individual soul doesn't really exist. It's a mere facet of the transcendent Godhood itself, called Brahman. Salvation consists of understanding that your mortal identity is just a mask for the Supreme Being. As God incarnate, of course the mystic can alter the world to suit himself.

Even if a mystic doesn't achieve this pinnacle of enlightenment, his austerities can give him power over the illusory lesser gods such as Indra or Shiva. Asceticism increases a mystical quality called *tapas,* "heat." This mystical "heat" disturbs the gods. If a mystic's "heat" grows strong enough, the gods may offer gifts of power just so the mystic reduces his *tapas* instead of burning the gods.

Indian mystical philosophy includes the idea of *prana,* "breath," an ambient mystical energy identical to Chinese *ch'i* or the Hermetic *pneuma.* The body also contains a potent mystical fluid of its own, *kundalini.* Meditation and austerity gather *prana* into the body, energizing the *kundalini* so it rises up the spinal column, activating mystical power centers called *chakras* as it goes. As more *chakras* activate, the mystic gains greater magical power.

Over the centuries, Indian ascetics developed many techniques to alter their minds and increase their mystical power. The easiest is the *mantra,* a phrase or syllable recited over and over again. Each mantra condenses some great mystical truth into a sentence, and then into a "seed syllable." Concentrating on the mantra helps quiet the mind for meditation.

A *mudra* is a gesture, either with the hand alone or holding some ritual object, repeated over

BUDDHIST SADHANA

The Buddhist lamas of Tibet, Nepal, and neighboring countries practice their own version of Sadhana. The lamas place more emphasis on mantras, mudras, meditation, and philosophy, and less on yoga, strange diets, and active self-torture. According to legend, the lamas develop mystic powers much like the sadhus.

Buddhist tradition warns that magic powers gained through ascetic practice can distract a mystic from his proper goal of liberation from worldly desires. A devout lama hesitates to use his powers as anything but a benchmark of his own spiritual progress. Buddhism extols compassion as one of the supreme virtues, however, so no one objects if a lama uses his powers to relieve the suffering of others. Indeed, the *boddhisattvas* — holy men who help humanity, instead of taking the final step to Nirvana, or extinction of ego and desire — are revered almost as much as the Buddha himself.

THE GREAT SIDDHIS

Hindu tradition lists eight magical powers that surpass all others. In order:

Animã: Shrinking, to perceive "things of the minutest size, even the inside of the atom." It's not clear whether this is physical shrinking, or merely clairvoyant.

Mahimã: Expanding as vast as the cosmos "as though all the worlds were laid out before one." Again, this might involve mystical perception.

Continued on next page

and over during meditation. Mudras have their own symbolic meaning, as do the implements held. The most common implement is a short wand with a point at each end, called a *dorje* or thunderbolt-scepter.

Ascetics also regulate their diet. At the very least, a sadhu must become a vegetarian: food tainted by killing would wash away his mystical purity. Mystical regimens also include periods of fasting.

Yoga postures discipline the mind and body alike, channeling mystical energies as well as promoting bodily health. The demands of a sickly body would distract a mystic from his meditations. Simply remaining immobile for a very long time is considered a mystical achievement; stories tell of ascetics who remained immobile so long that termites built mounds around them.

Breathing exercises, called *pranayama,* further train the mind and body. They also infuse the mystic with more *prana* than the human body normally holds, increasing his mystical power. Exercises range from simply learning to hold one's breath for longer and longer periods, to strange feats such as "cycle breathing," in which the sadhu inhales through one nostril while exhaling through the other.

Some ascetics go beyond disciplining the body to active self-torture. Heat, cold, piercing the flesh, and stranger torments all find their use in sadhana. Feats such as staring at the sun or being buried alive for a month are not merely advanced austerities, they show off the superhuman power an ascetic has already achieved.

Style Notes

The *siddhis* gained through asceticism often have no visible effect, or they affect the mystic himself. Typical feats include supernatural knowledge about other people; immunity to fire, cold, or wounding; and teleportation. Sadhus can also exorcise spirits. The standard lists of *siddhis* include flashier feats such as transmutation of matter, however, as well as commanding the wills of other people, changing your size, and taking the form of animals. Perhaps incongrously for ascetics, the popular literature of Sadhana also describes a great many *siddhis* concerned with sex.

Unlike most arcana, Sadhana offers few options for ranged combat. On the other hand, Sadhana offers unusual options for hand-to-hand combat, since the traditional *siddhis* include superhuman strength, toughness, and immovable heaviness so you can never be knocked off your feet. According to one story, the sage Milarepa could grow so large he could rip apart a castle with his bare hands.

The traditions of Sadhana suggest a mystic could gain almost any power he wanted, though, by extorting it from a god. A master sadhu could demand Indra's thunderbolt or Agni's fire as his price to curb his overflowing *tapas.* The traditional lists of *siddhis* also includes power over everything in the world and granting of all desire... which should certainly be enough to create any power a mystic wants.

Game Mechanics

The lore of Sadhana shows that its practitioners place few if any Limitations on their powers. Most *siddhis* are usable at will. A master requires no special equipment or procedures. The *Power: Sadhana* Skill Roll is based on EGO, not INT. Concentration (to represent a meditative trance), Gestures (for a mudra), Focus (objects carried while Gesturing), and Incantations (for a mantra spoken to activate the magic) are plausible Limitations for a sadhu who hasn't fully mastered his magic, but even in such a case the character should have some powers with no Limitations. To offset the costliness of many of their powers, the GM could permit practitioners of Sadhana to buy them in Power Frameworks.

DISADVANTAGES

Practitioners of Sadhana absolutely must take Disadvantages based on vows and prohibitions (see page 67). Not only must a sadhu eschew eating meat, his fasts, periods of meditation, and other austerities surely justify a large Physical Limitation: if he breaks his regimen, most or all his power disappears.

Sadhus who dedicate themselves to Shiva go naked, smear their bodies with ash, and never wash, comb, or cut their hair. They also carry Shiva's symbolic weapon, a trident. This is grounds for a Distinctive Feature in many campaigns.

Buddhist lamas might justify a small Distinctive Feature based on their monastic robe, shaved head, and hat. Lamas also may belong to a lamasery, giving them a *Subject To Orders* Social Limitation.

Sample Spells

DENY THE SOLID WORLD

Effect:	**Desolidification**
Target/Area Affected:	**Self**
Duration:	**Constant**
Range:	**Self**
END Cost:	**4**

Description: Hindu and Buddhist masters know solid matter is an illusion. They can learn to ignore that illusion, concentrating instead on the words of their prayers.

Game Information: *Desolidification (affected by magic) (40 Active Points); Concentration (½ DCV throughout; -½), Incantations (throughout; -½), Requires A Sadhana Roll (-½). Total cost: 16 points.*

Options:

1) Silent Spell: Remove Incantations (-½). Total cost 20 points.

2) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Sadhana Roll (-½). Total cost: 20 points.

3) Master Spell: Remove Incantations and Requires

A Sadhana Roll (-1). Total cost 27 points.

4) Tireless Spell: Add Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), but keep all Limitations. 60 Active Points; total cost 24 points.

5) Superheroic Spell: Remove all Limitations. Total cost 40 points.

GARIMÃ

Effect:	Density Increase
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	Self
END Cost:	0

Description: Through the power of *garimã,* a mystic makes himself the cornerstone of the Universe, with the mass of every star and planet resisting any attempt to move him against his will, and adding their force to his own exertions. Well, not quite. By concentrating on being the center of the universe, however, the *sadhu* does make himself too heavy for ordinary mortals to lift, and superhumanly strong as well.

Game Information: *Density Increase (1,600 kg mass, +20 STR, +4 PD/ED, -4" KB), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (30 Active Points); Concentration (½ DCV, must Concentrate throughout; -½), Extra Time (One Turn to activate; -½), Requires A Sadhana Roll (-½). Total cost: 12 points*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Density Increase (6,400 kg mass, +30 STR, +6 PD/ED, -6" KB). 45 Active Points; total cost 18 points.

2) Weak Spell: Reduce to 15 points of Density Increase. 22 Active Points; total cost 9 points.

3) Utterly Immovable: Character also buys Knockback Resistance -8", with the same Limitations as the Density Increase. 16 Active Points; total cost 6 points; total cost of power 18 points.

4) Invulnerable As A Mountain: Character also buys Armor (10 PD) with the same Limitations as the Density Increase. 15 Active Points; total cost 6 points; total cost of power 18 points.

5) Superheroic Spell: Remove all Limitations. Total cost 30 points.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS

Hindu and Buddhist mystics gesture with implements such as these as they meditate and chant their mantras, but this list is far from complete. These implements also find use in Buddhist ritual magic.

Chakra: The wheel or discus, emblematic weapon of Vishnu. An eight-spoked wheel symbolizes the Noble Eightfold Way of Buddhism. Wheels also symbolize the cycle of reincarnation.

Damaru: A hand-drum carried by several Hindu deities; also used in Buddhist ritual music.

Dorje: Thunderbolt-rod. A short rod with conical tips. Symbolizes Indra's thunderbolt, or the divine force of Buddhist doctrine that shatters illusions and wickedness. Also called a *vajra* ("diamond").

Kapala: Skull-cup made from the top of the cranium, used in rites dedicated to fierce deities such as Shiva, Kali, or Buddhist *dharmapalas.*

Mala: A rosary, used to count prayers or mantra repetitions.

Mani: A jewel, representing the mythic Wish-Granting Gem. Also called a *ratna.* A common implement for Buddhist or Hindu deities.

Pasa: A snare, a cord or chain with knots or metal knobs at the end. Emblem of Lakshmi, Shiva, and Varuna, used by them to rescue the lost or to bind enemies.

Phurbu: A thunderbolt-dagger used to stab demons. The central portion is a *dorje,* with a demon's head for the pommel.

Sankha: A conch trumpet, sometimes mounted in silver or bronze. An emblem of Vishnu.

Trisula: The trident; an emblem of Shiva and carried by some Buddhist figures as well.

Visra-Vajra: Thunderbolt-cross of two intersecting dorjes, held by some Buddhist idols.

KNOW BY SIGHT

Effect:	Detect Person's Name
Target/Area Affected:	One person
Duration:	Constant
Range:	No Range
END Cost:	0

Description: Eastern mystics often display uncanny knowledge about people they meet: their name, occupation, where they live, or other commonplace information — except they have no way to know these things about people they never met before. This example lets a sadhu know a person's name. Most of the time, it's just a cute trick to impress visitors, but it could come in handy for catching spies, learning the Secret Identities of supervillains, or piercing other disguises and incognitos.

Game Information: *Detect Name (INT Roll) (no Sense Group). Total cost: 3 points.*

Options:

1) Ranged Spell: Add Ranged. Total cost 8 points.

2) General Spell: This form of the spell tells the sadhu a lot more general personal information about the target. Change to Know Personal Information, and add Discriminatory. Total cost 15 points.

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Laghimã: Weightlessness, to walk on water, levitate, or move with incredible speed.

Garimã: Weightfulness, "as heavy as a mountain, so one cannot be moved."

Prãpti: Instantaneous travel, so "one can touch distant objects like the moon."

Prãkãmya: An irresistible will, to obtain anything by wishing it so.

Vashitva: Control over all creatures and elements, past, present, and future.

Îshitva: Godlike mastery over all things, through all of time, creating or destroying anything at will.

Other important *siddhis* include remembering past incarnations; understanding the speech of animals; transmutation of metals; or mastering the wills of others.

VOODOO: AFRO-CARIBBEAN WITCHCRAFT

There is malice, oh!

Voudon ritual chant

This section should be called "Magic of the Afro-American Religious Complex," but that's just too long and scholarly to endure. This tangled mess of African-derived religion and sorcery might as well take the name best known to Americans: *Voodoo.* Players can use Voodoo, a mixture of natural magic, ritual magic, and religion, as a model for the folk magic and witchcraft of many tribal cultures.

African slaves carried their religious ideas and folk magic to the New World. In what became the United States, the ruling whites outnumbered the slaves, so Christianity overwhelmed most of the slaves' African religions. In Brazil and the Caribbean, however, black Africans outnumbered the white Europeans by dozens to one, so the old ways fared better.

The slaves adopted a veneer of Catholicism to hide their beliefs from their masters, producing several hybrid cults: Macumba, Santería, Voudon, and many others. Native American beliefs seasoned the mix. Later came bits of Spiritualism and European grimoire magic. The Voodoo religions are still evolving.



The larger, more public Voodoo sects serve the same functions as any religion. The priest asks the gods to bless, protect, and assist the members of the congregation. Worshippers may consult the priest-magician privately for more personal goals, however, such as fortune-telling, a love charm, or a spell to drive away evil spirits and curses — or a curse of their own to put on an enemy. Officially, a Voodoo priest only casts hexes on deserving targets, but ideas of guilt can become... flexible... when the client is a congregation member and the target is a stranger.

Until recently, mainstream, "white" culture tarred all the Voodoo religions with the same brush. Voodoo meant blood-crazed cultists dancing orgiastically to pounding drums while devil-masked priests stuck pins in dolls and raised zombies from the grave. Serious, unbiased studies of Voodoo are quite a new thing; Voodooists had good reason not to go public.

Though Voodoo ceremonies involve drumming and dancing, there's far less overt sexuality in one than in, say, the hotter music videos. The congregation cooks and eats sacrificed animals; repugnance at seeing your dinner butchered is a peculiarly modern and Western quirk. The thought of human sacrifice and magical murder disgusts most Voodooists as much as any good Christian, Buddhist, or Secular Humanist.

Most... but not all. The horrors of slavery, poverty, and oppression drove some people to invoke powers of death, destruction, and vengeance instead of life and healing. Sinister cults, steeped in murder and sorcery, grew alongside the better-known Voodoo sects. Even today, these cults keep their secrets remarkably well. In the 1950s, the anthropologist Lydia Cabrera discovered the vicious Abakua cult surviving in the hinterlands of Cuba, decades after even the Cuban peasants dismissed the cult as long extinct. In 1989, the disappearance of an American college student in Matamoros, Mexico led to the discovery and suppression of another murderous Voodoo cult, which may have practiced Abakua. Ominously, reports from Cuba say that country's collapsing economy has caused a resurgence of Abakua.

The cults of Voodoo form a spectrum. Santería and the "Rada" form of Haitian Voudon represent the most benign face of Voodoo. The "Petro" branch of Voudon worships fiercer gods; the *bokors* (sorcerers) of Petro Voudon cast death-curses for their clients. Santería priests warn against the necromancers of Palo Mayombe. Mayomberos concede they rob graves and command ghosts, and some mayomberos act as supernatural hit men, but they don't kill humans in their ceremonies. The secretive Abakua cult is rumored to do just that; certainly the Matamoros cultists did. The Matamoros cult leader, Adolfo Jesus de Constanza, tortured his victims, sometimes skinned them alive, then ripped out his victim's heart and drank his blood — if possible, before the victim lost consciousness and died.

Some Voodoo Sects

Abakua: The most vile and vicious of the Voodoo sects derives, like Palo and Petro Voudon, from Congolese sources by way of Cuba. If the Matamoros cult was actually Abakua, this cult's rites feature human sacrifice of the most grotesque sort.

In the nineteenth century, the Cuban people greatly feared Abakua cultists called YaZigos. They were part Mafia and part Boogeyman, and notorious for their magical skill at kidnapping and murder. The authorities eventually suppressed the YaZigos and they were forgotten. Like the Japanese ninja clans, the YaZigos actually retreated into the hills, where Dr. Lydia Cabrera found them in the 1950s. (Unfortunately for research-minded GMs, Cabrera's work on these "Voodoo Ninjas" does not seem to be available in English.)

Batuque, Candomble, Macumba: These are the older forms of Voodoo in Brazil. They resemble Santería, right down to the names of the orishas.

Obeah: Obeah, the form Voodoo takes in Jamaica and the West Indies, emphasizes practical magic over religious devotion. The "obeah men" conduct a thriving business in curses and counterspells — and they often back up their curses with poison.

Palo Mayombe: Also called Palo Monte. This cult derives from Congo tribal beliefs by way of Cuba. Chief deities include Zarabanda the messenger, El Cristo Negro the king of the dead, and La Madre de la Luna, queen of the sea. A *palero* or *mayombero* also employs ghosts to commit magical murder and give him a spirit's invulnerability to harm. According to one author, not all paleros use their powers for evil; a few American doctors supposedly study Palo because of its vast store of medical magic as well. Still, the mayombero's scepter is a human shinbone wrapped in black cloth; the focus of his power, the *nganga,* is a cauldron filled with human remains stolen from graves, animal blood and other noxious ingredients. This is not a faith for the faint of heart.

Santería: This Voodoo sect originated in Cuba. Its gods, the *orishas,* come from the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Santería terminology and liturgy mixes Yoruban and Spanish. Cuban immigrants spread Santería through black and Hispanic communities in the United States. The sect now gains white converts as well. The orishas are temperamental but on the whole benign. Santería priests are called *santeros.* Special priests, called *babalawos,* use a complex fortunetelling system called the Table of Ifa. By now, most major American cities have a *botanica,* a shop for herbs, icons, and other Santería supplies.

Umbanda: This Brazilian cult combines traditional African and Catholic elements with a form of Spiritualism to create a rather complicated hierarchy of orishas, angels, Native American spirits, and saints. Umbanda ceremonies may include a séance. Umbanda has a "black magic" version called Quimbanda.

VOODOO TERMINOLOGY

Ashé: In Santería, the magic power within natural substances, especially herbs.

Asson: A sacred rattle used in Haitian Voudon, a gourd filled with seeds or snake vertebrae, covered with a loose web of beads or more snake vertebrae.

Baka: An evil spirit in Haitian legend. It usually appears in animal form and may serve an evil sorcerer. The most common form for a baka is a goat-horned dog.

Bilongo: An evil spell of Palo Mayombe or Palo Monte.

Bizango: A network of Haitian secret societies with a fearsome reputation. It acts as a neighborhood court which decides whether a troublemaker should be punished by being turned into a zombie. Also called *Shanpwel, Zobop,* or many other names.

Canari: A pottery jar for holding the Ti Bon Ange after a person's death. Usually it's broken during the funeral rites. Also called a *Govi.*

Ceiba: The silk-cotton tree, the premier sacred tree in all the Caribbean sects of Voodoo. In the northern United States, many Voodooists consider a cedar tree an acceptable substitute.

Corps Cadavre: The body in Haitian Voudon, as distinct from the souls, the *Gros Bon Ange* and *Ti Bon Ange.*

Coup L'air: An "air" spell in Voudon, a means of harming someone from a distance without using a powder.

Coup Poudre: A "powder" or drug-based spell in Voudon.

Djab: In Voudon, a devil or baka.

Duppie: A West Indies or Jamaican ghost, also called a *Jumbie.*

Ebbo: In Santería, an amulet or talisman.

Empereur: Founder and supreme leader of a region's Bizango societies.

Fwet Kash: A sisal whip used in Bizango rituals.

Gad: A tattoo charm against evil, given at initiation into a Voudon society.

Gros Bon Ange: The "Great Good Angel," one of the souls everyone has in Haitian Voudon. Unless captured by magic, it immediately returns to God when a person dies. (Note: writers about Voudon, and even practitioners themselves, do not agree about which soul should be "Gros" and which should be "Ti.")

Guedé, Ghede: A Haitian graveyard spirit, known for malicious mischief and rampant sexuality. Also a proper name, a pseudonym for the Petro Voudon death-god Baron Samedi.

Hand: In United States Voodoo magic, a pouch filled with diverse ingredients, used to work magic. Functionally equivalent to a Hermetic Theurgy talisman.

Houmfort, Hounfort: A Voudon temple. It may be as simple as a tent.

Iruke: Ritual feather duster or fly whisk used in Santería to banish spirits.

Kisengue: A human tibia wrapped in black cloth, used as a scepter or magic wand by a Mayombero.

Loogaroo: In West Indies Obeah, a person who can take off his skin and become a vampiric will-o-the-wisp. From the French *loup-garou.*

Madoule: A miniature sacred coffin, the symbol of Bizango societies.

Mamadjo: The Obeah name for mermaid-like spirits who inhabit certain lakes and springs.

Nganga: A cauldron filled with blood, bones and other disgusting things; the fundamental focus of a Mayombero's power.

Npaka: An animal horn filled with a special liquid. It's used in Palo Mayombe to make ghosts manifest.

Omiero: A complicated potion used in Santería for medicine, consecration, and spells.

Otan: Sacred stone of an Orisha, which keeps a santero in touch with his gods. Otanes must be kept in ornamental bowls and occasionally "fed" with sacrificial blood or "cooled" with herbal baths.

Paquets Congo: A name for a "Hand" in Haitian Voudon.

Pierre Tonnere: "Thunderstones," allegedly created by spirits and thus filled with magic power. Actually they are Arawak axeheads.

Continued on next page

VOODOO TERMINOLOGY (CONTINUED)

President: Leader of a Bizango cell.

Reine: "Queen," a female rank in Bizango societies. A full Bizango cult will have a Premier Reine, Dieuxieme Reine, Troisieme Reine, Reine Drapeau and Reine Voltige. The last is often supposed to be a Loup-Garou (see *Loogaroo*).

Riego: Sprinkling with sacred liquid, used in Santería for consecration and exorcism.

Sahumiero: Fumigation with incense, used in Santería for consecration and exorcism.

Seance: A Bizango meeting.

Ti Bon Ange: "Little Good Angel" in Voudon, the part of the soul which carries the personality. It stays around after death and faces various dangers which houngans try to prevent.

Tonton Macoute: "Uncle Strawbag," a wandering conjure-man used as a traditional Haitian boogyman. The Duvalier regime patterned its notorious secret police on this legend and the *Guedé.*

Vever: Symbolic designs drawn in flour or ashes to attract the loa in Voudon. Abakua uses something similar.

Wanga: In Voudon, a charm or talisman used for selfish or harmful purposes.

Zombi Cadavre: A zombie of the flesh, missing only its Ti Bon Ange; the familiar sort of zombie.

Zombi Astral: A *Ti Bon Ange* captured by sorcery and kept in a jar as a slave.

Voudon: This sect comes from Haiti, with a long-established branch in New Orleans. Its gods, the *loa* or *mystéres,* come in two main groups. The benign Rada group derives from Yoruba gods. The Petro gods, either derived from Congo deities or originating in Haiti, are fiercer and more willing to help in works of vengeance and hate. The language of Voudon is Creole. Priests are called *houngans,* priestesses are *mambos, mamans,* or *hounsis,* and their temples are *houmforts* or *hounforts.* Voudon sorcerers (evil magicians) are *bokors.* Anthropologist Wade Davis discovered the notorious Voodoo Zombie is quite real, but created through drugs rather than necromancy. Like Santería, Voudon concentrates on possession by the gods, with a brisk sideline in curses and counterspells.

Magic Theory

Voodoo combines natural magic with ritual appeals to spirits. Most of the practical magic claimed for real Voodooists combines herbs and other natural ingredients with an invocation to a god or ghost.

All the Voodoo religions share four features: spirit possession; equating African gods with Catholic saints; belief that all natural things carry magical power; and blood sacrifice.

Spirit Possession

Voodooists believe in a complicated spirit world. They believe a Supreme God created the Universe, but he delegates the work of running the world to lesser spirits — the gods of Voodoo — whom believers call *orishas*, *loas, saints,* or other names. The spirits of the dead also play an important role in Voodoo, and a ghost can grow into a god. All these spirits can take over the bodies of willing humans. In a Voodoo worship ceremony, the worshippers meet their gods face to face. A few celebrants *become* gods for a short time. Incarnate through their worshippers, the gods can use their magic to help or harm.

Gods Into Saints

Each African god is identified with a Catholic saint or other religious figure. African slaves recognized features of their own gods in the statues and icons their masters made them worship. The slaves decided the saints and gods were just different names for the same beings. Yemanya, blue-robed goddess of motherhood and the sea, was the Virgin Mary; Jesus was Obatala, white-robed lord of purity; Babalu-Aye, god of healing, was St. Lazarus. Gods and saints could have different genders, as when the slaves identified St. Barbara with Chango, god of fire, lightning, and justice: both St. Barbara and Chango were just masks the spirit used to make itself known to mortals.

Natural Magic

Voodoo links the power of spirits to the magic of the natural world. Water, minerals, animals, and especially herbs possess magical properties that a clever person can exploit. Santería calls this natural magic *ashé* (ah-SHAY). Not only do Voodoo mystics use ashé to help them contact the spirits, the spirits can help the Voodooist direct ashé to more worldly goals. Professional Voodooists learn the uses of a multitude of herbs, animal parts, and other substances.

Blood Sacrifice

The last core belief relates to the third. The gods don't work for free. In return for help, you must feed them the life-force of sacrificed animals (or, in darker cults and at least in fiction, sacrificed humans). Actually, most religions contain blood sacrifice in some form or another, but few accept the exchange of blood for power in such a business-like way.

Style Notes

The magic of "real Voodoo" is seldom supposed to show visible effects. A cursed person gets sick or loses his job; a blessed person's problems end, and that's it. "Fictional Voodoo" is far more lurid. Voodoo's stealthy nature still accounts for much of its glamor, but a victim of Fictional Voodoo knows he's under attack, even if the attacking Voodooist remains miles away. A victim doesn't just quietly keel over from a heart attack — he hears the pulsating rhythms of the Voodoo Drums pounding in his head, catches a glimpse of the priest in full regalia holding the doll and pin, and *then* the pain hits.

Game Mechanics

Voodoo sorcery, like many forms of folk magic, can affect a victim from a long way away, which you can simulate in a variety of ways.

A significant part of Voodoo magic consists of magical drugs and potions. These might be written up the same way as Alchemy (see page 121).

ADVANTAGES

Voodoo sorcerers may attack their foes from miles away, using sympathetic magic. You can create such abilities in several ways, such as using Mental Powers, or powers given *Based On EGO Combat Value* (+1), with Mind Scan for targeting.

Alternately, you can build a Voodoo power with the *Area Of Effect* (One Hex Accurate; +½) Advantage, and then *MegaScale* the target hex. A scale of 10 kilometers lets a Voodooist target someone anywhere in a city; a great master might scale the target hex so it encompasses the entire world.

LIMITATIONS

Voodoo magic is extremely Focus-oriented. The Foci might not be noticeable, as with the drug-based magic that's so important in Voodoo, but almost every Voodoo spell operates through some sort of Focus. *Almost* — but not necessarily all. Other Limitations come from the need to perform a ritual when casting most spells, but no Limitation is truly universal for Voodoo.

DISADVANTAGES

The demands of his religion impose the greatest limits on a Voodoo sorcerer. The Voodoo gods are capricious: keeping their favor takes a significant investment of time and resources. This can be represented as a Vow-based Dependence, but it might be easiest to treat it as a Psychological Limitation (Duty to the Gods).

Voodooists in America may endure petty harassment from neighbors who object to their religion, particularly animal sacrifice. A 5-point Hunted (Watched by Local Authorities) is quite appropriate.

Sample Spells

CONTROL DOLL MAGIC

Effect:	Mind Scan plus various effects
Target/Area Affected:	One person
Duration:	Some Instant, Some Constant
Range:	LOS
END Cost:	Varies

Description: Probably the most famous feat of Voodoo magic is the control doll: a little mannikin of rags, wax or clay, charged with a bit of the victim's hair, clothing, or nail clippings. Its stuffing might include graveyard dirt, bone shavings, or herbs. The diabolical voodoo witch-doctor sticks a pin in the mannikin, and the victim has a heart attack. Mind control and other powers are supposedly possible through the control doll as well.

Actually, the "voodoo doll" is quite rare in real voodoo; it's more a feature of European witchcraft. However, control dolls are not unknown. What's more, control dolls can be used to transmit blessings as well as curses — but the curses are more notorious.

A control doll is most effective when used from a long way away, targeting the attacks using the doll's magic link to the victim. In such a case, voodoo sorcerers can concentrate and take all the time they want to make the attack, and the victim doesn't see it coming. Up close, victims seldom sit still long enough. The doll can still be used, but it can be taken away.

The doll written up here is more Superheroic, intended for combat uses more than curses, and so only works on victims relatively near the mystic. It lets the Voodoo sorcerer cause intense pain or actual heart attacks, hypnotize victims into working the sorcerer's will like a puppet on strings, or send horrible hallucinations. Constructing a doll that can strike from vast distances regardless of the obstacles between caster and victim requires many Advantages and high Active Point totals; see the *Doll Magic* spell on pages 205-06 of *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire* for an example.

Game Information:

Cost	Powers
12	*Control Doll:* Multipower, 62-point reserve; all slots OAF Expendable Fragile (doll fashioned in victim's likeness and containing pieces of or items from victim, plus silver pins, Extremely Difficult to obtain; -2¼), Only Works Against Specific Character For Whom Witch Has Prepared Doll (-2)
1u	1) *Domination:* Mind Control 10d6, Telepathic (+¼)
1u	2) *Hallucinations:* Mental Illusions 12d6
1u	3) *Heart Attack:* RKA 1d6, BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1), Does BODY (+1), Invisible Power Effects (all Sense Groups except Mental; +1)
1u	4) *Pain:* Ego Attack 6d6

Total cost: 16 points

ELEKES

Effect:	Mental Defense and Power Defense
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	Self
END Cost:	0

Description: The *elekes* are the bead necklaces of the five most popular gods of Santería: Obatala; Eleggua; Oshun; Yemanya; and Chango. Each necklace has its own pattern of colored beads. Properly consecrated, the necklaces grant the wearer limited protection from many of the subtler forms of magical attack.

Game Information:

Cost	Power
3	*Elekes:* Mental Defense (5 points + EGO/5) (5 Active Points); IAF (-½)
3	*Elekes:* Power Defense (5 points) (5 Active Points); IAF (-½)

Total cost: 6 points.

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase Mental Defense to 8 points and Power Defense to 10 points. Total cost: 12 points.

2) Shared Spell: The Voodooist can share the Elekes' protection with one other person who grasps the necklaces. Add Usable Simultaneously (up to 2 people at once; +½) to both powers. Total cost: 10 points.

FIRE CURSE

Effect:	Ranged Killing Attack
Target/Area Affected:	One Hex
Duration:	Constant (1 Minute)
Range:	205"
END Cost:	0

Description: This curse comes from Santería. It invokes Chango, god of fire and lightning, to destroy a building. The magician wraps a mixture of several powders in red silk and scatters it on the building's door at midnight, then burns a photograph of the building in the flame of a red candle. Some days later, the building catches fire. The magic makes One Hex worth of fire for one minute; with luck, the rest of the building catches and burns naturally. This is a good example of "realistic" magic.

Game Information: *RKA 1d6, Area Of Effect (One Hex; +½), Indirect (anywhere in target building where a fire could start; +½), Invisible Power Effects (to forensic investigation [investigators find a plausible real-world cause]; +¼), Time Delay (some time within the next week; +¼) (37 Active Points); IAF (powders, photograph, candle; -½), Extra Time (1 Minute to curse building; -1½), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 11 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to RKA 2d6. 75 Active Points; total cost 21 points.

2) Weak Spell: Reduce to RKA ½d6. 25 Active Points; total cost 7 points.

3) Heroic Spell: The Voodooist waves a red satin packet and fires appear wherever he wants. Remove Invisible Power Effects (+¼), Time Delay (+¼), and Extra Time (-1½); add Gestures (-¼) and Incantations (-¼). 30 Active Points; total cost 12 points.

4) Superheroic Spell: Increase RKA to 2d6; remove Remove Invisible Power Effects (+¼), Time Delay (+¼), Extra Time (-1½), and Requires A Magic Roll (-½); replace IAF (-½) with OAF (-1). 30 Active Points; total cost 15 points.

LOVE BATH LIQUID

Effect:	Seduction (PRE Roll +5)
Target/Area Affected:	One person
Duration:	Constant (5 hours)
Range:	Self
END Cost:	0

Description: The bread-and-butter magic of most Voodooists has nothing to do with combat; they make their living off spells to help people achieve ordinary desires... such as getting cozy with that special someone. This magical potion is a consecrated mixture of *omiero* and several other liquids and herbs added to an otherwise normal bath. For several hours afterward, the bather radiates a magic aura of sexual attraction. This isn't enough to force another person's will, but it can powerfully augment natural charms.

Game Information: *Seduction (PRE Roll +5) (13 Active Points); IAF Fragile (bath liquid; -¾), Extra Time (20 Minutes to activate; -1¼), 1 Continuing Charge lasting 5 Hours (-0). Total cost: 4 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Seduction (PRE Roll +7). 17 Active Points; total cost: 6 points.

2) Weak Spell: Reduce to Seduction (PRE Roll +3). 9 Active Points; total cost: 3 points.

ZOMBIE POWDER

Anthropologist Wade Davis discovered the infamous Zombie Powder really exists. Its chief chemical component is tetrodotoxin, obtained from either the puffer fish or the sea toad. The Haitian *bokors* who compound the drug, however, give credit to the shavings of human bone and the ritual of preparation. It can be blown in a victim's face, to be inhaled and absorbed through the eyes, or placed in a victim's shoes to be absorbed through the feet. Zombie Powder is not quite instantaneous, but will put anyone not protected by magic or a nonhuman metabolism into a deathlike trance in less than an hour. Only a close medical examination can tell that the victim is still alive. Yet the victim remains conscious through the pronouncement of death, the nailing shut of the coffin, burial.... The poison wears off anytime from 12 hours to 2 days later, at the discretion of the *bokor*. Then, the hallucinogenic Zombie Cucumber is used to complete the brainwashing process and turn a living man or woman into a mindless zombie slave.

In a Heroic-level campaign, Zombie Powder doesn't need to be written up as a power. A *bokor* merely needs SS: Voodoo Toxicology to compound it, and anyone can use the powder. In a Superheroic game, the whole process is a Major Mental Transform (free-willed human being into zombie slave) with hefty Limitations.

FANTASTIC MAGIC STYLES



These arcana stray a lot further from the claims of self-proclaimed magicians. In real life, alchemists never claimed they could brew potions to give people magic powers, and real legends of necromancers never have them menacing the world with armies of zombies. These classic arcana are best known from Fantasy stories, but they draw inspiration from genuine legends and belief systems. The descriptions suggest ways you might integrate these mystic arts into a historical or contemporary setting.

ALCHEMY

High-housed within the Alchemic Citadel,
We are served by Azoth and by Alkahest.
Out of the gleamless mire and sand we make
Pactolian metal. Fumed from our alembics
The world dissolves like vapors opium-wrought...

Clark Ashton Smith, "Soliloquy in an Ebon Tower"

Alchemy is an example of natural magic. The alchemist tries to exploit the supposed occult virtues of natural substances, concentrating and combining them into new substances with magic powers. The best-known goal of alchemy was the Philosopher's Stone that could turn lead into gold. The Elixir of Life, which cured all disease and made one immortal, was nearly as famous.

Alchemy was independently invented in Egypt, then India and China. The first alchemy consisted of recipes for creating colored metal alloys and fake jewels. Success led the alchemists to seek more ambitious transformations: if they could change a metal's color, why couldn't they change its properties completely — and turn lead into gold? In China, the alchemists looked beyond medicines for specific ailments to a universal medicine to prevent age and death itself.

For centuries, alchemy relied on purely physical and chemical processes such as heating, mixing, dissolving, and distilling. As long as the alchemists kept discovering new chemical techniques and reagents, the art flourished. In this way, European alchemists laid the foundations of modern chemistry and pharmacy. Occultism entered the art simply because alchemists had no other theory to explain the world — and no clear line was yet drawn between natural and supernatural influences. For instance, glassblowers thought that making properly clear glass depended as much on the phase of the Moon as the right mixture of ingredients.

In India, alchemy withered after only a few centuries. In China and Europe the art declined in the seventeenth century AD. The search for the Philosopher's Stone produced much fraud but little gold. In China, alchemists thought compounds of mercury and arsenic held the key to immortality. Emperor after emperor died of self-administered poison: so much for the Elixir of Life. In both cultures, the wealthy elite that kept alchemists in business realized they were wasting their time and money. The rise of science gave new alternatives to magic. As early as the sixteenth century, the alchemist and doctor Paracelsus called gold-making a delusion and said alchemists should turn to pharmacy. Nowadays, only a few crackpots believe in alchemy, or they say the whole thing was a complicated allegory for spiritual transformation.

At least, that's the public story. From the witch's cauldron flows a weirder, more secretive tradition of drugs to enchant the mind and body: of flying ointments, love potions, and the philters of Circe that changed men into beasts. The witches didn't write books about their art, but it too counts as alchemy. As the Elixir of Life shows, the two traditions never remained entirely separate. Most alchemists were no more than con men, or they honestly believed they could make gold if they found the right recipe. A few scholarly alchemists applied their laboratory techniques and arcane theories to the hand-me-down potion recipes of the witches. The result was a powerful art that could store magic for anyone to use.

On Earth, alchemical wizardry remained one of the most secret of magic arts. Magic in a bottle could have changed the world, but the world didn't want to be changed. Europeans wanted gold, nothing else. The Chinese were just as fixated on immortality. The patrons of this very expensive magic art wouldn't pay for any other alchemical product. On other worlds and in other histories, alchemy became a highly respected school of magic.

Magic Theory

Alchemy is based on the premise that natural substances have supernatural properties. At first glance, alchemy seems to break the usual pattern for magic, of using symbols to affect the material world. An alchemist selects his ingredients, however, based on occult theories rather than objective physical or chemical properties.

These magical properties are also very weak in their natural state. Laboratory processes concentrate the occult virtues of ingredients and combines them to further strengthen and shape their effect. The final product remains matter, but matter charged with supernatural power.

The raw materials, and the laboratory processes used upon them, symbolize the magical feat the alchemist hopes to perform. Brewing a potion is a ritual. In some worlds, following the ritual might be enough. In many settings, however, a mystic must understand the meaning of each ingredient and operation, just like any other ritual magician.

CLASSIC GOALS OF ALCHEMY

According to legend, several feats stand out as the greatest achievements of alchemy.

The Philosopher's Stone: Despite the name, accounts of alchemy always describe the wondrous catalyst as reddish or yellowish granules, rather than a solid. It's also called the Powder of Projection. A few grains of this powder can turn a pound of lead into gold, or iron into silver. To use the Stone, seal the powder and base metal in a crucible, and heat it for an hour.

Alkahest: Also called the Universal Solvent, because this potent liquid can dissolve many times its own volume of anything. Obviously, it's not possible to store Alkahest; you make two precursor compounds and mix them when needed. Some stories say alkahest is needed to make the Philosopher's Stone. The Universal Solvent would also make a potent weapon.

Elixir Vitae: The Elixir of Life cures all diseases and greatly prolongs life. Some accounts say the Philosopher's Stone is also the Elixir Vitae, which transforms base flesh as thoroughly as it transmutes metals. Some Chinese accounts say the Elixir of Life actually makes its user a divine spirit — though that sounds like a bit of ass-covering after an Emperor's poisoning.

Abiogenesis: Up until modern times, savants believed life could spontaneously generate from putrefying, dead matter. Some alchemists tried to create life from dead matter — especially the Homonculus, a miniature man created in a flask. Aside from being a really cool feat of magic, Homonculi were claimed to have oracular powers. Alchemists might create other creatures, as well. Doctor Frankenstein pursued a variation on abiogenesis, with what consequences everyone knows.

The Microcosm: The alchemist seeks to collect the essences of matter and life in a sealed flask, and coax them into forming a miniature world. The Microcosm recapitulates the seven days of Creation, including the appearance of two tiny homonculi — but at the end of this period, the flask explodes. Accounts of the Microcosm don't say this experiment has any practical goal. As with the Homonculus, the goal is simply to emulate — or usurp — the creative power of God.

Astrology

Alchemists took astrology as one of their guiding theories. Astrology claims that for any operation, from shoeing a horse to fighting a war, some arrangements of the planets are good and some are bad. The planets also have mysterious affinities for various metals, jewels, plants, animals, and other substances. Like a Hermetic theurgist, an alchemist might decide what combination of planets best represents the feat of magic he wanted, then select ingredients corresponding to those planets. He also performs his laboratory procedures at times when the influence of those planets is strongest and most favorable. For instance, an alchemist might distill a liquid seven times while the Moon is in Pisces. He might even decorate his lab equipment with astrological symbols.

Doctrine Of Signatures

The Doctrine of Signatures claims that visible forms reveal occult virtues. Thus, to treat heart disease you need an herb with heart-shaped leaves. The Chinese used arsenic and mercury in their immortality drugs because they thought these potent toxins could "kill" the mystical force of mortality itself. During the Renaissance, many doctors and alchemists accepted astrology and the Doctrine of Signatures as basic truths. Only in modern times did alchemists realize how magical these theories were.

Theories Of Matter

Early Western alchemists believed in the four Aristotelian elements of Air, Fire, Earth, and Water. In the Renaissance, however, an alternate theory gained credence. This theory labeled Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury as the elements of nature, each one contributing certain basic qualities of matter: dryness and flammability from sulphur, fluidity and metallicity from mercury, and rigid stability from salt. Combining these elements in the right ratio would create gold.

The alchemist did not, however, mean the common, everyday sulphur, salt, and mercury. He considered the actual substances impure. Transmutation required purified, supernatural versions of the elements. By the seventeenth century, alchemists focused on "Philosophical Mercury" as the key to turning lead into gold, among other wondrous feats.

Obviously Magical Substances

In a setting that includes magical creatures, alchemists might seek parts of their bodies as a way to exploit their powers. For instance, a potion that makes a person immune to fire might include dragon scales, salamander skin, demon ichor, essence of fire elemental, or other bits of creatures who use fire or resist it.

Style Notes

Alchemical magic takes the form of potions, pills, and powders. Most famously, alchemical products can grant a person temporary magical powers. Fantasy games popularized the potion, a liquid you drink to trigger its effects. Chinese alchemy, on the other hand, emphasizes pills made by mixing arcane powders with sweet, sticky jujube pulp — alchemical gumdrops. Other possibilities include sprinkled powders, oils or lotions, pellets and capsules, or even cupcakes with "Eat me" written on the top in frosting. Alchemical attacks — drugs, poisons, and the like — might need a victim to consume them unwittingly, or could be delivered by syringe or dart. Liquids sprayed from an atomizer or squirtgun, or powders thrown in someone's face, are other options. Magic that doesn't affect someone directly could take any solid or liquid form, or might be burned as a pellet or pastille.

Game Mechanics

In theory, an alchemist can brew a potion to grant the user virtually any power — if he can work out the right recipe (and, of course, within the limits set by the campaign). Alchemical tools and weapons can produce a wide range of effects, too, though effects based on transformation of the user's form seem especially appropriate. So are effects based on evoking physical properties, drugs, or toxins. For instance, an alchemist who wanted to immobilize a foe could squirt him with a drug that paralyzes him, a fluid that instantly hardens like concrete, or a potion that turns him to stone; or the alchemist could drink a Gorgon Eye Potion and gain the power to turn other creatures to stone.

Alchemical magic is distinctive, though, for lacking a spiritual component. For instance, Desolidified spirits often remain vulnerable to magic, but not to alchemical attacks (unless the power has Affects Desolidified, of course). Alchemy hardly ever produces mental or spiritual effects directly. Instead, a potion gives its imbiber mental powers, or the alchemist must administer a drug to his victim.

ADVANTAGES

Alchemy stands out from other magic because a practitioner can give magic to other people. The familiar "magic potion" is the classic example. The *Delayed Effect* Advantage represents this: the alchemist "casts the spell" in his lab, and then can pass around Charges of the potion for other people to use.

But don't forget that a character who can loan his powers out to other characters may have drastic effects on a campaign. If one character in a group can make all the other characters invisible or boost their Characteristics or powers, effectively the other characters have a bunch of powers they never paid for. Gamemasters should carefully scrutinize alchemist characters for anything that would make their group too powerful. This goes for NPC alchemists in villain teams, too! And only a fool would let a PC gain an alchemist Follower who would cheerfully hand out new powers to all his boss's buddies.

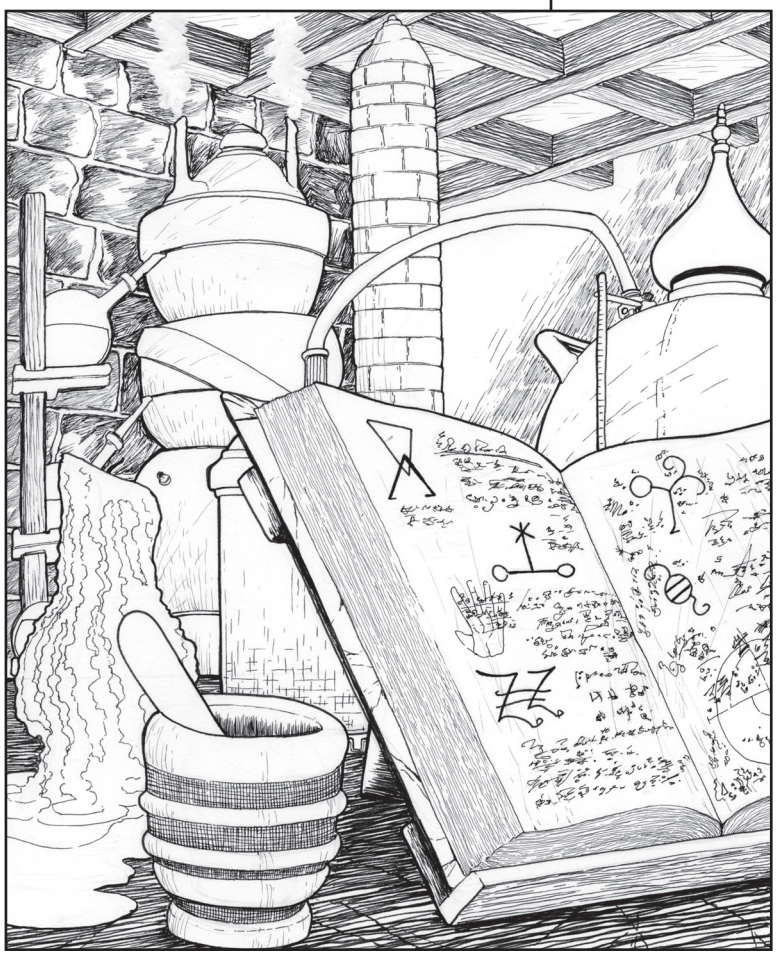
LIMITATIONS

This style of magic emphasizes Expendable Foci, and most alchemy has Charges, too. Other Limitations fall in two classes. "Storing Limitations" represent the alchemist's work in creating the potion. "Release Limitations" are restrictions or handicaps on a character who wants to use a potion.

Charges: This Limitation is easy to handle for Instant Powers, such as a healing potion or an alchemical grenade. Constant and Persistent Powers (such as Armor or Invisibility) can use Continuing Charges, as can Instant Powers with the *Continuous* Advantage applied so they remain in effect for a defined period of time (such as a potion that gives the imbiber the power to read minds [Telepathy] for the next hour).

Extra Time: Potions take a long time to prepare. This is a common Storing Limitation to go with the Delayed Effect. You don't have to use it, though. Since an alchemist can do other things while brewing a potion and does the work between adventures, the time involved seldom becomes an issue during play. Instead, you may prefer to apply Restricted Recovery to the Charges to represent the inconveniences of potion-making.

An alchemical product may also require Extra Time to use, as a Release Limitation. For instance, a magical unguent that must cover a user's entire body takes Extra Time to apply.



CHINESE ELIXIRS

These elixir names come from a Chinese alchemist's recipe book, the *Tan Ching Yao Chueh* of Sun Ssu Mo, translated with extensive commentary by Nathan Sivin. Sun Ssu Mo gives a long list of various "Immortality Elixirs," with recipes for several of them. Master Sun's names suggest many potion effects besides immortality, though.

Grand Unity Jade Powder Elixir

Fine Day Elixir

Grand Unity Spirit Summoning Elixir

Elixir of the Four Wonderful Substances

Elixir for Salvation from Distress

Wonderful Metamorphosis Elixir

Scarlet Snow and Flowing Pearl Elixir

Beaming Moonlight Elixir

Scarlet Brilliance Elixir

Nine Cauldron Elixir of the Yellow Emperor

Liquid Gold and Jade Flower Elixir

Eightfold Luminosity Elixir

White Snow Elixir of Master Mao

Elixir of Meteors' Halting at the Moon

Dark Pearl Elixir of the Emperor of the North

Elixir of Fright at the Falling of the Moon

Immortal Child Elixir

Focus: Potions, of course, are Foci. The Focus is usually Accessible, and Obvious to other mystics at least, even if a little Sleight Of Hand can conceal its use. Potions are also Universal Foci, and generally Fragile, too. A potion can be Expendable, but this depends on the expense and difficulty of obtaining ingredients.

Requires A Skill Roll: The length and complexity of alchemical recipes easily justifies a Skill Roll for each attempt to brew a potion. The Power Skill is called *Alchemy,* of course.

Side Effects: A failed attempt to brew a potion may result in a poison, an explosion, or the ever-popular *Delusion Potion:* the imbiber suffers a powerful Mental Illusion that the potion worked correctly. In this case, the Side Effect affects whoever uses the potion rather than the creator, so reduce the Limitation's value appropriately. Other alchemical products may carry their own Side Effects, such as explosions.

Gamemasters and players who prefer a uniform Side Effect for alchemy can use Transform. If a character fails his Alchemy Roll when trying to brew a potion, he suffers a lab accident and receives a certain number of dice of Transform. If these accumulate to twice the character's BODY, the character suffers some long-term debility, chosen by the GM.

DISADVANTAGES

Alchemy itself imposes no Disadvantages on characters. Alchemists can suffer a variety of debilities because of lab accidents, though. For instance, explosions might leave an alchemist hard of hearing (a Physical Limitation) or especially weakened against later poisoning (a Vulnerability). Plausible social Disadvantages include Hunted (watched by your employer, who may kill you if he decides you're a fraud), or Reputation (if people think alchemists are all crackpots).

Sample Spells

CONGEALED FROST ELIXIR

Effect:	Energy Blast 3d6
Target/Area Affected:	4" Radius
Duration:	Constant
Range:	RBS
Charges:	0

Description: This Chinese alchemical weapon must be kept in tightly sealed vials. To use it, uncap a vial of elixir and throw it as far away as possible. The magical powder explodes in a burst of snow and icy fog. This zone of more-than-arctic cold incapacitates anyone who isn't specifically protected against cold, or who doesn't leave the area quickly

Game Information: *Energy Blast 3d6, Delayed Effect (may have available a number of potions equal to character's INT; +½), Area Of Effect (4" Radius; +1), NND (defense is Safe Environment: Intense Cold; +1) (52 Active Points); OAF Fragile (-1¼), Extra Time (6 Hours to brew; -3½), Range Based On STR (-¼), Requires An Alchemy Roll (-½), 6 Continuing Charges lasting 1 Minute each (-0). Total cost: 8 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Potion: Increase to Energy Blast 4d6. 70 Active Points; total cost: 11 points.

2) Weak Potion: Decrease to Energy Blast 2d6. 35 Active Points; total cost: 5 points.

3) Apprentice's Version: Add Side Effects (GM's discretion, see discussion above; -½). Total cost: 7 points.

4) Difficult-To-Brew-Potion: Change to Requires An Alchemy Roll (-1 per 5 Active Points; -1). Total cost: 7 points.

5) Easy-To-Brew Potion: Change to Requires An Alchemy Roll (-1 per 20 Active Points; -¼). Total cost: 8 points.

6) Master's Version: Remove Requires An Alchemy Roll (-½). Total cost: 9 points.

7) Lengthy Potion: Add Extra Time (Full Phase; -½) as a Release Limitation. Total cost: 7 points.

8) Attentive Potion: Add Concentration (½ DCV; -¼) as a Release Limitation. Total cost: 8 points.

9) More Potions: Increase to Delayed Effect (may have available a number of potions equal to character's INT x 4; +1). 60 Active Points; total cost 9 points.

STEELSKIN POTION

Effect: Armor (8 PD/8 ED)
Target/Area Affected: One person
Duration: Constant
Range: No Range
Charges: 4

Description: This is a typical example of a potion to give someone a magical power for a limited time. The potion makes the imbiber highly resistant to damage for 20 minutes by turning his skin into living, flexible steel.

Game Information: *Armor (8 PD/8 ED), Delayed Effect (may have available a number of potions equal to character's INT; +½) (36 Active Points); OAF Fragile (-1¼), Extra Time (6 Hours to brew; -3½), Requires An Alchemy Roll (-½), 4 Continuing Charges lasting 20 Minutes each (-0). Total cost: 6 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Armor (12 PD/12 ED). 54 Active Points; total cost 9 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to Armor (5 PD/5 ED). 22 Active Points; total cost 3 points.

3) Apprentice's Version: Add Side Effects (GM's discretion, see discussion above; -½). Total cost: 5 points.

4) Difficult-To-Brew-Potion: Change to Requires An Alchemy Roll (-1 per 5 Active Points; -1). Total cost: Total cost: 5 points.

5) Easy-To-Brew Potion: Change to Requires An Alchemy Roll (-1 per 20 Active Points; -¼). Total cost: Total cost: 6 points.

6) Master's Version: Remove Requires An Alchemy Roll (-½). Total cost: 6 points.

7) Lengthy Potion: Add Extra Time (Full Phase; -½) as a Release Limitation. Total cost: 5 points.

8) Attentive Potion: Add Concentration (½ DCV; -¼) as a Release Limitation. Total cost: 5 points.

9) More Potions: Increase to Delayed Effect (may have available a number of potions equal to character's INT x 4; +1). 48 Active Points; total cost 8 points.

AZOTH

Effect: Healing all Characteristics 6d6, Resurrection
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
Charges: 4

Description: Few alchemical products make more friends for an alchemist than this one, the Life Principle isolated by Paracelsus. Azoth instantly heals even mortal wounds, as long as the person who uses the potion is still alive. Properly administered, Azoth can even restore life to the recently dead, if the body is more or less intact. If the body has been dead more than a few hours, or the user fails a Paramedics roll, the result is either a mindless husk or a totally unexpected consciousness (like, say, a demon). Embalming blocks Azoth completely. The mystic drug also counters all diseases or poisons, for either the living or the resurrected. Producing Azoth takes a full month of intensive labor, with several rare and expensive ingredients.

Game Information: *Healing 6d6, all Characteristics simultaneously (+2), Can Heal Limbs, Delayed Effect (may have available a number of potions equal to character's INT; +½) (227 Active Points); OAF Expendable (-1½), Extra Time (1 Month; -5), Requires An Alchemy Roll (-½), 4 Charges (-1) (total cost: 25 points)* ***plus*** *Resurrection for Healing (70 Active Points); same Limitations as above, plus Requires A Paramedics Roll (increases RSR to -¾), Side Effects (if Paramedics roll fails, Azoth reanimates the corpse as mindless husk, brain-eating zombie, or something even worse; -¼) (total cost: 7 points). Total cost: 32 points.*

NECROMANCY: WITCHCRAFT OF THE DEAD

Properly speaking, *Necromancy* is summoning spirits of the dead for information. For some reason, any slob can become a fountain of divine wisdom once he's dead. The ancient Greeks believed ghosts existed outside of time, like the gods, and so could see the past and future. Or perhaps Erichtho, the witch from Lucan's *Pharsalia,* had the right of it: anyone with the nerve to raise the dead deserves an answer.

And necromancy did take nerve, once upon a time. Both the Jews and Romans made necromancy a capital crime. Christianity continued the suppression. In the nineteenth century, however, necromancy made a surprise comeback in the form of Spiritualism. All those respectable Victorians gathering in parlors for their seances were actually would-be necromancers. A few necromancers still practice their art: they call it "Channeling."

A person twitching and talking in a silly accent, however, is not most people's idea of a proper necromancer. The gruesome, grave-robbing Enchanter of Death comes from fiction, brewed from legends of witches, black magicians, curses, ghouls, and revenants.

Egypt supplies one ingredient for the brew. The Egyptians built much of their religion around death. Their sorcerer-priests covered tombs and coffins with magic spells to grant the dead a favorable place in the Afterlife... and to let them return to the mortal world.



The Greek and Romans invoked the dead in their magic. Archaeologists find countless lead sheets in tombs or other entrances to the Underworld, such as caves or wells. These thin tablets bear pleas to the dead for revenge, love, success in court cases, and other favors. Incantations also invoke Hermes/Mercury, who conducted souls to the Underworld, and death-gods like Hecate or Pluto.

The East has its own necromantic traditions. In the Aghora school of Hinduism, a mystic seeks communion with Shiva and Kali by living among the dead at the burning-ground, using a scorched cranium as his begging-bowl, and kneeling on the chest of a corpse as he recites his mantras. In China, magicians and holy men need skill at placating the angry dead and exorcising predatory ghosts.

Most people instinctively feel you shouldn't disturb the dead. That sense of taboo feeds into legends of witchcraft. From Lucan's Erichtho to the cannibal-witches of the Pueblo Indians, evil sorcerers gain power through grave-robbing and murder. Even the exorcist inspires a hint of suspicion: if he can send a ghost back to the Underworld, maybe he can call them out, too. And so Egyptian funerary magic spawns legends of death-curses and vengeful mummies, while the Requiem Mass becomes a spell to slay the living as well as to bless the dead.

Necromancy remains a rare style of magic, but it spreads to every culture with a sophisticated magic tradition. Not every necromancer must be a black-hearted fiend, but the very nature of this magic requires practitioners to break religious and civil laws.

Magic Theory

A necromancer invokes and controls the dead using ritual tools made from corpses. Since the ghosts were once in bodies, parts of such bodies retain a magical link to them, a basic use of the Law of Contagion. The necromancer can force ghosts to serve him directly, to occupy and animate dead bodies, or empower his magical tools. Ghosts can also be used as a link to fearsome gods of Death, Darkness, and Destruction. Necromancy combines aspects of natural magic, ritual magic, and appeals to divine power, making it a form of witchcraft.

Very often, a necromancer's magic includes the theories and practices of some other magic style. A necromancer may be a specialist version of some other sort of mystic. For instance, Aghora is a substyle of Hindu Theurgy and Palo Mayombe is a substyle of Voodoo, while a Hermetic Theurgist might become a necromancer by concentrating on Egyptian mysteries or Saturnian rites. In the Western world, "pure" necromancy grows from perverted Christian ritual and Greco-Roman death-witches like Erichtho.

Style Notes

Animating corpses and summoning ghosts are the most characteristic feats of necromancy, but this arcanum can achieve many other effects, too. A necromancer can also evoke forces and conditions associated with death, such as darkness, silence, and terror. For special effects, these spells have putrid-hued glows or motes of light, inky shadows, or unholy stenches.

Necromancers use a variety of grotesque Foci. Human armbones and legbones make excellent wands and rods of power. Skulls can become chalices or censers. Amulets can be carved of bone. Human or animal blood may be shed in ritual sacrifices, or used as an ingredient for noxious compounds. Mummy dust, corpse hair, and preserved body parts also find use in necromancy. Some rituals and spells call for other materials associated with death and decay, such as lead, graveyard dirt, coffin nails, bitumen, pitch, natron and myrrh (used in mummification), luminous fungus, and other oddments.

A necromancer's tools and methods are often a grisly parody of some other religious or magical tradition. An Egyptian necromancer would write his spells in blood on strips of linen robbed from mummies. A European necromancer might pervert Christian rites using a cross of human bones and a chalice of blood, or Hermetic tools made from lead, bone, and black gemstones.

Game Mechanics

Necromantic combat magic follows the usual pattern of ranged attacks, Adjustment Powers, and Mental Powers, but given a deathly twist. Drains are easily justified as sapping the target's body or life-force in various ways, or "killing" the target's powers. Defensive spells might use anything from a shield of gibbering ghosts (a Force Field), to armor made of bones, to the character stopping his own life functions, so nothing hurts him that much (Armor or Damage Reduction).

For a Fantasy necromancer, a Summon to animate zombies or create other undead is practically obligatory. Many necromancers also need a spell for contacting the dead. This requires some combination of Mind Link, Mind Scan, or Telepathy.

ADVANTAGES

The baleful forces of death, disease, and aging suggest NND attacks for necromancers, especially with Does BODY. Powers to contact or coerce the dead may need Transdimensional. It's up to each GM to decide whether the Afterlife counts as one dimension, or several.

LIMITATIONS

Foci are not the only standard Limitation for necromantic magic. Many traditions require Incantations, such as Egyptian words of power, Hindu mantras, or appeals to Greco-Roman death-gods. Animate dead spells that create corporeal undead creatures (like zombies) need bodies to work with (a -1 Limitation). Side Effects for disrupted spells are quite appropriate: the necromancer deals with exceptionally dangerous forces. An evil necromancer probably has a few powerful spells for vile curses or raising undead that require Extra Time to cast.

DISADVANTAGES

It's safe to say any known necromancer is Hunted (Watched) by the local authorities. The authorities may not know about the necromancer, but if they find out they won't be happy. Churches and other mystics may Hunt necromancers as well. Necromancers are almost by definition peculiar people, which easily justifies unusual or extreme Psychological Limitations. A necromancer might carry an unwholesome aura of death — perhaps even strong enough that ordinary people sense it (a Distinctive Feature). Death wizards could even suffer a Vulnerability to magic styles based on Light and Life.

Sample Spells

In addition to these spells, you can find an extensive selection of Necromancy magics in *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire,* and related spells of Black Magic in *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire II*.

SPEAK WITH THE DEAD

Effect:	**Mind Scan and Mind Link**
Target/Area Affected:	**One spirit**
Duration:	**Constant**
Range:	**Special**
END Cost:	**7**

Description: This represents a variety of techniques for contacting the dead. The ritual can be anything from a spiritualist medium's darkened room to a ghastly, demonic rite. The effect is the same, no matter what the setting: the character calls into the Beyond and invites a particular ghost to answer. Maybe the proper ghost responds... or maybe some other spirit replies. Failing the Magic Roll means the spell itself fails; failing the Mind Scan ECV Attack Roll may mean the character contacts some other ghost than the one he wanted (though not necessarily a hostile one).

The OECV penalty for using Mind Scan to contact the dead depends on the character's connection to the deceased (see sidebar for details). If the deceased was well-known to the character (*e.g.,* was a close friend or relative), the character has access or proximity to the deceased's body when he casts the spell (*e.g.,* he casts it at the deceased's grave, or has a significant part of the deceased's corpse), or the character has with him some object or person the deceased treasured in life, then the deceased counts as a "familiar" mind. Contacting someone the character has no connection with usually means no bonus (at best), or even an "unfamiliar mind" penalty. Of course, if the deceased has a "strange or alien" mind — as would most dead spellcasters — contacting him may be easier.

Typically a *Speak With The Dead* Mind Scan must be directed against a "planet's" worth of dead beings (the entire Afterlife), meaning a -20 OECV penalty. If the character can narrow this down further — for example, if the Afterlife is divided into regions, and the character knows which region the spirit he wants to talk to is likely to be in — the GM should reduce the penalty appropriately.

Game Information: *Mind Scan 6d6, +8 ECV; Transdimensional (to Afterlife; +½) (69 Active Points); OAF (ritual paraphernalia; -1), Concentration (0 DCV throughout casting and communication; -1), Extra Time (20 Minutes to cast; -1¼), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Magic Roll (-½) (total cost: 13 points)* ***plus*** *Mind Link, any one ghost, any distance, any dimension (20 Active Points); OAF (ritual paraphernalia; -1), Concentration (0 DCV throughout casting and communications process; -1), Extra Time (20 Minutes to initiate; -1¼), Incantations (throughout casting; -½) (total cost: 4 points). Total cost: 17 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase Mind Scan to 8d6, +10 ECV. 90 + 20 = 110 Active Points; total cost 17 + 4 = 21 points.

2) Weak Spell: Reduce Mind Scan to 4d6, +5 ECV. 45 + 20 = 65 Active Points; total cost 9 + 4 = 13 points.

3) Risky Spell: If the Mind Scan fails, the necromancer contacts an evil spirit who lashes back with a psychic attack. Add Side Effects (4d6 Ego Attack; -½) to Mind Scan. Total cost: 12 + 4 = 16 points.

4) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½) from the Mind Scan. Total cost: 14 + 4 = 18 points.

5) Master's Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½) and Extra Time (-1¼) from the Mind Scan, and the Extra Time from the Mind Link. 69 + 20 = 89 Active Points; total cost 20 + 6 = 26 points.

ROT

Effect:	**RKA 1d6, NND, Does BODY**
Target/Area Affected:	**One character**
Duration:	**Instant**
Range:	**225"**
END Cost:	**4**

Description: This spell makes a patch of the victim's flesh rot away in seconds. It doesn't work on inorganic materials such as metal or concrete, which are not affected by disease. The basic version of the spell is tailored for a Heroic-level Fantasy campaign, in which magicians use several Limitations on their spells and magic is somewhat unreliable. Variations are noted below.

Game Information: *RKA 1d6, NND (defense is appropriate Immunity; +1), Does BODY (+1) (45 Active Points); OAF (necromantic rod of human bone shod in lead; -1), Extra Time (Full Phase; -½), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 13 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to RKA 1½d6. 75 Active Points; total cost 21 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to RKA ½d6. 30 Active Points; total cost 9 points.

3) Free Spell: Remove OAF (-1). Total cost: 18 points.

4) Apprentice's Version: Add Side Effects (RKA 1d6; -¼). Total cost: 12 points.

5) "Realistic" Version: Add Gradual Effect (1 Day; -1¾). Total cost: 9 points.

6) Superheroic Version: Increase to RKA 1d6+1 and remove all Limitations except OAF (-1). 60 Active Points; total cost 30 points.

VARIANT OR MINOR STYLES



History and legend describe many other styles of magic. Some of these arcana overlap with better-known arcana, or aren't sufficiently broad or detailed to merit more extensive treatment. Others grew from quite different cultures and mystical backgrounds, but the mechanics of a game adaptation would not differ much from some other arcanum. Still others simply lack the documentation needed for an extensive treatment: most notably, far less has been published in English about Asian sorcery than about Western ceremonial magic. This section offers brief descriptions of some variant or less familiar styles you can research and develop on your own.

THE EVIL EYE

Cultures around the world believe in the Evil Eye. This power to inflict harm does not involve actual spellcasting: it's the definitive example of high magic. In some traditions, people are born with the Evil Eye, making it an example of a wild talent as well. In the Middle East, for instance, this power results from being born under an unlucky arrangements of the planets. Some African tribes, on the other hand, believe the Evil Eye runs in families. Still other cultures, however, think you can gain the Evil Eye by committing some horrible crime such as murdering and cannibalizing a blood relative.

The Evil Eye doesn't have complex occult theories to explain it. It just happens. If a person feels envy, anger, or hatred, his spirit reaches out to curse his target. Middle Eastern folk add that surprise or admiration can also trigger the Evil Eye, so you should never offer praise without invoking God to avert the curse. Many other simple charms can protect against the Evil Eye, such as hand-gestures, a line of scripture carried as an amulet, an animal's claw, or something to distract the eye such as a large, blue bead or a tassel.

A victim of the Evil Eye can experience many forms of misfortune. He may become sick, or be wounded or slain in an accident some time later. His property or business may suffer through his bad luck. People with a very powerful Evil Eye can cause immediate harm: stories tell of the Evil Eye killing animals, breaking stone, or even making a person's eyes explode in his head. Most possessors cannot control their Evil Eye, but a responsible person at least tries. People who learn to use this vicious power at will inspire great fear and hatred from those around them.

Killing Attacks or Drains with a greatly delayed recovery can represent many forms of the Evil Eye. The power must have Invisible Power Effects, since at best the only connection between attacker and victim is that the attacker looks at the victim. A Time Delay enables the curse to take effect later. The power may have No Conscious Control, as well as a Limitation that various charms can protect against the curse.

Sample Spells

Since a character often cannot control the Evil Eye, it would be fair to turn three or four forms of misfortune into Multipower slots. Not only is the entire Multipower uncontrollable, the character cannot control which effect his Evil Eye creates, either.

DEADLY ACCIDENT

Effect:	**RKA 2d6**
Target/Area Affected:	**One person**
Duration:	**Instant**
Range:	**4"**
END Cost:	**6**

Description: This form of Evil Eye causes the target to suffer a serious injury at a later time. For instance, he might slip on the stairs or be hit by a car. Neither the target nor the curser knows what form the accident will take. Fortunately, the character's Evil Eye does not activate more than once per day. If he suspects he may have cursed someone, he can take back the curse by calling on God, apologizing immediately for his anger, or taking other steps suitable for his culture.

Game Information: *RKA 2d6, Trigger (next time person is in a situation where he could be injured; +¼), Invisible to Sight and Hearing Groups (+¾) (60 Active Points); No Conscious Control (-2), Limited Range (4"; -¼), 1 Charge (-2). Total cost: 11 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to RKA 3d6. 90 Active Points; total cost 17 points.

2) Weak Spell: Reduce to RKA 1d6+1. 40 Active Points; total cost 8 points.

3) Controlled Curse: Remove No Conscious Control (-2). Total cost: 18 points.

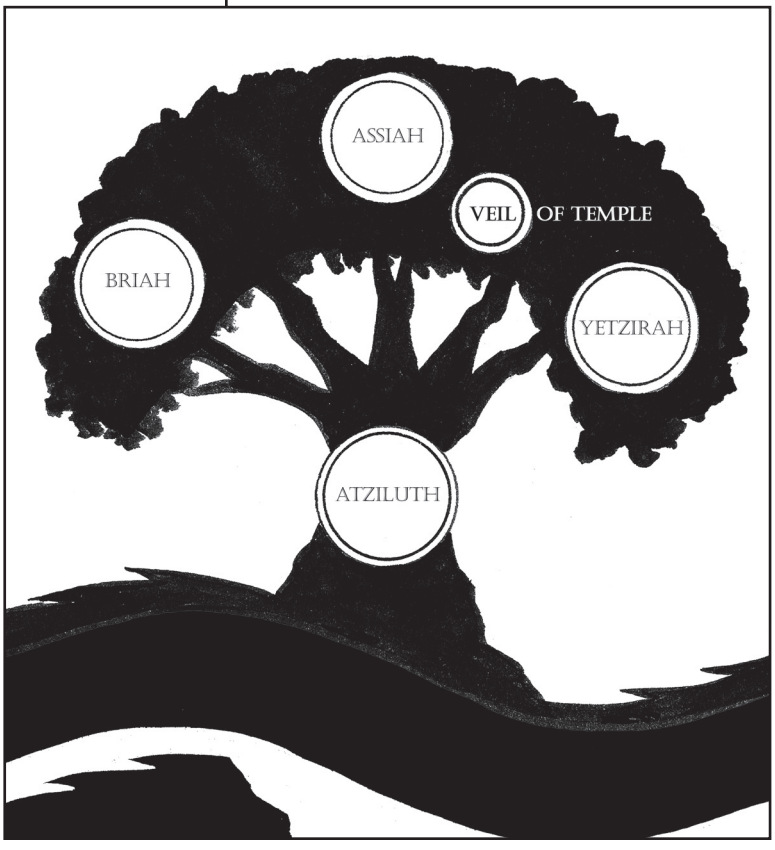
4) Ritual Curse: Sorcerers can duplicate the Evil Eye's effect by pointing a bone, tying knots in a cord, or manipulating other Foci while uttering a curse. Replace No Conscious Control (-2) with IAF (ritual implement; -½), Extra Time (Full Phase; -½), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), and Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 11 points.

KABBALISM

This style of mysticism helped give rise to Hermetic Theurgy. The true purpose of the Kabbalah (Hebrew, "What Is Received") is not magic, though. A true kabbalist seeks hidden meanings in the Torah. Through this search, as well as meditation, he hopes to better understand the mind of God. Jewish tradition holds that only married men over the age of 40 should study the Kabbalah, and they should do so with a study partner to make sure an excess of otherworldly thought does not lead them into heresy, sorcery, or outright death — the highest mystic revelations of kabbalism can kill an unprepared mind.

The highest achievement of kabbalism is a vision of the throne of God. Along the way, a kabbalist may incidentally learn how to animate golems and summon angels — but a true kabbalist would hesitate to use such powers for worldly ends, unless he were very sure God wanted him to do so. Rabbi Judah ben Loew, one of the holiest men in Jewish history, created the Golem of Prague only to defend his people against a vicious pogrom, and even that went badly in the end. Amulets are one of the few uses for kabbalism that are always legitimate.

Nevertheless, the kabbalists uncovered awesome secrets of magic. Men who were not so holy found practical applications for their discoveries. Kabbalistic magicians are properly called *ba'al shem* ("Master of the Name"). These magicians sell charms and talismans, and even summon devils. Grimoires like the *Testament Of Solomon* come from the ba'al shem, not from true kabbalists.



Gematria is one of a kabbalist's most important means of extracting hidden meanings from the Torah. The ancient Hebrews used the letters of their alphabet as numbers, so every word could also be seen as a string of numbers you could add or multiply. If two words added to the same number, they bore some mystic connection. A kabbalist could also transpose letters according to various schemes, turn words into acrostics, or select and manipulate letters in other ways. The "Bible Code" is a modern example of gematria. So are schemes to find a person's "lucky numbers" from his name or date of birth.

Among other hidden meanings, gematria reveals secret names of God and angels. The mightiest of these was the Shemhamphorash, the Name Of 72 Names, with which Moses called the plagues upon Egypt and parted the Red Sea. Such names have power over all the forces of nature and the spirit world. A kabbalist could use the Sacred Names to summon an angel for whatever it might teach about divine things. A ba'al shem would use the Sacred Names in charms to bring luck, money, love, revenge, or other mundane goals. A kabbalistic incantation would take the form of a prayer filled with secret names of God.

Kabbalistic talismans feature geometrical diagrams, strange sigils, and Hebrew writing. Talismans are often written on paper, then folded or rolled up to fit in a little silver case inscribed with more words and symbols.

Kabbalah also supplies the concept of the *Sephiroth,* or emanations from God. According to Kabbalah, God did not create the world directly. Instead, he worked through intermediate forces or concepts. First came *Kether,* the Crown, the purest and most abstract expression of his infinite power and dominion over everything that ever could exist. Kether brought forth *Chokmah,* or theoretical Wisdom; Chokmah brought forth *Binah,* or practical Understanding; and so on, through *Chesed* (Mercy) or *Gedullah* (Greatness, Magnanimity), *Pachad* (Justice) or *Geburah* (Strength), *Tiphereth* (Majesty/Beauty), *Netzach* (Firmness), *Hod* (Splendor), *Yesod* (Foundation), and finally *Malkuth* (the Kingdom of created things). These ten sephiroth can be arranged in a line, as concentric circles, a wheel, or in a series of triads called the Tree of Life. A kabbalist seeks a mystical comprehension of each emanation in turn, from Malkuth to Kether, as he approaches his direct perception of God. The sephiroth also provide a system for analyzing and filing mystical concepts, and forces to invoke in spells.

Hermetic Theurgy has now absorbed practical kabbalism. Hermetic mystics routinely study Hebrew, analyze the names of spirits through gematria, and use the Tree of Life diagram in their rituals. True kabbalists remain rare and secretive even by mystical standards, scorning worldly power in their pilgrimage to the throne of God.

Sample Spells

Most Hermetic spells work just as well as practical Kabbalism. These spells relate more closely to mystical kabbalism.

SOLOMON BOTTLE

Effect:	Extra-Dimensional Movement, Usable As Attack
Target/Area Affected:	One spirit
Duration:	Instant
Range:	250"
END Cost:	5

Description: King Solomon trapped demons and djinn in brass bottles through the power of Divine Names, then sealed the bottles with lead and stamped them with his ring. Latter-day kabbalists can duplicate Solomon's feat. This requires a brass bottle (or some other sturdy container — in the Arabian Nights, a fisherman found a djinni trapped in a clay jar), plus a ring engraved with Solomon's Seal. The kabbalist spends six hours preparing the bottle through prayers and magic words painted on the sides. The enchantment fades the next time the kabbalist sleeps, so the bottle must be used quickly. When the kabbalist approaches the spirit, he commands it to enter the bottle in the name of God (several names, in fact). At this point, the spirit and kabbalist engage in a contest of EGO Rolls, as described for the *Summon* Power. If the kabbalist wins, the spirit is trapped in the bottle, which functions as a prison dimension. The spirit can try to escape through another EGO Roll contest an hour later, and every day after that, unless the bottle's lid is sealed shut with molten lead and stamped with the ring. Once that happens, the spirit cannot escape unless someone opens the bottle.

Spirits greatly fear this power. Any mystic who tries and fails to trap a spirit makes an enemy forever.

Game Information: *Extra-Dimensional Movement (to Bottle Interior), Usable As Attack (defense is winning an EGO Roll contest, see text; +1), Ranged (+½), Delayed Effect (see text; +¼) (55 Active Points); OAF (-1), Extra Time (6 Hours, storing Limitation; -3½), Incantations (-¼), Only Works Against Spirits (-1), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 8 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Add Increased Mass (x4) to Extra-Dimensional Movement. 82 Active Points; total cost 11 points.

2) Spell Trap: Replace Delayed Effect (+¼) with a Trigger (when a spirit touches a prepared item; +¼). 55 Active Points; total cost 8 points.

VISIONS OF THE KINGDOM

Effect:	Clairsentience (Sight Group), Dimensional
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	225" (see text)
END Cost:	2

Description: On the way to seeing the Throne of God, a kabbalist may incidentally learn how to see other dimensions. Jewish scrying involves a bowl of oil; but only a great kabbalist can look beyond this world to see all the realms in the Kingdom of God. (In the Ptolemy Resurgent setting, this spell can scry into all the planetary and astral realms. In the official Multiverse of the Champions Universe, described in *The Mystic World,* it can scry the Inner Planes: the Lower Astral Plane, Babylon, Elysium, Faerie, and the Netherworld.) The kabbalist also needs Navigation (Dimensional) to select the dimension he wants to view (unless he's willing to settle for viewing other dimensions completely at random).

Game Information: *Clairsentience (Sight and Hearing Groups), Dimensional (any dimension), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼) (44 Active Points); OAF Fragile (bowl of oil; -1¼), Blackout (-½), Concentration (0 DCV throughout; -1), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 10 points.*

Options:

1) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost 12 points.

GOLEM CREATION

Effect:	Summon 250-point creature
Target/Area Affected:	One creature
Duration:	Instant
Range:	No Range
END Cost:	33

Description: "Golem" is Hebrew for "dead matter." Creating life from dead matter is the supreme expression of divine power, and or a kabbalist's worthiness in the eyes of God. Other mystic traditions imitate the kabbalistic feat by animating man-shaped automatons of clay, metal, or other substances. Kabbalists do this too, but that's just magic. The real goal is to create a *living creature,* not a magically-animate statue.

A master kabbalist can create any living creature he wants. The process requires 24 hours of continuous effort. The kabbalist sculpts the creature from clay (the statue doesn't have to be very good) and prays over it with many invocations of God's secret names. At the end he writes the word "Emeth" (Truth) on the golem's forehead and intones the Shemhamphorash, the Name Of 72 Names... and if his devotion is pure and his knowledge complete, dead clay becomes living flesh.

If he wants, a kabbalist can even make a man — perhaps a man with superhuman strength and toughness, like the golem Rabbi Loew created in Prague. He may give his creation certain goals; the golem's willingness to follow these goals is represented by the *Amicable* (+¼) Advantage. The golem has a mind of its own, though, and its desires may change — perhaps tragically so. The golem also cannot speak, and may be returned to clay by erasing the first letter on its forehead, changing the word to "Meth" (Dead) (this is a Physical Limitation for the golem). A golem also lacks a soul, for that power God does not delegate even to the wisest kabbalist; but the creature may gain one through selfless or pious deeds.

Game Information: *Summon 250-point being, Expanded Class (any living creature; +1), Amicable (+¼) (112 Active Points); OAF (clay, incense, Torah scroll; -1), Extra Time (1 Day; -4), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 17 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase Summon to 350-point being. 157 Active Points; total cost 23 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease Summon to 150-point being. 67 Active Points; total cost 10 points.

3) Dangerous Spell: If the kabbalist fails his Magic Roll, he creates a berserk monster possessed by a demon. Add Side Effects (Summon creates hostile being of equal power who attacks caster; -1). Total cost: 14 points.

4) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost 18 points.

MANTRA-VIDYA

Magic in India begins with the rites and prayers in the ancient Vedas, especially the *Atharva-Veda.* The incantations in the *Atharva-Veda* range from spells to cure disease to curses upon romantic rivals. Vedic spells frequently invoke the gods to work the magician's will; incantations may also address a medicinal herb as if it were a god or spirit, and describe the herb as a descendant of a god as a way to increase its power.

Incantations play such an important role in Indian sorcery that ritual magic is called *mantra-vidya,* "knowledge of words." The incantation or *mantra* is not the only technique used in magic, though. Sacrifices are at least as important. The Brahmins — Hinduism's caste of priest-magicians — claimed that a perfectly-performed sacrifice compelled the gods to obey whatever the officiating Brahmin commanded. The great sacrificial rites of the *Yajur-Veda* are the longest, most complicated religious ceremonies ever devised. Anything associated with the sacrifice carried divine power that could be used in magic. Indian magic therefore frequently involves oblations, or sacrificial offerings. Ghee (clarified butter) and a sweetened porridge are the most common offerings. The Vedas describe a mystic, intoxicating liquid called *soma* as the best and most potent offering, but no one knows anymore what soma is; the prevailing theory is that soma was fig wine, or the juice of the ephedra plant. Many other offerings are possible, though. For instance, one curse requires 100,000 ash oblations poured into a stream.

Post-Vedic sorcery employs other tools as well. Diagrams called *yantra* carry mystical power, like the pentagram, hexagram, and other occult symbols from Western magic. Sorcerous rituals may also use more elaborate diagrams called *mandalas,* a circular design embellished with figures of gods, Buddhas, or other spirits. Indian ritual may also involve gestures, or *mudras,* with the same ritual implements used in Sadhana meditations (see page 113). The Vedic spells often involve various herbs. Red and blue threads invoke Nirriti, goddess of disease and misery, to withdraw her curse or inflict it on others.

Spells may also use sympathetic magic. Ghee has magical powers for healing and fertility because it is golden, like the life-giving sun. A traditional cure for jaundice involves anointing the patient with yellow porridge, then washing it onto yellow birds, to carry away the yellow skin tone caused by the disease.

India has its own version of astrology, too. Indian astrologers do not accept Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. They also pay as much attention to the *nakshatras,* or 28 lunar houses, as to the 12 zodiacal signs. Astrology is mostly used just to tell fortunes, but a mystic might use it to select a propitious time for a ritual.

Mantra-vidya is just as complex and powerful an arcanum as Hermetic theurgy. Since Hindu myth describes hundreds of gods a mystic might invoke, and the greater gods can do anything if

compelled by a sufficiently elaborate ceremony, in theory a master of Mantra-vidya can perform any feat he can imagine. He doesn't even need to believe in the gods he invokes: the Mimamsa school of Hindu theology says religious ritual has power by itself, whether the gods exist or not.

Indian ritual magic does not include "stored magic" exactly like Hermetic talismans. Indian mystics either cast a spell using the full ritual, or a god gives them a power they can use at will thereafter (a point where Mantra-vidya overlaps with Sadhana). But Indian legends do include magic items, however, such as a magic jewel whose possessor can fly. Indian people also believe in a variety of amulets. Talismans, either mandalas or consecrated ritual implements, are thus a logical extension of Mantra-vidya for gaming purposes.

Sample Spells

BATTLE ILLUSIONS

Effect:	Mental Illusions 6d6
Target/Area Affected:	6" Radius
Duration:	Instant
Range:	LOS
END Cost:	4

Description: Ancient Indian magicians invoked Arbudi and Nyarbudi, demon servants of Indra, to harass enemy troops with frightening or distracting illusions. The spell cannot produce extreme changes to perception, but everyone in an area perceives the illusion, adding to its verisimilitude. A cunning Brahmin might create an illusion of fellow soldiers running away, or make his own side's forces seem better equipped or more numerous. Guards at a fortress might see a group of besiegers as their own soldiers seeking entrance. In contemporary settings, the power of Arbudi and Nyarbudi might trick hostage-takers into hearing each other suggest giving up, or set them bickering amongs themselves.

Like many hostile spells, Battle Illusions require an oblation of oil. The mystic must also sing a prayer to the two demons, their master Indra, and the divine magicians Brihaspati (the planet Jupiter) and Varuna.

Game Information: *Mental Illusions 6d6, Area Of Effect (6" Radius; +1¼) (67 Active Points); OAF (oil and ritual paraphernalia; -1), Concentration (½ DCV; -¼), Extra Time (1 Minute; -1½), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 15 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Mental Illusions 8d6. 90 Active Points; total cost 20 points.

2) Weak Spell: Change to Area Of Effect (One Hex; +½). 45 Active Points; total cost 10 points.

3) Quick Spell: Reduce to Extra Time (Full Phase; -½). Total cost: 19 points.

4) Stored Spell: Add Delayed Effect (+¼) and increase to Extra Time (5 Minutes; -2). 75 Active Points; total cost 15 points.

5) Talismanic Spell: Change Focus to IAF (talisman bearing images of Arbudi and Nyarbudi; -½), remove Extra Time, and add 8 Charges (-½). Total cost: 22 points.

INDRA'S THUNDERBOLT

Effect:	RKA 3d6
Target/Area Affected:	One character
Duration:	Instant
Range:	335"
END Cost:	7

Description: This is a Mantra-vidya version of the Hermetic lightning bolt spell. A Hindu mystic sacrifices to Indra and prays for the god to grant him use of his thunderbolt. If the mystic performs his ritual correctly, the god infuses a *dorje* with power the mystic can call upon four times thereafter. When the mystic exhausts the dorje, he must perform the ritual again if he wants to throw more thunderbolts.

Game Information: *RKA 3d6, Delayed Effect (may have available a number of spells equal to character's INT; +½) (67 Active Points); OAF (dorje, fire, and sacrifice; -1), Extra Time (20 Minutes, Storing Limitation; -2½), Gestures (Release Limitation; -¼), Incantations (Release Limitation; -¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), 4 Charges (-1). Total cost: 10 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to RKA 4d6. 90 Active Points; total cost 14 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to RKA 2d6. 45 Active Points; total cost 7 points.

3) Talismanic Spell: Remove the Delayed Effect and Extra Time: as long as the character has his consecrated dorje, he can cast lightning bolts four times per day. 45 Active Points; total cost 11 points.

4) Superheroic Spell: Change to a simple RKA 4d6, with no Modifiers. Total cost: 60 points.

TANTRA

Tantrism is the most controversial aspect of Indian ritual magic. Properly speaking, a "tantra" is simply an instruction manual; the term is often used for an Indian grimoire. The style of mysticism called Tantrism, however, involves sex as part of its rituals. The Tantric mystic assumes the power of the god Shiva by re-enacting his marriage to his wife Shakti. For some Tantrics, this union between man and woman, mortal and god, is entirely symbolic or takes place in the imagination. Other Tantrics perform orgiastic rites condemned by most Hindus.

MAGIC AND MAYA

India has a rich tradition of spells to befuddle the senses, from illusions to frighten an opposing army to the Indian Rope Trick. India also has a rich tradition of sleight of hand and other stage magic. Both are called *maya.* A Hindu magus would not draw much distinction between magic that really affects the world, a magical illusion, or a feat of prestidigitation. The whole world is illusion — so you can't say one sort of magic is "more real" than others. If a feat of magic brings the results you want, it's real enough.

RUNIC YOGA YODELING!

Early in the twentieth century, the German occultist Siegfried Adolf Kummer invented one of the goofiest magic systems of all time. Kummer believed people could gain magic powers by yodeling while contorting their bodies into yoga postures corresponding to various runes. Kummer also associated each rune with a different body part or malady, and said you could heal diseases by concentrating on the proper rune. A colleague of his promoted a system of "runic gymnastics," but details are not available. Perhaps it's for the best.

RUNE MAGIC

Several cultures believed the act of writing carried magical power. The old Norse and Germans provide a good example of this belief. Their letters — runes — were also powerful magical symbols. Magic runes also included many glyphs that represented entire words, or were abstract symbols. For example, the ancient Germans used the swastika as a sun symbol.

According to mythology, Odin himself was the first rune-magician. He hung himself from the World Tree, a sacrifice to himself, for nine days and nights to discover the runes. The gods carved their treaties in runes on Odin's spear; this made their oaths unbreakable.

Mortals used runes as well. The ancient Germans wrote runes on slips of wood cut from a fruit tree, cast the slips on a white cloth, then picked out three at random. The runes chosen give a clue to the future.

Runes could compel the future, as well as reveal it. To curse the king and queen of Norway, the hero Egil Skallagrimson erected a hazelwood pole topped with a horse's head and carved with a command that the land-spirits drive the royal couple from the kingdom.

Egil also used runes to reveal poison. Suspecting that his host gave him poisoned ale, Egil stabbed his knife into his palm, carved runes on the drinking-horn, and rubbed his blood into them as he spoke a poem. The horn split, revealing the treachery.

Germanic warriors carved runic inscriptions such as "increase to pain" on their weapons. A valkyrie told the mythic hero Sigurd, "For victory, carve runes on your sword-hilt and twice name Tyr." Runes would seem to be an established means of enchanting weapons and other items.

In general, rune spells require writing or carving the runes, saying an incantation, and charging them with blood or some equally potent liquid. A mystic could use jewelry or small slabs of wood, bone, or stone carved with runes as talismans. A German occultist, for instance, claimed that rings inscribed with certain runes protected the wearer from sickness and harm. You could even use runes in a version of the classic magic circle, with runes instead of Hebrew letters or Hermetic symbols. A more generic Fantasy wizard might cast spells merely by tracing runes in the air with his finger, but the raw physicality of knife and blood help set rune magic apart from other arcana.

Sample Spells

For many more rune magic spells, see *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire II*.

POISON-DETECTING RUNES

Effect:	**Detect Poison and RKA 1d6**
Target/Area Affected:	**One Object**
Duration:	**Instant**
Range:	**No Range**
END Cost:	**1**

Description: This is Egil's spell to detect poison. The mystic scratches the runes on a container, smears the runes with a bit of his blood, and says a rhyme. If the container's contents are poisoned, the container breaks.

Game Information: *Detect Poison (INT +5) (no Sense Group) (8 Active Points); OAF (knife; -1), Extra Time (1 Minute; -1¼), Incantations (-¼), Nonpersistent (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), Side Effect (caster inflicts 1 BODY on himself, always occurs; -½) (total cost: 2 points)* ***plus*** *RKA 1d6, Trigger (when poison detected; +¼) (19 Active Points); OAF (knife; -1), Extra Time (1 Minute; -1¼), Incantations (-¼), Linked (-¼), No Range (-½), Only Versus Object Holding Poisoned Substance (-2), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), Side Effect (caster inflicts 1 BODY on himself, always occurs; -½) (total cost: 3 points). Total cost: 5 points.*

BLIZZARD RUNES

Effect:	Change Environment
Target/Area Affected:	4 km radius
Duration:	Uncontrolled (lasts for 1 Hour from time of casting)
Range:	No Range
END Cost:	0

Description: This is an example of fantastical rune magic. The jotuns, or frost giants, practice rune magic to cast illusions and control the weather. A few mystics of other races study their baleful magic as well. This particular spell amplifies existing cold weather into a deadly blizzard that can bury a region in snow, while anyone who travels in the blizzard risks swift death from hypothermia. To cast the spell, the mystic slashes his feet and treads a bloody circle in the snow. Then he draws the rune for H (*hagalaz,* "hail") to the north, south, east, and west of the circle. In between, he draws the runes for V, E, T, and R (*vetr,* or "winter"). In the middle, he plants the largest icicle he can find, and surrounds its base with a wreath of rowan and yew. Finally, he chants a long and terrible invocation to Ice-Born Ymir, the first giant, and the nameless powers of Chaos, proclaiming that the end of the world has come and it's time to spread the Great Winter over the world. ("Sun is dead; honor fled; Ymir hear my call. Winds arise; freeze the skies; doom shall come to all....") The icicle becomes a candle, burning with cold fire for the next hour while icy winds blow a torrent of snow over the region. Invoking such dreadful magic carries a price, though. For the next day, warmth becomes deadly to the character (a Susceptibility) unless he is a frost giant himself. The second time someone casts the spell, the Susceptibility lasts a week; and each time the spell is used, the Susceptibility lasts one step longer on the Time Chart.

Game Information: *Change Environment 4" radius, -3 to Sight Group PER Rolls and -2 Temperature Levels, Multiple Combat Effects, MegaArea (1" = 1 km; +¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Uncontrolled (duration of 1 Hour, can be ended prior to that by disrupting magic circle; +½) (72 Active Points); OAF (icicle, tree branches, knife; -1), Extra Time (5 Minutes to cast; -1), Incantations (-¼), Only Works When Temperature Level Is Already -1 Or Lower And There's Snow (-1), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), Side Effects (character inflicts 1 BODY on himself, always occurs; -½), Side Effects (caster suffers Susceptibility [1d6 damage per Turn of exposure to warmth, lasts 1 day or longer]; -¼). Total cost: 13 points.*

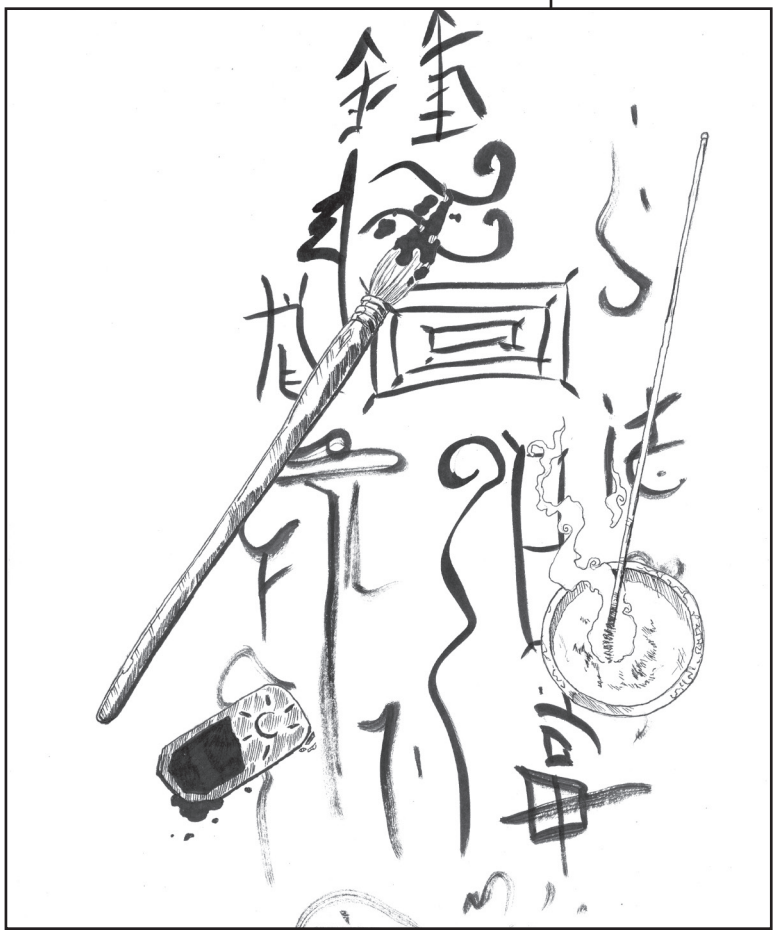
TAOIST THEURGY

The origins of Chinese ritual magic recede into prehistory. Taoism, the mystical philosophy underlying most Chinese magic, is attributed to the legendary sage Lao Tzu, but the fundamental ideas and practices go back much further.

Taoist sorcery combines a rich and multifarious spirit world with absolutely impersonal cosmic forces. The fundamental principle is the Tao itself — the ever-changing, indescribable totality of existence. The Tao divides into the opposed but complementary principles of *yin* and *yang.* Yin is dark, still, feminine, and terrestrial. Yang is light, active, masculine, and celestial. Each principle contains a bit of the other, however: thus, the heavenly moon is yin, while the fertility of the earth is yang.

The interaction of yin and yang create the Five Elements of Earth, Fire, Metal, Water, and Wood. Each element generates another and destroys another. The elements correlate to directions, numbers, colors, musical tones, odors, planets, seasons, numbers, parts of the body, and many other phenomena.

Yin and yang also generate the eight trigrams and 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching,* or *Book Of Changes*. Although the I Ching began as a system of fortune-telling, Taoist mystics see the hexagrams as a guide to the ways in which cosmic energy, *ch'i,* flows and transforms in everything from the human body to the rise and fall of nations.



China has its own system of astrology, based on 60-day and 60-year cycles linked to the Five Elements. A magic rite should be conducted on the proper day and hour within a cycle. Anyone whose year, month, day, and hour of birth clashes with the time of a ritual must be excluded, for the inharmony of forces could outrage the spirits.

Spiritual and cosmic forces are invoked through calligraphy. Written talismans are even more central to Taoist magic than to Hermetic theurgy. When a mystic writes a talisman, he channels power from a spirit into a slip of paper, a peachwood plaque, or some other surface. The color of the ink and paper are set by the elements governing the desired feat of magic.

Magical calligraphy may use ordinary Chinese characters, but often employs secret writing styles, square and angular for yang effects, rounded and swirling for yin. The characters are often merged into complex fretworks or looping scribbles. A talisman may also include drawings of constellations, gods, spirits, animals, or other figures. The talisman may be burned at the end of a ritual, releasing its magic into the spirit world.

Magical characters can be hidden nearly anywhere. The wiggling lines representing the ripples on a waterfall within a landscape painting may be the stretched characters of a spell. The mystical lines of flowing *ch'i* may be hidden within the curves and hollows of a jade carving, the swirls of paint on an actor portraying a demon, or the footsteps and gestures of a dance.

The magic charms and talismans used in everyday life are usually for commonplace purposes such as luck or health. In legend, however, Taoist mystics can achieve spectacular feats of magic. Through meditation, diet, occult medicines, and other practices, a mystic can work an "internal alchemy" that suffuses his body with *ch'i.* Not only can the mystic greatly extend his life, he may learn to affect the flow and interchange of mystic forces and transform the world around him. Feats attributed to Taoist masters range from parting the wine within a cup, to raining red-hot stones down on an army. Taoist mages particularly excel in all magic of transformation or creating things from nowhere, though they can summon spirits too. A master may even become a godlike spirit-entity — an Immortal. A Taoist mystic might cast a spell merely by tracing a symbol in the air and saying a few quick words. An Immortal works magic by will alone.

Taoist mystics who still use material tools to work their magic need a supply of paper, silk, and ink in various colors for talismans, incense, mirrors, firecrackers, a table engraved with mystic diagrams for divination, and implements such as a special lantern, umbrella, or fan. Peach, plum, and willow wood are mystically potent. For instance, peachwood swords are used in exorcistic rites. (A "cash sword" of coins strung on a long, narrow loop of stiff wire is also used.)

The spells of masters and Immortals stands out as the most gorgeous and flamboyant magic ever imagined. A Taoist master doesn't just conjure a mystic shield: a celestial lotus grows from his mouth on a long stalk to block attacks. He snorts, and beams of destructive magical light shoot from his nose with a sound like a bell. The more jaw-droppingly improbable a spell's effect, the better.

Other Chinese Magic

China has a variety of other sorts of magic, more or less related to Taoist Theurgy. The Taoist version of alchemy has already been noted in the discussion of that arcanum.

Ancient shamanism evolved into a tradition of mediums. Some mediums channel messages from the dead, like Western spiritualists. Other mediums write messages from the spirits using a wooden stylus in a tray of sand. Each séance requires a ceremonial prayer and offerings of incense and gold-paper. Several of China's secret societies and cult rebellions involved such trance mediums.

Feng Shui ("wind and water") is the art of designing and placing homes, graves, and other structures to harmonize with natural currents of *ch'i.* Hills, for instance, are yang while valleys and waterways are yin; the ideal balance is a site with three parts yang to two parts yin. Certain directions and relationships to other structures are also propitious. A geomancer, or *feng shui* specialist, locates *ch'i* currents by spinning a spoon-shaped magnet on a metal plate called a *lo pan,* engraved with the trigrams and hexagrams of I Ching and the 60 symbols of the astrological cycle. The *lo pan* also finds use in other Taoist magic. A structure with "good *feng shui*" can bring luck, while "bad *feng shui*" may bring misfortune. A geomancer can mitigate the worst effects, however, by rearranging walls and furnishings.

Builders and plasterers can impart blessings or curses on a home or other structure by sealing little figurines into the walls. They may also use figurines as voodoo dolls.

Onmyodo

Taoist magical ideas reached Japan, where they generated a style of magic called *Onmyodo* that flourished during the Heian period (794–1185 AD). The practitioners of Onmyodo, called Onmyoji, exorcised demons and advised the emperor on lucky and unlucky days; in legend they became masters of more colorful magic as well, like their Chinese Taoist forebears. It's safe to say anything a Taoist master could do, an onmyoji could achieve as well, though his spells may have somewhat different appearances or be cast in slightly different ways.



Sample Spells

CH'I FIRE

Effect: Energy Blast 8d6
Target/Area Affected: One creature
Duration: Instant
Range: 200"
END Cost: 4

Description: This spell, a favorite for Taoist warriors and mystics who expect to face both spiritual and material foes, conjures a ball of fiery *ch'i* the mystic can hurl at his opponent. Since the fire is mystical, pulled from the mystic's own *ch'i,* it can often harm ghosts and other spirits (since spiritual entities are usually affected by spiritual magic, even without a specific *Affects Desolidified* (+½) Advantage). The mystic conjures the spirit-fire by tracing a character on his palm with the finger of his other hand and saying a magic word.

Game Information: *Energy Blast 8d6 (40 Active Points); Extra Time (Full Phase; -½), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼). Total cost: 20 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Energy Blast 12d6. 60 Active Points; total cost 30 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to Energy Blast 6d6. 30 Active Points; total cost 15 points.

3) Unreliable Spell: Add Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 16 points.

4) Superheroic Spell: Remove all Limitations. Total cost: 40 points.

PAPER DOLLS

Effect:	Summon a simulated person built on no more than 25 Character Points
Target/Area Affected:	One simulated person
Duration:	Instant
Range:	No Range
END Cost:	1

Description: Taoist sorcerers often create animals or servants by cutting a figure from paper and turning it into the real creature. This basic version summons human servants with no special powers. More powerful versions can summon tigers, magical flying horses, or just about anything else. Although these servant creatures seem alive, they are really spirits. If slain, or the magician tires of them, they turn back into paper dolls.

Game Information: *Summon 25-point servant; Expanded Class (any generic human person; +½), Loyal (+½) (10 Active Points); OAF Fragile (paper figure; -1¼), Extra Time (1 Turn; -1¼), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼). Total cost: 2 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: The Taoist can evoke more formidable servants. Increase to Summon 100-point servant. 40 Active Points; total cost 10 points.

2) Rapid Spell: Remove Extra Time (-1¼). Total cost: 4 points.

3) Silent Spell: Remove Incantations (-¼). Total cost: 3 points.

4) Still Spell: Remove Gestures (-¼). Total cost: 3 points.

PROTECTIVE CHARM

Effect:	+4 DCV
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	Self
END Cost:	2 to create

Description: The theurgist writes a complex set of mystic characters on a slip of paper. Whoever carries this slip of paper enjoys greater safety in battle, as attacks are less likely to strike him. The amulet only lasts an hour, though, and the spirits permit the mystic to grant this favor only once per day. This spell is "realistic" and has no Heroic or Superheroic options.

Game Information: *+4 DCV (20 Active Points); OAF Fragile (- 1¼), Costs Endurance (to create charm; -¼), Extra Time (5 Minute to create charm; -1), 1 Continuing Charge lasting 1 Hour (-¼). Total cost: 5 points.*

chapter four:



MAGIC, GENRE BY GENRE

MAGIC GENRE BY GENRE



Wherefore, from Magic I seek assistance,
That many a secret perchance I reach
Through spirit-power and spirit-speech...
That I may detect the inmost force
Which binds the world and guides its course.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part I

Of all genres, Fantasy places the greatest emphasis on magic (though not always on mysticism). *Fantasy Hero* discusses magical characters and magic systems in depth, so that subject isn't covered here. But mysticism can appear in just about any roleplaying setting or genre if you want it to. Indeed, some genres that aren't usually considered Fantasy have their own rich traditions of supernatural powers and characters. This chapter discusses ways mystics can appear in different gaming genres — including some where mystics might at first seem strange and out of place.

They aren't. The mystics seen in *other genres* may be out of place, but every period of history, and every genre of gaming, has its own version of magic. This chapter includes brief treatments of a number of magical styles peculiar to specific genres.

Sometimes, though, gamers like to combine genres. Entire games have been based on bringing fantastical magic into some other genre — Science Fiction, Westerns, or just about anything else. It's hard to say much about such mixed-genre campaigns, because they're often quite idiosyncratic. But remember that they're possible... and can be a lot of fun.

COMIC BOOK SUPERHEROES: CHAMPIONS

Of all gaming genres, superheroic adventure offers the widest range for mystical characters. Every sort of supernatural character can appear: scholar-mages, spirits and spirit hybrids, vampires, were-creatures, golems, wild talents, wielders of magic items, embodied deities, the works. True mystics can practice every sort of magic, too — including a few styles peculiar to the superhero genre.

Characters

Mystical characters for a superhero campaign must function as superbeings as well as mystics. They need Characteristics and Powers comparable to other heroes and villains. Nevertheless, they stand out from other superbeings in important ways.

TRUE MYSTICS

A true mystic's power depends on mental ability and discipline, and their Characteristics typically reflect this. INT and EGO are obviously important, given mystics' emphasis on Intellect Skills, ECV-based attacks, and the like. Similarly, a high PRE gives a sorcerer the mental and spiritual fortitude to confront Things Man Was Not Meant To Know (not to mention the general confidence powerful, learned people tend to have). Priests, pacters, mad mages, and wild talents can get away with less mental ability than the super-intellectual scholar-mages, but all mystics tend to be bright and strong-willed compared to normal people.

Physical Characteristics don't matter so much for mystics. A mystic might be fit, but won't have extraordinary STR (after all, even 10 STR is pretty good compared to the average joe on the street). Mystics can have less PD, ED, and STUN than most superheroes, too (many supermages have been knocked out by ordinary thugs who caught them by surprise). Super-mages rely on magical defense, not innate toughness.

On the other hand, supermages may have great endurance. They perform bizarre, strenuous ceremonies that take hours, work around the clock researching the latest Threat To Reality, and then jander off into alternate dimensions to battle some evil overlord. A mystic can have pretty high CON, REC, and END, at least by normal human standards. Mystics may be intellectuals, but PCs at least should possess the fortitude to go toe-to-toe with

the bad guys next to the mutants, martial artists, and other heroes.

PC mystics need enough DEX and SPD to dish out damage as fast as their colleagues and avoid damage from their enemies. Here, however, players and GMs have a free hand, depending on their conception of a character's magic. If you assume spellcasting happens at literally the speed of thought — wish it and bang, it happens — DEX could be very high, like a martial artist's (or the mage might have lots of Lightning Reflexes). If, on the other hand, you decide a sorcerer can only chant spells so fast, then DEX might be comparatively low by superheroic standards (though high by ordinary standards).

Of course, these rules can have exceptions. A scholar-mage could also exercise regularly, or be a master of the martial arts on the side (a sound mind in a sound body, as they say). Elderly wizards might be too slow and feeble to fight battles; pedantic scholars might lack the INT, EGO, and PRE to work magic easily, forcing them to use some of the "shortcuts" described in the *Disadvantages* section in Chapter One.

Mystics stand out from other superbeings in their choice of Powers. Although super-mages tend to know spells for conventional Energy Blasts, Entangles, and other standard ranged attacks, they also possess Mental Powers, Adjustment Powers, and other attacks that bypass physical defenses, such as NND, AVLD, or BOECV powers. The sheer *range* of a mystic's Powers makes them some of the most flexible characters around. Only super-science gadgeteers can justify a Variable Power Pool so easily.

Occult investigators are a possible exception. In comic books, some occult investigators have enough power that you can treat them as scholar-mages in trenchcoats, but most of them are at best high-end Heroic mystics. They can face down a vampire, werewolf, or gang of cultists. They may even have powers and Skills that make them valued allies or guest-star characters. However, they lack the physical power to go toe-to-toe with supervillains on a regular basis. Occult investigators certainly have their place in a mystical superhero setting, but in most settings they're best left as NPCs or the heroes of a special campaign of their own.

OTHER MYSTICAL CHARACTERS

Mythological gods, were-creatures, wielders of magic items, and other magic-based characters can be treated like any other superbeing, if that's what you want. A hero with a magic sword can be just another guy with a Focus. A person merged with a fire elemental might be a standard energy projector. A character with a mystical origin might also have Skills related to his background, such as KS of mythology, supernatural creatures, other planes, or the Mystic World.

Making a character "mystical" depends more, however, on playing up his background and connection to other mystical forces. Does the character know other mystical people and creatures? Do any of them Hunt him? Does he know about magic, even if he doesn't cast spells himself? Can he visit mystical dimensions or other unearthly places? Most of all, does the character *want* to involve himself in mystical matters?



A god, for instance, carries the baggage of his background mythology. He has connections to other gods, possible access to their extradimensional home, a selection of traditional allies and adversaries, and a body of archetypal stories that may play out in the campaign. For instance, a Norse god can visit Asgard, owes fealty to Odin, fights giants and trolls, and tries to prevent the forces of evil from destroying the world in Ragnarok. A god may also feel special obligations based on his cultural background or special area of power. A Babylonian god, for example, might gain mystical foreknowledge of dangers to the city he protects.

Lesser creatures from mythology, such as legendary heroes, possess the same connections on a smaller scale. For instance, the Greek hero Theseus, reincarnated in the modern world, might battle a King Minos reborn as an evil tech-sector billionaire, his supercomputer DAEDALUS, his Talos-class robot minions, and his monstrous Minotaur stepson, but receive secret aid from the villain's daughter Ariadne.

Spirits and spirit hybrids also personify the power mystics seek. Even if this doesn't connect the character to some mythic background, mystics may try to exploit the character's power. Good mystics may offer guidance in return for the character's help; evil mystics might view the character as a potential

ARTIFEX

Billy Doyle hated his miserable life. It wasn't easy being a smart, sensitive kid in a South Boston slum where most people's idea of an uplifting cultural experience was a musical car horn. The two points of light were the local library and Uncle Button, a street performer who told wonderful stories. Billy's favorite stories were about the magical city of Babylon, the nexus between all cities. And then Billy followed strange music through an alley and found himself in Babylon. Billy had a hard life in Babylon, but in time he became the apprentice of a sorcerer and learned the magic of Artifice. He returned to Earth as Artifex, master of the Cosmic Craft.

Artifex is a Superheroic-level thaumaturge with particular skill at reshaping matter, energy, and magic. He hates that most people accept whatever they get from chance and the power elite instead of making their own way. Artifex quarrels with the Powers of Evil because they would take away what little opportunity for self-creation and self-improvement people have. And really, can't the villains think of something more *original* than conquest and slaughter? Any dunce can wreck things; improving the world, now *that's* a challenge

slave or power battery. If the spirits have any culture of their own, that's another source of mystical story hooks or points of interest. For instance, a hero who merged with a fire elemental in a magical accident may want to explore the Elemental Plane of Fire, while the half-mortal son of a totem-spirit might have the opportunity to learn more about his mythic heritage.

Ghosts, vampires, were-creatures, and other ex-humans or half-humans may gather in little societies of their own, hidden from mundane humanity. These supernatural subcultures probably have strong connections to the Mystic World, just because the supernaturals don't have to hide their true nature from mystics. (This assumes the mystics are friendly. Most likely, only evil mystics willingly associate with, say, predatory vampires.) Conversely, mystics may value Contacts within supernatural subcultures.

As for cursed or enchanted characters: who enchanted them, why, and how? Whether the enchantment was deliberate or accidental, the character gains a connection to someone with formidable mystic powers. If the character enchanted himself, he probably knows a fair bit more about magic, too. He could have Contacts in the Mystic World, and certainly attracts attention from other mystics. Social connections to the Mystic World help set any magic-oriented character apart from other superbeings.

Even a character who simply owns a magic item can be drawn into matters mystical. Someone had to make the item; other people may want to claim the item's power; an item's legendary past may connect a character to ancient enemies or allies.

MYSTICS WHO DON'T LOOK LIKE MYSTICS

Going the other way, a mystic might gain powers that make him look like some other sort of character, such as a martial artist or a nonmagical mentalist or energy projector. A mystic could master certain spells so completely they look just like regular superpowers — only another mystic can tell the difference. A mystic could even give himself super-strength through body augmentation magic and function as a brick.

Example: *As an apprentice Hermetic Theurgist, the superhero Antares discovered an affinity to the energies of Mars. He took up bodybuilding and boxing to strengthen his connection to the red planet's carnal and aggressive aspects, and eventually worked out spells to give himself super-strength, invulnerability, and the power to fly. Even his teammates usually think of Antares as a flying brick. But when the team encounters mystical threats or conundrums, Antares reminds them he knows a great deal of occult lore and can perform a wide variety of ritual spells.*

A priest, pacter, or Servant of Higher Powers may also resemble a superbeing who merely received an enchantment. The priestly character knows a lot more than someone who simply received a gift of power, though. He also may possess a wider range of powers thanks to his own mystical studies.

Of all mystics, wild talents and mad mages look most like nonmystical superbeings, in that they possess the narrowest range of powers. Such self-taught or instinctive mystics tend to have such *weird* powers, however, that few people mistake them for mutants or other sorts of superbeings.

Magic Styles

Any and every sort of magic can appear in a *Champions* setting, but the differences between magic styles depend on flavor more than game mechanics. In rules terms, superheroic magic might not differ much from any other superpower. After all, a playable mystic hero or villain has to be able to attack as ably as any mutant, alien, or powered armor jockey, and has to soak up damage, too. See page 100 for a further description of the stylistic differences between Heroic-level and Superheroic-level magic.

Thaumaturgy

I will repeat a subtle rune
And thronging suns of Otherwhere
Shall blaze upon the blinded air,
And spectres terrible and fair
Shall walk the riven world at noon.

Clark Ashton Smith, "Song of the Necromancer"

The comic books invented their own stripped-down, flashy, combat-oriented style of magic. It occurs in no other genre. In the Champions Universe, mystics call it Thaumaturgy. High Sorcery would be another good name, for this style epitomizes the ideals of high magic: it requires none of the special tools, techniques, and rituals of "realistic" magical styles.

MAGIC THEORY

Thaumaturgy calls on the energies of other dimensions. For some spells, the thaumaturge draws energy directly from another plane and shapes the energy into a spell. In other cases, the mystic invokes a powerful dimension lord or cosmic entity to tap a stream of mystical power already shaped or generated by that entity. The invocation acts like a lens or filter, giving the magical energy a tendency to generate certain effects, making the thaumaturge's job easier.

Invoking divine entities this way doesn't automatically make the mystic a servant of Higher Powers. Most of the Higher Powers don't insist on any special relationship with thaumaturges who call on them. But they may notice a mystic who repeatedly invokes them and take action later.

If the Higher Power approves of the sorcerer, he might become a Contact. On the other hand, if the dimension lord or cosmic entity doesn't like the sorcerer, he might cut off the mystic's link to his power so that particular spell fizzles or blows up in the character's face. If neutrally disposed, the entity might simply ask for some service in exchange for all the times his power helped the mystic.

What do the Higher Powers get out of this arrangement? Many thaumaturges believe the more mystics call on a dimension lord's power, the bigger that power grows. Some cosmic entities permit lesser beings to use their special spells as a way to get publicity, or because they find it flattering. Or perhaps when an entity reaches a certain level of mystical power, its magic "spills over" and the entity can't really stop mystics in other dimensions from exploiting his overflowing energy.

STYLE NOTES

To cast a spell, a thaumaturge just waves his hands. He might speak the name of the spell, such as, "I call on the Scintillant Suns of Saravane!" or "Let the Baleful Bonds of Balthus ensnare you!" Balls, beams, and planes of light appear from the mystic's hands to strike at his foes, deflect attacks, and do whatever else he wants. The oft-alliterative names often refer to the powerful mystics or dimension lords who invented the spells.

GAME MECHANICS

Thaumaturges can use any Attack Power in their spells, with the *Ranged* Advantage added if necessary. (Hand-To-Hand Attack is the only Attack Power they hardly ever use.) Defense Powers are more limited: as with most mystics, Mental Defense and Power Defense are the only common Persistent Defenses. Otherwise, they use Force Field, Force Wall, and Missile Deflection.

Many thaumaturges learn astral projection. This special form of Duplication is the only Body-Affecting Power used very much by most thaumaturges.

A thaumaturge's use of other Powers generally conforms to the standards for other mystics. They rarely have Persistent Powers of any sort.

Thaumaturgy relies heavily on Power Frameworks. Thaumaturgical spells tend to come in many variations. A super-mage might cast a mystic bolt to strike one target, or an area; one time, the spell might blast apart brick walls, but on another occasion it doesn't even leave a mark. Shared special effects, or a common origin, link other spells. Therefore, many spells are better represented as Multipowers instead of single powers. As Superheroic-level characters, thaumaturges also frequently make use of Elemental Controls and Variable Power Pools.

A character doesn't need to buy every variation of a spell, or place every spell within its own Multipower. A super-mage loses little by gathering all his attack spells in one Multipower (though of course, then he cannot combine spells for multiple-power attacks). For instance, a mystic might buy a Multipower with two slots of *Koriol's Crimson Crystals,* three *Sorcerer's Stars,* and a *Hypnotic Helix.* A second Multipower or Elemental Control could hold spells for defense, movement, or other purposes — or you could simply give the character a Multipower reserve large enough for him to use two slots at once.

Limitations

At first sight, Gestures and Incantations may seem appropriate for thaumaturges. In the comic books, though, nothing less than hog-tying and gagging a thaumaturge can prevent him from casting spells. A thaumaturge can fire off spells while being slammed with attacks that would ruin any Gestures, and he doesn't absolutely need to call out the spell's name. *Restrainable,* at -¼, ably represents how an enemy can prevent a captured thaumaturge from casting spells, but even it isn't required. The greatest masters, including dimension lords, perform magic with no Limitations at all.

However, not every thaumaturge necessarily reaches this acme of austere purity. Some of these mystics do use Foci, Gestures, or Incantations, or they accept a little uncertainty in their magic through Activation Rolls, Required Skill Rolls, and perhaps even Side Effects. A thaumaturge whose spells carry a Variable Limitation still needs some vestiges of ritual to use his magic, but is no longer completely dependent on any one tool or technique.

Comic book mystics seldom battle in ordinary clothing. They might cast tiny spells in their Secret Identity, but when the sky is falling and nameless horrors run amuck, they instantly change their civvies for colorful outfits before they blast away with their mystic bolts. But this only qualifies for an *Only In Heroic Identity* Limitation if some circumstance can actually prevent the character from changing into costume and casting spells.

Disadvantages

Thaumaturgy itself does not impose any special Disadvantages on practitioners. If anything, they are often exempted from many mystical sources of Disadvantages, such as vows and prohibitions. Players must decide for themselves where to set the balance between the mystical and superheroic styles.

Sample Spells

Here are a few examples of typical spells a thaumaturge might know. See *The Mystic World* for many more.

LEVITORY LOCUS

Effect: Flight 12"
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
END Cost: 1

Description: This is just one example of many spells thaumaturges use to fly. The *Levitory Locus* creates a swirling disk of yellow light under the caster's feet. The disk carries the mystic into the air. The character's feet stick to the *Locus,* so he can fly upside down if he wants. The disk is intangible to anyone else.

Game Information: *Flight 12", Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼). Total cost: 30 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase Flight to 18". Total cost: 45 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease Flight to 10". Total cost: 25 points.

3) Rapid Flight: Add x8 Noncombat to Flight. Total cost: 42 points.

4) Very Rapid Flight: Replace Reduced Endurance (½ END) with MegaScale (1" = 1 km; +¼). Total cost: 30 points.

5) Master Flight: A master of the Levitory Locus might have a Multipower with slots tailored to various purposes:

Cost	Powers
30	*Levitory Locus:* Multipower, 30-point reserve
3u	1) *Basic Flight*: Flight 12", Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)
3u	2) *Rapid Flight:* Flight 10", x8 Noncombat
3u	3) *Very Rapid Flight:* Flight 12", MegaScale (1" = 1 km; +¼)

Total cost: 39 points.

SHIELDS OF SKARN

Effect: Force Field (various configurations)
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
END Cost: 3/3/2

Description: Mystics throughout the Champions Universe fear the dimensional conqueror Skarn the Shaper, but they have to admit he's a top-notch thaumaturge. Skarn invented these unusually rigid mystic shields, which resist even the subtlest and most piercing spells. A thousand years ago, Skarn lost a bet to another thaumaturge and paid by teaching him this spell. It has spread widely since then, though most sorcerers know a less powerful version than Skarn himself uses. The *Shields* look like a three-foot-high curved rectangle of iridescent light that hovers in front of the caster. Incoming spells are drawn to the shield.

Game Information:

Cost	Powers
31	*Shields of Skarn:* Multipower, 31-point reserve
3u	1) *Mental Shield:* Force Field (10 PD/10 ED/5 Mental Defense), Hardened (+¼)
3u	2) *Mystic Shield:* Force Field (10 PD/10 ED/5 Power Defense), Hardened (+¼)
3u	3) *Stability Shield:* Force Field (8 PD/ 8 ED), Hardened (+¼) **plus** Knockback Resistance -5"

Total cost: 40 points.

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase the reserve to 44 points, Slot 1 to Force Field (14 PD/14 ED/7 Mental Defense), Slot 2 to Force Field (14 PD/14 ED/7 Power Defense), and Slot 3 to Force Field (12 PD/12 ED) **plus** Knockback Resistance -7". Total cost: 56 points.

2) Less Tiring Spell: Increase the reserve to 37 points, add Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼) to each slot, and increase Slot 3 to Force Field (9 PD/9 ED). Total cost: 49 points.

THE SILVER CIRCLES OF SELESTAR

Effect:	**Entangle 3-6d6, with various Advantages**
Target/Area Affected:	**One character or 6" Cone**
Duration:	**Instant**
Range:	**300"**
END Cost:	**6/6/6/6**

Description: The dimension of Selestar is ruled by the Geometers, minions of the cosmic entity Urizen the Lawgiver. The Geometers developed many spells using geometrical forms which they share freely with Urizen's other followers. Over the millennia, other thaumaturges learned them too. The *Silver Circles* create a swarm of silver hoops that wrap around the spell's target. Many variations exist.

Game Information:

Cost	Power
60	*Silver Circles Of Selestar:* Multipower, 60-point reserve
6u	1) *1st Circle:* Entangle 6d6, 6 DEF
6u	2) *2nd Circle:* Entangle 4d6, 4 DEF, Takes No Damage From Attacks (+½)
6u	3) *3rd Circle:* Entangle 4d6, 4 DEF, Sticky (+½)
6u	4) *4th Circle:* Entangle 3d6, 3 DEF, Area Of Effect (6" Cone; +1)

Total Cost: 84 points.

Options:

1) Strong Spells: Increase reserve to 82 points, Slot 1 to Entangle 8d6, 8 DEF, Slots 2 and 3 to 6d6, 5 DEF each, and Slot 4 to Entangle 4d6, 4 DEF. Total cost: 114 points.

2) Weak Spells I: Decrease reserve to 52 points, Slot 1 to Entangle 5d6, 5 DEF, Slots 2 and 3 to Entangle 4d6, 3 DEF each, and Slot 4 to 3d6, 2 DEF. Total cost: 72 points.

3) Weak Spells II: Decrease reserve to 40 points, Slot 1 to Entangle 4d6, 4 DEF, Slots 2 and 3 to Entangle 2d6, 3 DEF each, and Slot 4 to Entangle 2d6, 2 DEF. Total cost: 56 points.

CYBER HERO

For a genre that prides itself on its aura of near-future realism, cyberpunk actually has a strong mystical streak. Netrunners send their consciousness out of "the meat" like astral projectors. Corporations are as powerful, cruel, and untouchable as gods, with executives as their high priests and AI avatars as their angels. Yet the secret knowledge of icebreaker programs and cheat codes can command the software-spirits and steal the lightning of data from the gods' own hands. Bioengineering and cyberware make men more than human... or less, into predators as fierce as any werewolf or vampire. Virtual reality goggles or eye implants make the world itself a shifting dream.

In pure *Cyber Hero,* characters may be mystics by metaphor, using technology advanced enough to look like magic. They're much like classic scholar-mages. Some people may view their mysticism as more than metaphor, too, and believe they genuinely touch something divine when they leave the meat for digital simulations. Maybe they do: if minds really can abandon bodies to exist in virtual worlds, that's not much different from a soul going to an afterlife... but remember to flatter the sysop, for he becomes the God who can consign you to Hell or oblivion.

Of course characters can visit virtual worlds patterned on any sort of Fantasy, where they can take the roles of wizards, priests, and supernatural creatures. That is almost trivial — unless the whole world is a digital phantom, as in the *Matrix* movie trilogy, and hacking the system makes you a mage in truth.

The similarities between cyberpunk and Fantasy leads some authors and gamers to blend them. In these settings, magic returns to the world at some point in the near future to mingle with the cyber-tech. Elves and dragons coexist with chainguns and cyber-samurai, and wizards cast spells with their keyboards instead of magic wands and circles. All sorts of mystical character types could appear in a setting like this, with as much of a high-tech spin as you want. A ghost could be a personality upload — or a ghost. A servant of Higher Powers could serve a superintelligent AI, or a more traditional god (and who's to say the AI isn't a new mask for an old deity?). Gamemasters can decide for themselves how far they want to push the resemblance between cyberpunk and Fantasy.

CYBER HERO: THE STAR

A nameless hacker with an interest in kabbalism merged his hobbies and accidentally opened a portal to Hell. The grand duke Astaroth came through the portal — but the cyberkabbalist's spell brought the archdevil into the Net instead of the material world. The Demon of Omniscience found the Net a convivial home.

Astaroth seeks mortal worshippers and minions to work his will in the material world. Netrunners now trade rumors of the mysterious überhacker called The Star who can crack any security system and give you anything you want... but you must do something for him in return. And once you accept The Star's help, he owns you forever. Some cyberjocks search for The Star to ask his help anyway, or to challenge him and see who's kung fu is stronger. Most of them think The Star is an AI daimon. Only a few frightened netrunners suspect The Star is a demon in truth — an inhuman evil subverting more and more of the digital world.

DARK CHAMPIONS: JULIAN SILVERS

This scion of a family with a history of mysticism didn't have the brains to be a master sorcerer, or the patience and subtlety to foster evil through business, politics, or the media. Julian chose crime. His master Paimon, a king in the Descending Hierarchy, guided him to a city already rife with crime and corruption. Julian's few spells were enough to make him the master of a small gang, then a large one. Julian is now the youngest crime boss in the city. The older bosses don't like treating him as an equal, but he knows too much about their operations, and three assassination attempts have failed. Plus, his chief enforcer Randy Dandy scares the snot out of hardened gunsels.

Julian knows three significant spells. The first lets him contact Paimon. The archdevil provides advice, makes demands, and sometimes works magic in return for sacrifices. (It's a plot device for origins and to set adventures in motion. The archdevil cannot himself enter the mortal world.) A scrying-spell lets Julian spy on anyone in the city if he has a sympathetic link. A jeweled talisman lets him paralyze, hypnotize, or stun his foes. Paimon also gave him two magic rings. One makes Julian nigh-invulnerable (at least by *Dark Champions* standards...), while the other turns him invisible for a short time.

The cops won't touch Julian. He harvests money from every vice known to man, and spreads it around through copious bribery. Now if he could just do something about those vigilantes, and that private eye Sarah Redhawk, he could turn the city into Hell on Earth.



DARK CHAMPIONS

Contemporary action-adventure genres present many opportunities for mystical characters. Heroic-level vigilantes often operate in a scaled-down version of the usual superhero world, where anything goes. If a vigilante discovers a werewolf is committing the "ripper" murders terrorizing the city, well, that means it's time to load his gun with silver bullets. Just about any sort of mystic or supernatural creature could appear as an adversary, if you tone him down properly to fit the heroes' power level and the nature of the campaign. Mystical enemies also operate more covertly than their Superheroic-level counterparts: for instance, the evil sorcerer doesn't blast apart the museum in search of an artifact, he uses Mind Control on the director. See pages 314-15 of *Dark Champions* for more information about using magic and mysticism, as well as other "paranormal" phenomena, in the modern-day action-adventure genre.

Paramilitary and espionage campaigns don't usually include real magic. Commandos and superspies can encounter charlatans, though. Perhaps the leader of a terrorist cult convinces his followers he has magical or divine powers (it worked for the founder of the Hashishim). A dictator or warlord may believe in the occult and consult charlatans: for instance, mysticism obsessed Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS. Elite spies may even become charlatans themselves to get close to an occult-minded target, or try to spoof a target with a supernatural hoax (a common *Mission: Impossible* plot).

On the other hand, you could create a "Monster Hunters" campaign in which elite paramilitary forces hunt mystical threats. The Initiative from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* and the *Delta Green* supplements for the *Call of Cthulhu* game, supply examples and inspiration; so does the novel *Necroscope* by Brian Lumley. You could select one particular mystical type as the principle enemy, such as vampires, Satanists, or Nameless Horrors From Beyond — or throw in everything for a rollicking, high caliber monster mash.

Supernatural Thriller

Dark Champions can include the supernatural or occult thriller, which most bookstores file under "horror." These stories feature tough private eyes, Special Forces soldiers turned university professors, and other super-competent people, battling mystical forces on their own, without the backing of a larger agency. Heroic-level mystics and supernatural creatures also appear as protagonists. Robert Weinberg's novels such as *The Devil's Auction* and *The Black Lodge* are typical examples. Sometimes an author combines the archetypes. The '90s saw a rash of supernatural thrillers about tough female detectives who were also witches, zombie animators, faerie princesses, or otherwise mystical.

Supernatural thriller campaigns involve Competent Normal or Heroic-level characters. Competent Normal characters probably don't begin the campaign as mystics, though occultists are a viable concept. Scholar-mages, wild talents, and occult investigators are the most appropriate Heroic-level mystical characters. Characters who begin the campaign not knowing about the supernatural may become these sorts of mystics as the campaign progresses: this often happens in supernatural thrillers. You may, in fact, give players the option to write up a Competent Normal or Normal character with a reserve of unspent Character Points to "promote" the character to Heroic-level as the campaign progresses. Other mystical characters don't appear as often, at least as protagonists (though the tough female private eye mystics always seem to end up in bed with a handsome and sympathetic vampire). Wilder campaigns may permit any sort of mystical character, as either PC or adversary. These may slide into Superheroic-level point ranges, though

individual powers remain at Heroic standards.

Weird Conspiracy

Television shows like *The X-Files* exemplify a lower-key approach to contemporary mystical adventure. The heroes are Competent Normal people such as criminal investigators, doctors, or academics who seek the truth about paranormal events, from demonic possession to UFOs. As with supernatural thrillers, you may focus on one mystery, or throw in several: for example, while *The X-Files* focused on aliens and UFOs, heroes Mulder and Scully also investigated witches, demons, and other apparently mystical phenomena.

Some people already know whatever the characters seek, and they try to keep the secret. Whether the enemy is a cabal of Satanist businessmen or a government plot to cover up UFOs, some conspiratorial group hinders the PCs while itself trying to remain hidden. The paranormal may be less immediately dangerous to the PCs than the agents of the Conspiracy, and paranoia runs high as informants die or turn out to be Conspiracy agents planting disinformation. Exposing the Conspiracy and discovering its goals matters as much as finding the truth about mysterious events. In fact, solving either mystery would explain the other one, too.

In a Weird Conspiracy campaign focusing on mysticism, the characters are occult investigators by campaign premise. They can't be true mystics, let alone magical creatures: the mystery is a lot less mysterious if the characters are already part of it. Their quarry may be mystical, though characters shouldn't start out knowing what they're really after. There isn't much mystery if players figure out that, yup, it's all aliens. Or demons, or sorcerers, or whatever. The big secret should turn out to be something quite different from what it first seemed, and the Conspiracy may itself be deluded. For instance, some UFOlogists point out that supposed extraterrestrials behave a lot like faerie-folk from old tales. So maybe a campaign to investigate alien abductions, which at first seems like low-level Science Fiction, actually turns out to be about the secret mystical danger of faeries, who've adopted a veneer of high tech to fit into the modern age. Even that might not be the final truth, though. The faeries themselves may turn out to be something other than what the characters first think.

If the campaign includes magic, it should be low-key and "realistic" in the sense that it doesn't provide easy proof of its own existence. Most historical arcana, such as Hermetic Theurgy or Voodoo, can be adapted for a mystic Weird Conspiracy campaign. Of course, the PCs may also encounter charlatans who believe in various styles of magic, or pretend to. Not that the PCs should ever be sure right away the characters are charlatans....

FANTASY HERO

The *Fantasy Hero* genre book contains a complete discussion of magic and mystics in full-blown Fantasy campaigns, where the supernatural usually is out in the open and fairly common. Several Fantasy subgenres, however, require special mention.

Writers set most Fantasy stories in invented worlds, and most gamers follow this tradition. Even if the writer calls the setting Earth's distant past or future (such as the "Hyborian Age" of Conan the Barbarian, the far-future continent of Zothique from stories by Clark Ashton Smith, or Jack Vance's tales of the Dying Earth), there's no meaningful connection to the real world. A significant subset of Fantasy, however, brings the supernatural into the "real" world: either contemporary Earth, or some past era.

Urban Fantasy

Quite a few writers set Fantasy stories in the contemporary world. Sometimes the supernatural carefully hides itself. Mystics often belong to secret societies that work to keep humanity ignorant of magic — either to rule from the shadows, or because most people aren't enlightened enough to handle the Big Secret. Other stories simply assume magic is so rare, or so subtle, that most people never encounter it, and wouldn't recognize it anyway. Juvenile Fantasy often falls in the latter category: when children try to tell grown-ups about the magic going on, the grown-ups assume the children are "just making it up." The "Harry Potter" series by J. K. Rowling presents a setting of hidden magic; the "World of Darkness" setting from White Wolf Games presents a grimmer world of contemporary vampires, werewolves, mages, and other mystical creatures engaged in secret battles; the short stories of Charles deLint provide an example of more subtle street magic. Tales of magic in the modern world are often called *Urban Fantasy,* though they aren't always set in cities.

At high power levels, Urban Fantasy overlaps with superhero settings. Assuming a fairly "pure" urban Fantasy setting, though, you can still build a campaign around characters of any power levels. Sometimes Urban Fantasy overlaps with supernatural thrillers (discussed under *Dark Champions*) instead. Most characters are interchangeable between these genres.

Competent Normal characters for Urban Fantasy are ordinary people who know extraordinary things — most importantly, that the supernatural really exists. Even a minor talent such as *Astral Awareness* (see page 50) or a little Mental Defense becomes remarkable for these characters. On the other hand, they can call on the resources of the modern world — emergency rooms, Internet searches, guns, and so on — which may help them cope with the supernatural. The young heroes of juvenile or young-adult Fantasy may be Normal characters in most ways, apart from any magic they may learn or acquire.

ALTERNATE-HISTORICAL FANTASY: PHARAOH NAPOLEON

In 1798, General Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Egypt in the name of France. He brought scholars with him as well as soldiers; they scoured Egypt for artifacts and information about the Pharaonic era. In 1799, British and Turkish forces drive the French from Egypt — but Napoleon stages a coup when he returns home. The armies of France march almost unhindered from then on, as plagues, storms, and freak disasters befall every opposing force. Worse yet, general after defeated general turns coat after meeting the Emperor. The Pope is defeated, deposed, and driven into exile. God Himself seems to decree that Napoleon shall rule the world.

But what god?

A few mystics know the truth. In Egypt, Napoleon found the secret shrine of Amun in the oasis of Siwa. Like Alexander the Great, he returned as the adopted son of Amun, god of kingship. Every palace in Napoleon's empire now holds a shrine to Amun and other Egyptian gods, and Napoleon's inner circle practices dark magics to curse its foes. Only magic can fight magic: Hermetics, alchemists, and kabbalists are all needed to stop the Pharaoh of France. But can they put aside their own differences, and make peace with a Church that calls them all heretics, before the mad Corsican tyrant destroys Christendom and the old gods rule once more?

Heroic-Level mystics or occult investigators are frequent heroes for Urban Fantasy campaigns. Wild talents are especially common: many urban fantasies feature protagonists who discover unsuspected mystic powers once they enter the secret, supernatural world. Actual supernatural creatures, such as vampires or spirits, need extra work to humanize them and to keep their power balanced with mortal characters. You may want to keep supernatural characters as adversaries, or as allies whose limitations keep them out of the action much of the time.

Superheroic-Level characters in Urban Fantasy campaigns may be any sort of mystic or supernatural creature, from scholar-mages to werewolves, as long as they have some way to remain hidden from humanity. True mystics *are* human, of course. Many supernatural creatures look human (such as vampires or some faerie-folk), can change their shape (were-creatures or some sorts of demons), or disguise themselves with illusion (other sorts of demons). On the other hand, some urban Fantasy or horror stories assume the supernatural has gone public, and explore the consequences to society. In this case, just about anything supernatural could appear.

Historical And Alternate-Historical Fantasy

Some Fantasy writers create stories that take place in fantastical versions of real historical periods. For instance, Harry Turtledove set *Land Between The Rivers* in early Sumeria, with the gods and demons the Sumerians actually believed in; and his *Thessalonika* is set in that Greek city during the Middle Ages, with a war involving gods, mythic creatures, sorcery, and saints. Tim Powers's novels such as *Drawing Of The Dark* and *On Stranger Tides* also present good examples of historical Fantasy. (See also the discussion of *Victorian Hero, Western Hero,* and *Pulp Hero,* below, for more recent historical settings.) Authors often assume that magic once was real but has faded or gone into hiding.

Competent Normal characters in campaigns modeled on this subgenre probably shouldn't cast spells, but they may know something about the supernatural. For instance, they might carry amulets to ward off demons, or know where and how to contact local spirits. At most, characters possess minor mystic talents such as second sight or a holy relic. They don't wield the supernatural, they cope with it.

Spellcasting becomes feasible for Heroic-level mystical characters. Within this general category, mystics may range from a traveling friar who performs exorcisms to powerful wizards such as Merlin. Characters can be any sort of true mystic. In some campaigns, the GM may allow low-powered versions of overtly supernatural characters such as werewolves or spirit hybrids.

Superheroic-level alternate mystical history characters can be mighty wizards, mythic creatures, offspring of gods, or gods themselves. The setting is probably based more on a culture's mythology than on its history — for example, the GM might set his campaign in Mythic Greece or Mythic China, not historical Greece or China. You probably shouldn't pretend the setting is an actual, hidden side of history; it's a Fantasy world that happens to copy a real mythology and culture.

For best effect, a GM who creates a Historical Fantasy setting should research the actual supernatural beliefs of that time and place. In Europe from the Roman Empire to the Victorian Age, scholarly mystics use some variation on Hermetic Theurgy. The witch Erichtho, from Lucan's *Pharsalia,* is a great example of a powerful Greco-Roman necromancer. Particular cultures may use more specific forms of magic, such as Norse rune-craft or Taoist alchemy.

Juvenile Fantasy

In juvenile or young adult fantasies, the protagonist is often a boy or girl just starting to learn magic. The character may become the student of an adult mystic, or he may find a book of magic or some other way to teach himself. Other stories feature a group of children who may include one nascent mystic. Sometimes the children merely find a magic item or supernatural creature whose powers they attempt to exploit. Classic examples include the novels of Edward Eager and Edith Nesbit.



In most ways, these youthful heroes are simply Normal characters, albeit with presence of mind far beyond their years. Magic is extremely easy to learn, though: a bright child can cast spells or brew powerful magic potions if he has a grimoire or some other source of instruction. In a Juvenile Fantasy campaign, magic may not require characters to spend points on actual powers. At most, they might buy a Skill to reflect growing knowledge of magic. Treat the grimoires, wishing rings, enchanted gardens, and suchlike as Independent magic. The child protagonists can activate the magic with ease, but cannot control it very well: most of the fun comes from the magic's unintended consequences. In campaigns where young characters learn spellcasting for themselves, you might write them up as Normal characters with a reserve of extra points they can spend on spells as the campaign progresses.

Technomancy

"Why shouldn't a modern city have its special ghosts, like castles and graveyards and big old manor houses once had?"

Fritz Leiber, Our Lady Of Darkness

Technomancy — the fusion of science and magic. With two such powers conjoined, what would not be possible? Imagine computers casting spells with digital precision, a million times faster than any human wizard... machines brought to life with synthetic souls.... enchanted firearms... mass-produced magic and cyborged spirits.

Technomancy comes from contemporary "urban Fantasy." In these stories, post-modern magi filter traditional magic through a blend of urban hipness and pop culture, including the machines that permeate modern life. Techno-mystics also appear in comic books and superhero games, which easily absorb every new trend.

Perspectives on Technomancy usually take one of two forms.

Urban Ritual Magic

What a load of bullcrap, say most mystics. Magic and high technology are just too different, they insist. Science is about what works even if you don't believe in it: objective, impersonal, measured, precise. Magic, on the other hand, is fundamentally subjective, ambiguous, and personal. The magician views reality as a network of interconnected symbols vibrant with meaning, life, and power. Intangible and "subjective" qualities such as moral character and mythic resonance are as fundamental to magic as they are alien to scientific thought. A computer could no more cast a spell than a toaster could write a symphony.

And yet...could it be that science is simply too new, not yet assimilated? And that mystics who deny the possibility of technomancy are just miffed at being upstaged by high-tech wonders they can't understand?

Well, maybe. A few young mages experiment with combining modern technology and magic. They make some progress. Television sets, for instance, work just as well as crystal balls for scrying. Spells to enchant bows and arrows also work for guns and bullets. Summoners raise elementals from scrap metal, electricity, and smog.

So far, however, these self-proclaimed "technomancers" only perform traditional feats using new materials. Scrying with a TV set merely exploits the TV set's symbolic character as a "device for seeing" without involving or understanding how television actually works. The "urban elementals" show more promise, since they're attempts to exploit forms of matter with new properties.

In a setting like this, what "technomancy" exists, therefore, should more properly be called "urban magic." It uses the products of technology as symbolic foci for magic, or crafts spells specifically to affect technological artifacts, or relies on occult energies generated by modern cities. It is the newest and rarest of the magic arts. Most technomancers are wild talents, or at least self-taught.

Urban High Magic

In other settings, magic and technology have been more fully and logically integrated — perhaps for a long time, perhaps only recently. The relationship of Magic and Science (whatever it might be) is better understood. Magic is the subject of rigorous scientific study in some quarters; in others, magicians use their spells to do things normally relegated only to science (provide power for technological devices, mass-produce consumer goods, and so forth). Depending on how common, easily used, and accepted magic is, society may feature police and military units that use spells and enchanted items (often specifically against magic-using foes), colleges that offer degrees in magic, and magic employed to do what science cannot yet.

For example, imagine a world where wizards use spells to transmute pollutants into building materials, gasoline, or food. Suddenly, businesses can pollute all they want, and society benefits doubly: the costs of many consumer good go down, and society gains raw materials it needs (perhaps, as the cycle continues, lessening the need to exploit the environment). The *Shadowrun* roleplaying game and Poul Anderson's short story "Operation Salamander" both depict settings with this more common, powerful, and societally accepted Technomancy.

JUVENILE FANTASY: CORRIE MCCRACKEN

Her Irish grandmother was a witch, from a long line of witches, but the Gift skipped a generation. Grandma decided to initiate Corrie into the Craft a little early due to her own advanced age. Corrie loves her newly-revealed powers, and shares the secret with her young friends Megan and Mitch. They try using magic to help classmates, relatives, or themselves — but Grandma's warning about careless magic proves true again and again. Corrie knows that if things get too bad, Grandma can fix them... but she'd rather eat a worm or kiss a boy than confess her blunders to a grown-up. So far, 12-year-old wits and ancient witchcraft have pulled Corrie and her friends out of trouble, but only when joined to courage, honesty, and compassion.

Corrie's magic involves brewing potions in a cauldron, accompanied with incantations from Grandma's spellbook, the *Book Of Shadows.* Effectively, Corrie can summon a spirit for any one, narrowly defined purpose, directed at one, specific person... but her wish usually has side effects she didn't expect.

MAGIC THEORY

When people create and use their machines, they invest them with psychic energy — thought-forms, to speak Hermetically. Large concentrations of "processed" matter, such as steel, concrete, and glass, also create their own elementals. Just as older styles of ritual magic invoke the spirits of nature or the planets, technomancy invokes the new spirits and psychic forces of the city. Some technomancers go the other way, and use new media to invoke traditional powers: magic circles of neon and electric wiring, sigils drawn on computer chips, and the like.

Post-modern magicians raid older myths and arcana for techniques and theories. For a TV-scrying spell, a mystic might draw sigils of Mercury and Jupiter on the screen, and make Voodoo-like offerings of candles, rum, and cigars to a picture of Edward R. Murrow. The incongruity of the juxtapositions is itself a source of power.

Urban magicians have already evolved some shared terms. Urban ley-lines are called "power mains" or, since they often follow main roads, "thoroughfares." Ley line intersections are "substations" or "juncture boxes." A city's pattern of mystic energies is called "the Grid." Some urban magicians speculate that the energies of cities even create their own elemental plane. They call this dimension "The Grey" (always with British spelling, just to be pretentious), or "The Silverbright."



STYLE NOTES

Special effects can vary widely in technomancy, but they keep an "urban" or quasi-technological feel. Spells might be accompanied by sparks or fluorescent glows. Nearby lights may flicker and machines behave oddly. The materials used are those of the modern world — plastic, electronics, concrete, mass-manufactured consumer goods.

Foci are common. These often have a strong connection to the desired spell effect. Thus, a spell to evoke or manipulate electricity might require a penlight, electric toothbrush, or some other small, battery-powered item. A spell to summon elemental forces of concrete, metal, smog, or glass would require a Focus of that substance, or related to it at any rate. Smog spells, for instance, might use a talisman cut from an old muffler and steeped seven days in old motor oil. Some technomancers seem more like "weird scientists," building crazed machines to work their magic.

Most importantly, technomancy is *weird* — every urban mage's spells are custom creations, drawn from his own selection of arcane theory and practice, pop culture, and personal whimsy. Surprise and humor (or horror) matter as much as anything to establishing an urban mystical style.

GAME MECHANICS

Technomancy is a heterogeneous art. No Powers or Advantages are more or less suitable than for other arcana. Some spells require many Limitations, while others get by with just one. Every technomancer has his own substyle, with its own quirks. Some casters require Foci, Incantations, Charges or some other common Limitation on all their spells; some don't. Players and/or GMs who create technomancers must decide on their own what Limitations the characters take.

Magic Rolls are quite appropriate, though. Spells are so idiosyncratic that a technomancer can't draw on a large body of established lore and time-tested spells; he relies on inspiration and sheer chutzpah. When he guesses wrong — but not wrong enough — Side Effects make sense, too, as his little-understood powers short out and bite him on the ass.

Technomancy itself suggests no special Disadvantages, but an urban mage might adapt the typical Disadvantages of other arcane traditions. For instance, a techno-Hermetic Theurgist might have a Vow-based Physical Limitation specifying that he must conduct rituals to maintain his powers. Every day, he meditates under high tension lines while wearing a tinfoil hat, or carries a pocketful of batteries three times around the crosswalks at an intersection. An urban shaman might be Watched by spirits of the Grid.

Sample Spells

DERELICTION

Effect:	Invisibility to Sight and Hearing Groups
Target/Area Affected:	Self
Duration:	Constant
Range:	Self
END Cost:	0

Description: The countless millions of people who have studiously ignored beggars create a powerful psychic force a mystic can harness. By invoking this force through the chant of "Spare change? Spare change?" and an outstretched hand, the caster can move unseen virtually anywhere. The caster isn't literally invisible; people just refuse to notice him. Because this is magic, it doesn't matter if the mystic is actually in full costume, walking through the White House: if anyone looks at him, their eyes glaze and they quickly walk past.

Dereliction has two great weaknesses. First, it only works on people, not animals or cameras and other mechanical sensors. Second, getting involved in any sort of combat nullifies the spell.

Game Information: *Invisibility to Sight and Hearing Groups, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (37 Active Points); Doesn't Work Against Animals Or Machines (-½), Gestures (throughout; -½), Incantations (throughout; -½), Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost: 12 points.*

Options:

1) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost 15 points.

2) Attentive Spell: Add Concentration (½ DCV throughout; -½). Total cost 11 points.

KIDDIE SPACE GUN OF DOOM

Effect:	Energy Blast 4d6, AVLD
Target/Area Affected:	One character
Duration:	Instant
Range:	250"
END Cost:	5

Description: This spell works by literalizing a metaphor: it makes a toy plastic "space gun" shoot a real energy bolt. The caster can use a toy laser gun or one of those toy guns that spits sparks when you squeeze the trigger. A technomancer might engrave sigils on the plastic gun and invoke Barakiel, angel of lightning, when he fires the gun; or he might draw runes and call on Thor.

Many sorts of attacks are possible: an urban mage might buy several Energy Blast variations through a Kiddie Space Gun.

Game Information: *Energy Blast 4d6, AVLD (defense is Power Defense; +1½) (50 Active Points); OAF (toy space gun; -1), Incantations (-¼), Requires A Magic Roll (-½), Side Effects (Energy Blast 6d6; -½). Total cost: 15 points.*

Options:

1) Strong Spell: Increase to Energy Blast 5d6. 62 Active Points; total cost 19 points.

2) Weak Spell: Decrease to Energy Blast 3d6. 37 Active Points; total cost 11 points.

3) Safe Spell: Remove Side Effects (-½). Total cost 18 points.

4) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½) and Side Effects (-½). Total cost 22 points.

5) Silent Spell: Remove Incantations (-¼). Total cost 17 points.

TAXI!

Effect:	Summon a cabbie with Vehicle
Target/Area Affected:	One cabbie and taxi
Duration:	Instant
Range:	No Range
END Cost:	2

Description: This spell has a prosaic but useful effect: the character takes a step, waves his hand, calls for a cab, and a perfectly ordinary taxicab drives up, ready to take him where he wants to go. (For the cab, use the Taxicab writeup on pages 9-10 of *The HERO System Vehicle Sourcebook*.) The driver even speaks clear and fluent English! The spell works anywhere there's a road; the driver's mind is clouded so he can't explain why he happened to be deep in the Ozarks, or wherever. The driver does, however, still expect the caster to pay his fare.

The Focus for this spell is a little plaque shaped like a taxi, cut from metal taken from a wrecked cab, and consecrated to spirits of metalwork or travel such as Ogoun, Hephaistos, Hermes, Anubis, or St. Christopher. Variant spells can Summon an ordinary policeman, a pushcart vendor, or even a parking space (equivalent to Summoning a Base with nothing but a hex of Size).

Game Information: *Summon a cabbie built on up to 25 Character Points (5 Active Points); OAF (taxi talisman; -1), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Only Works When Character Is Standing Beside A Road (-½), Requires A Magic Roll (-½) (total cost: 1 point)* ***plus*** *Summon 59-point Taxicab (12 Active Points); OAF (taxi talisman; -1), Gestures (-¼), Incantations (-¼), Only Works When Character Is Standing Beside A Road (-½), Requires A Magic Roll (-½) (total cost: 3 points). Total cost: 4 points.*

Options:

1) Free Spell: Remove OAF (-1). Total cost 2 + 5 = 7 points.

2) Stilled Spell: Remove Gestures (-¼). Total cost 1 + 4 = 5 points.

3) Silent Spell: Remove Incantations (-¼). Total cost 1 + 4 = 5 points.

4) Reliable Spell: Remove Requires A Magic Roll (-½). Total cost 2 + 4 = 6 points.

5) "Realistic" Spell: Replace Only Works When Character Is Standing Beside A Road (-½) with Summoned Being Must Inhabit Locale (-½) and Arrives Under Own Power (-½). Total cost 1 + 3 = 4 points.

6) Superheroic Spell: Remove all Limitations. Total cost 5 + 12 = 17 points.

7) Loyal Cabbie: The cabbie becomes a Follower for the rest of the adventure. Add Loyal (+½) to the Cabbie portion of the spell. 7 + 12 = 19 Active Points; total cost 2 + 3 = 5 points.

NINJA HERO

Mysticism is fundamental to the martial arts genre, even in its most "realistic" treatments. Eastern martial arts have intimate connections to the mystical religions of Buddhism and Taoism. *Ch'i* is itself a mystical concept, a supernatural energy that people may accumulate, shape, and direct. Legends about great martial artists include all manner of magical feats. Even the weapons used in fighting arts tend to accumulate mythology, such as the myriad powers the Malay people ascribe to the *kris*.

Stories and games follow the legends. Martial arts masters are at least borderline mystics. Legendary powers like the "death touch" push further across the line into blatant magic. *Ninja Hero* and *The Ultimate Martial Artist* describe the mystical feats attributed to martial arts masters.

Just as martial artists can be mystics too, the Martial and Mystic Worlds intersect in the East. Martial artists often learn their fighting skills at temples, and they may be priests or monks. The standard repertoire of villains includes evil cults who combine martial arts with vile mystical beliefs and practices. The long-lost book or scroll that explains a powerful "secret technique" is a grimoire for all practical purposes, and the "secret techniques" themselves tend to be magical. Legendary weapons with uncanny powers are another mystical trope often found in martial arts adventures.

Wuxia And Anime

The *wuxia* and anime sub-genres go all the way as hybrids between martial arts and high Fantasy. Martial artists manifest battle auras and fire *ch'i* blasts, while wizards swing swords and leap about while casting spells. All sorts of true mystics can appear, both as heroes and villains. For instance, eunuch court officials who are also powerful black magicians are one of the classic *wuxia* villains. Other sorts of mystical characters are not out of the question, either, especially as villains. Chinese vampires, fairy foxes, grotesque demons, and ghostly maidens with prehensile hair can all appear in these wild martial arts fantasies.

Campaigns and PCs are Heroic-level at least, and are often Superheroic-level. Heroes range from martial arts masters with flamboyant *ch'i* powers, to Taoist warriors who mix magical blasts with their swordplay, to outright sorcerers and holy men with magical powers, all the way to sympathetic ghosts, spirits, or demigods.

You can consider *ch'i* powers a form of high magic, like Sadhana (and sharing the use of meditation as a road to power), but placing greater emphasis on augmenting the body, impairing and healing others, and fighting ghosts and demons. True mystics employ Taoist, Buddhist, or Shinto forms of ritual magic, albeit with most of the ritual stripped out so practitioners can use spells in combat. Magic is always flashy: when a saintly Buddhist monk exorcises a demon, his skin might turn golden and glow with light, while a vampire or zombie might explode when a monster hunter slaps a calligraphic charm on its chest.

PULP HERO

"Pulp" is more a period than a genre: pulp heroes can be anything from two-fisted private eyes to elderly professors. Stories range from fairly gritty street dramas to borderline superheroics. Pulp can also overlap with Victorian, Western, *Dark Champions,* and outright Fantasy genres. This gives campaigns based on pulp adventure a wide range of options for mystical characters and creatures.

Classic Pulp

In the most archetypally pulpish campaigns of masked mystery-men, brave explorers, strong-jawed brawlers, daring aviators, and other colorful adventurers, the PCs may include Heroic-level mystics. Occult investigators (such as Carnaki, Jules de Grandin, and John Thunstone) hunt ghosts, vampires, swamp monsters, or just about anything else the GM can imagine. Sometimes, though, the apparent supernatural menace is a fake. The scenario of a villain creating a supernatural hoax to scare people away from the land he wants to buy, a long-lost pirate treasure, or something else valuable, began with pulp adventurers like Doc Savage or Tom Swift long before those meddling kids and their dog.

But not every pulp hero associated with the occult is an investigator. The likes of Mandrake the Magician could be scholar-mages. Heroes like the Shadow, who possess a few mystic (or quasi-mystic) talents without being outright sorcerers, can be seen as variations on either occult investigators or true mystics... or a character type of their own. Enchanted or supernatural characters are less appropriate. Pulp heroes are extraordinary people but still human, even if they're built as low-end Superheroic characters.

For adversaries, though, the sky's the limit. Pulp adventures are almost as anything-goes as superheroes in the villains they fight. A single vampire, werewolf, demon, or sorcerer makes an excellent enemy for a group of pulp heroes, and a story arc might include all of them. And if the werewolf turns out to be a robot, and his demonic master is actually a Moon Man in disguise, that's quite all right for pulp. At the high end of the power scale, pulp heroes can encounter nigh-divine entities such as the Shining One, the Snake Mother, or the annihilator-god Khalk'ru from the pulp novels of Abraham Merritt.

Any arcanum of magic is fine for pulp, except those specifically restricted to other genres. The details of magical beliefs and practices don't matter as much, though. Magic is either quick and easy (almost as much as for super-mages), or so ritualistic it's completely impossible to use in a fight. In the former case, a connection to the mysterious East is almost *de rigeur,* possibly making the mystic powers a form of Sadhana. Mystics who follow Western styles such as Hermetic Theurgy either need extensive rituals, or they're villains.

THE MAGICAL MYSTERY MAN

For the most part, this character type looks and acts like any other masked mystery man. He relies on his fists and guns... but he has one or two mystic talents, too. The Shadow, with his "power to cloud men's minds," is the exemplar of this type. It's up to you whether a mystery man counts as a scholar-mage, a wild Talent, or an occult investigator who doesn't actually investigate the occult.

The Magical Mystery Man probably learned his special knack in Tibet, Mongolia, or some other remote culture. He doesn't need to know a lot of mystic lore, though. His arch-rival may know considerably more magic, and his mentor certainly does.

Mystic powers should be low-key, such as Mental Powers or low-STR Telekinesis — too much power spoils the pulp "feel." A mystery man's powers should not be his principal attack. Instead, they should give him an edge to get close to his target, to gather clues, or help him escape from traps. These may still be formidable abilities: when the Shadow interrogated his captives, they saw themselves in a room of endless, floating blue — completely cut off from the real world, a powerful Mental Illusion.

Pulp Satanism

In his "Black Magic" series of novels, author Dennis Wheatley created a model for pulp campaigns centered on mystical foes. Only one of his heroes, the aged Duc de Richelieu, was himself a mystic. Other characters ranged from a middle-aged lady writer to a brawny New York banker.

The mysticism chiefly came from the heroes' adversary, the worldwide Satanic cult that strives to subvert all humanity. The cult created Nazism as its first great gambit in the twentieth century, with Communism as its backup plan... but individual cult leaders mastermind their own schemes, too. These can range from a school to raise the children of the elite as Satanists, to a plot to cause nuclear war.

Individual villains are all demon-pacters, gifted with dark powers through their worship of the Devil. Satanists can wield the power of low-end supervillains: they may be uncannily hard to kill, and their more aggressive powers can defeat most Heroic-level characters if they get in the first shot. They emphasize Mental Powers, but cult leaders can also Summon powerful devils through elaborate rituals.

Heroes can use ritual magic, but cannot wield *any* magical effects quickly, at least not on Earth. That sort of easy power comes only from Satan. A heroic mystic may wield Mental Powers while astrally projecting, though, to hold a psychic battle with a Satanic sorcerer. Most importantly, mystical heroes can learn how to consecrate magic circles to protect themselves from demonic sendings.

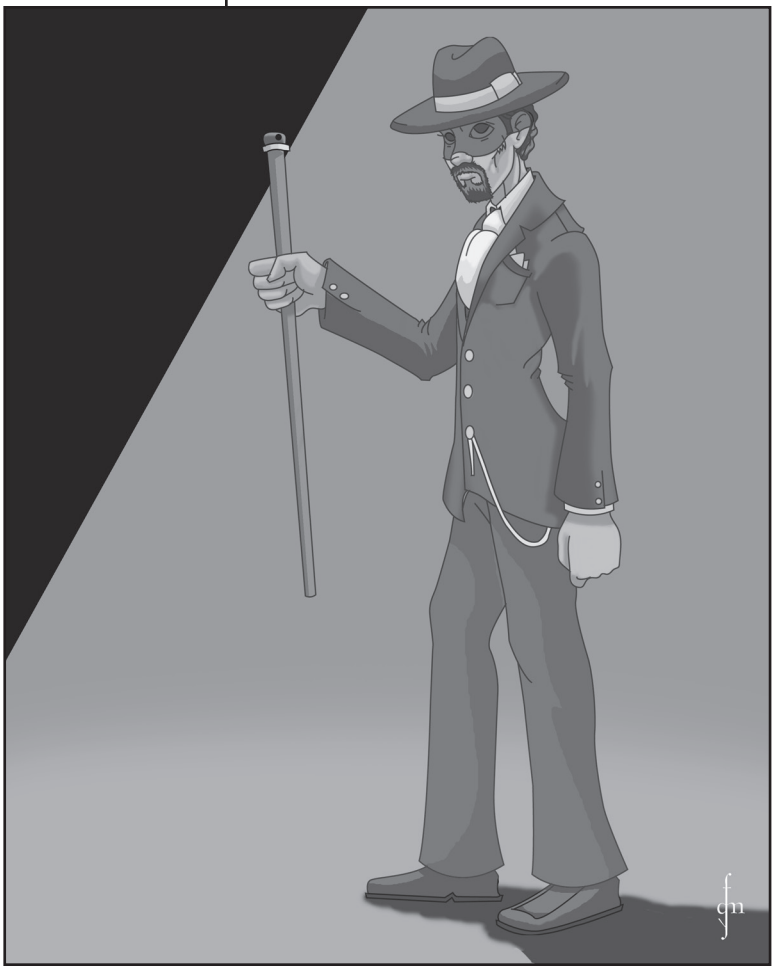
Satanic ritual magic is an evil version of Hermetic Theurgy based on invoking devils, perhaps using special Foci steeped in dark power through

centuries of use in vile rites. The spells are usually "realistic" in that their effects remain invisible to most people — but they're powerful, able to kill or control mere mortals from far away. A consecrated circle gives partial protection against these sendings, but a Satanic attack remains a test of heroes' wits, courage, and strength of will.

Lovecraftian Horror

The pulp era gave rise to a particular style of horror fiction most people name after its most famous writer, H. P. Lovecraft. Some horror writers use Lovecraft's invented "Cthulhu Mythos" and settings in their own stories, but Lovecraftian horror does not depend on such direct imitation. Lovecraftian horror comes from the premise that all human desires, beliefs, and achievements are utterly insignificant to a universe both unknowable and malign. The "unspeakably" horrible monsters so often found in Lovecraftian stories are not themselves the point of the horror: they merely drive home that reality itself is monstrous. The entities who possess true knowledge and power are alien... and the more knowledge and power they have, the more they regard humans as slave, cattle, or mere vermin to crush in passing. People who discover the cosmic truth risk madness, if they survive at all.

As a genre for gaming, Lovecraftian horror offers perhaps the greatest mismatch between PCs and their opposition. Characters are Competent Normal, or even Normal; if the campaign leans more toward pulp adventure, they may be Heroic-level, but this tends to reduce the horror element. An elderly professor is as viable a character as a gun-toting G-man, if not moreso. Their enemies, on the other hand, range up to cosmic entities who create universes when they twitch. Characters soon learn they cannot actually defeat such more-than-godlike beings, or the galaxy-spanning and aeons-old entities and civilizations that worship them. They can, however, prevent the minor alien entities and their crazed human allies from inflicting immediate harm. They can save individuals or towns, and maybe buy humanity a little more time before reality's true masters destroy them, enslave them, or force them to acknowledge the hideous truth.



THE KINGS OF EDOM

The Champions Universe setting includes an homage to Lovecraft's mythos in the form of the Kings of Edom. These mind-blasting, nigh-omnipotent entities are so ancient and alien that even cosmic entities of knowledge do not know their origin. Kabbalistic lore uses "Kings of Edom" — a pre-Israelite kingdom in Canaan — as a code for entities from practice worlds that God created and destroyed. Even this merely hints at the horror of the Kings.

Long before the Earth formed, godlike entities from throughout the Multiverse teamed up to imprison the Kings in barren worlds and dark dimensions. Over billions of years, however, curious, ambitious, or foolish mystics found ways to contact the Kings, draw power from them, and weaken the bindings upon them. Entire races of monsters and horrific civilizations served the Kings until they met their destruction... but some servants and items of power always survive to guide later fools to the Kings. One such race, the Elder Worm, occupied Earth in a past epoch. Today, the international criminal cult DEMON serves the Kings, though most members don't know it. For more information, see *Arcane Adversaries* and *DEMON: Servants of Darkness.*

The usual Lovecraftian setting includes ritual magic, but not the sort you see in Fantasy games or most other genres. Lovecraftian magic chiefly deals with contacting, summoning, or (less often) banishing the malign Things From Beyond, or perceiving aspects of reality beyond human senses — not so much with blowing things up or other cool combat powers. It also tends to drive its practitioners mad, since learning magic necessarily involves learning cosmic truth. Real magic also has little or nothing in common with occult traditions: at most, the lore of Hermeticism, Kabbalah, or other arcana may hold a few distorted hints and fragments of the truth, or incantations pulled out of their true context. Characters usually cannot begin a campaign already knowing magic, but they may be occultists, occult investigators, or charlatans. Examples include exorcists, shamans, or ritual magicians who believe in a conventional mystic tradition.

Regular supernatural entities, from vampires to gods, may appear in a Lovecraftian horror campaign, but should never work exactly the way legends or pop fiction say they do. If gods exist,

for instance, they are just "the small gods of Earth" — spirits almost as insignificant as humanity compared to reality's masters, but possibly serving them and protected by them. Alternatively, a god might be a sort of illusion created in human minds to mask some cosmic entity too alien to perceive directly.

LOVECRAFTIAN MAGIC

Stories by Lovecraft and his imitators often show magic as fairly easy for ordinary people to learn and perform... well, easy for extremely learned savants who have access to the right books of lore, anyway. In "The Dunwich Horror," for instance, librarian Dr. Henry Armitage and his Miskatonic University allies research spells to reveal and banish a monster. It takes a few days, and there's no evidence any of them know other magic. Most spells from Lovecraftian fiction would have prodigious Active and Real Costs if written up in *HERO System* terms. Where do PCs get enough Character Points to pay for learning such spells?

Simple: they don't. In this sort of setting, spells don't cost Character Points. Lovecraftian magic should be entirely Skill-based. If a character has the right lorebooks and makes the right Skill Rolls, he can learn and perform a spell. It's not so different from conventional science or technology: a character could make a truck bomb using Demolitions and SS: Chemistry without needing a special *Create Bomb* power.

Background and Intellect Skills matter most for Lovecraftian magic. Characters need Languages and Cryptography to translate ancient grimoires and lorebooks; KSs of occult traditions, mythology, and cults to interpret obscure references; Science Skills such as Chemistry, Astronomy, or Mathematics to figure out alchemical recipes or the proper times for rituals; and Deduction to determine what a possibly-deranged writer actually meant. A Magic Skill is not necessary. If a character figures out and performs a spell correctly, it works, with no chance of failure. More powerful spells are harder to figure out, but might not be intrinsically harder to perform.

If you feel you ought to write up Lovecraftian spells in terms of Powers and Modifiers, they often involve Summon (to call entities from beyond) or Dispel (to send an entity back where it came from, or to negate one of its powers for a brief time). Spells to expand perception use Enhanced Senses and Clairsentience. Most spells carry hefty Limitations such as Extra Time, Expendable Foci, Incantations, and the Side Effect that learning and casting them pushes a character toward madness — cast too many spells in a short time, and you end up worshipping the Things From Beyond or howling in a madhouse (in game terms, the Side Effect is a small, but unavoidable, Mental Transform that eventually drives the character insane).

STAR HERO

At first glance, *Star Hero* shouldn't include magic or mysticism. Science Fiction varies widely in how "scientific" it really is, though, to the point where some SF is really Fantasy in disguise. What's more, even a "hard" SF setting can include a Mystic World.

At one extreme, you could create a Space Fantasy campaign. This setting uses all the tropes of Fantasy — wizards, monsters, mystic artifacts, the lot — but adds the trappings of Science Fiction. Characters travel between planets instead of islands or villages, in spaceships powered by demons or elementals. Aliens fill the same roles as dwarves, elves, or orcs. Warriors carry swords and blasters. The technology fully integrates magic: demons can have cyberware, special pentacles confine antimatter, blaster rifles can be enchanted. Whatever style of magic you use, make it flashy! This is, in effect, Technomancy (page 149) writ large, in a setting with much more advanced technology than the modern day.

A shade further from outright Fantasy, a campaign can disguise the magic as an alternative technology. Edgar Rice Burroughs's "Barsoom" series set the pattern: Mars/Barsoom has flying ships powered by the fantastical "Eighth Ray" rather than any plausible sort of engine. Marion Zimmer Bradley's "Darkover" series continues the tradition. Darkover receives visitors from Earth in spaceships, but the planet itself follows typical Fantasy tropes such as feudal lords, swordplay, mages in their towers, magical jewels, an elf-like elder race, and even the occasional god or demon.

In these "Planetary Romance" settings, mystics take the form of people with psionic powers, aliens with strange powers, or super-scientists. No matter what they're called, though, their powers act like magic. Planetary Romance mystics are usually Heroic-level characters, though a mad scientist's superweapon or an artifact of alien technology can be as powerful as anything from a comic book setting.

Indeed, any setting with psionics brushes the edge of the Mystic World, since psionics is just the old wine of magic in the new bottle of pseudo-science. Even if scientists could find an ironclad, materialistic explanation for psychic powers, some people would treat them as magic anyway. They would see psionics as wizards, gurus... or dangerous witches. Psionic people might embrace such roles and promote themselves as scholar-mages (if psychic power demands a lot of study and practice), seers, or even mystical cult leaders.

A few steps closer to hard SF, you can create a Space Opera setting where science proves the existence of some apparently mystical phenomena. Humans probably don't understand the supernatural very well, but alien Elder Races might. For instance, the TV series *Babylon 5* included alien Soul Hunters who extract and store the souls of the dying, an alien religious festival in which the dead revisit the living, and mysterious Technomages whose powers seem to defy conventional technological explanations.

NESSON

The Thorgons, a genetically engineered caste of warriors, overthrew and enslaved their progenitors, the Ergons. The Terran Empire has a small population of Ergon exiles. One such is Nesson, a monk in the ancient sect of Fate and Chaos. The Thorgon Hegemony outlaws this sect (for one thing, Fate and Chaos leaders warned against the Thorgon experiment).

Fate and Chaos holds that random and turbulent processes conceal a cosmic plan. Initiates meditate on running water, video static, and random net-surfs in attempts to perceive that plan. Some initiates become highly intuitive and lucky. Nesson became psionic. It's the only sensible explanation for how he knows when Hegemony agents are near... and his uncanny knack for finding skilled people and maneuvering them into situations where they interfere with the spies' plans.

Nesson believes his place in the Cosmic Plan is to protect the Terran Empire from the Thorgon Hegemony. He has not told the Empire. Nor does he tell his unwitting agents. After all, they lack the enlightenment to accept that their role in the Cosmic Plan may mean their deaths.

In Space Opera, advanced science sometimes permits travel between dimensions. The usual scenario involves a malfunction by a spaceship's "jump drive" or "hyperdrive." Natural wormholes or other space warps may also catapult star-travelers into another universe. In a wild Space Opera campaign, the characters might jump genres, too, and find themselves in a universe with magic.

Arthur C. Clarke famously said that, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." A Science Fiction setting might include *ersatz* magic created through advanced technology — or is it real, after all? In post-holocaust settings, the technological relics of the Ancients seem like magic, and people who know bits of lost science become magicians. Fritz Leiber's novel, *Gather, Darkness!* portrays a future where a despotic church dupes the people and enforces its rule using technology disguised as miracles... and the rebels pose as witches. In settings like this, characters probably cannot become true mystics: magicians are people with special skills or devices. Nevertheless, they can be part of a Mystic World.

In their "Dream Park" series, Larry Niven and Steve Barnes showed another way to combine SF with magic. The novels are set in a theme park of the future, where paying guests take the role of wizards, warriors, and other Fantasy figures in live-action roleplaying games. Holograms, virtual reality, and other technologies create the illusion of magic and monsters. The holodeck from *Star Trek* takes the concept a step further. In even the "hardest" SF campaign, characters might take a vacation in a simulated Fantasy environment, and temporarily assume the roles of any sort of mystic.

Finally, a Science Fiction setting might not include any sort of magic, but some people still consider themselves mystics. Characters may encounter — or be — scholars studying occult beliefs, or charlatans who pretend to have mystical powers. (See page 161 for more on occultists and charlatans.)

Alternate Science Fiction

Another approach is to start with magic and make it scientific. Most examples combine a magical science with an alternate history. Randall Garret's "Lord Darcy" series, for instance, shows an alternate twentieth century of a history where magic became a science. The stories concern a detective whose frequent partner is a forensic magician. Richard Garfinkle's novel *Celestial Matters* goes a step further. It's a hard-science adventure about interplanetary travel... only the "science" is Aristotelian, based on elements and humours, and the planets all revolve around the Earth on crystal spheres. The "Age of Unreason" series by J. Gregory Keyes is based on an alternate science of alchemy and spirits, set in the eighteenth century.

Whether you call such a setting Fantasy or Science Fiction is a matter of taste. Treat the alternate scientist just as you would a "real" scientist in a Science Fiction or contemporary setting. Skills matter most for this Heroic-level or Competent Normal character. His "magic" might not need to be paid for with Character Points, except in the form of a lab (a Base), or special magic beyond the reach of ordinary people. The GM must do a lot of work in advance, however, to define what each mystical science can and cannot do.

VICTORIAN HERO

The Victorian Age provides abundant opportunities for mystical adventure in both its life and its literature (especially if you stretch the period back to the early nineteenth century). Contemporary writers such as James Blaylock and Alan Moore add more material through "Steampunk" fiction that looks back to the Victorian Age.

In real life, mysticism permeated the Victorian period. Spiritualism turned necromancy into a fad and popularized notions of ghosts and the Astral Plane. Theosophy carried matters several steps further, with spiritual masters, fairies in gardens, secret mystical doctrines, and sorcerous civilizations on lost continents. Meanwhile, the Golden Dawn created a new synthesis of European ritual magic. Rival occult sects fought a "Battle of Bewitchment" in France, a conflict thinly fictionalized in J.-K. Huysman's *La Bas.* Europe's colonial empires exposed the West to the mysticism of India, China, and tribal shamans and witch-doctors, while Voodoo flourished in the New World.

Literature reflected the mysticism of the age. Hoffman's wonder-tales enthralled Europe's artists. Bulwer Lytton's occult novels, such as *A Strange Story* and *Zanoni,* found a wide audience. In the New World, Poe, Hawthorne, and Bierce became famous for their tales of the weird and uncanny, while M. R. James put *The Turn Of The Screw* to his readers with the best ghost story ever written. At the start of the nineteenth century, John Polidori brought *The Vampyre* into modern fiction. Even writers not usually associated with weird fiction dipped into the supernatural, as Charles Dickens did in "A Christmas Carol" and Gilbert and Sullivan did in *The Sorcerer.* Victorian proto-Science Fiction often has a supernatural edge, too: for instance, Doctor Frankenstein came to medicine with a mind steeped in the Hermeticism of Agrippa.

Nearly any sort of magic or supernatural creature, therefore, can appear in a Victorian adventure. Ritual magicians such as Eliphas Levi and the Golden Dawn adepts supply inspiration for Hermetic scholar-mages; other learned mystics may come from India or China. For wild talents, the Victorian Age has Spiritualist mediums and tribal shamans (though few of the latter will ever visit London or the other great cities that are such important settings for Victorian adventure). Weird scientists like Dr. Jekyll or Hawthorne's Rappacini could be interpreted as mad mages who use scientific props. Actual Christian priests still conducted exorcisms, while Voodoo priests and priestesses like Marie Laveau cast spells for their clients. A few individuals — crackpots or visionaries — still practiced alchemy.

In literature, ghosts were legion. Polidori's vampire, Lord Ruthven, began a cavalcade of undead aristocrats that climaxed with Count Dracula. The occasional werewolf appeared too, along with cursed immortals like Melmoth or the Wandering Jew. Faerie-folk and spirits such as Melusine, the Lorelei, and the Devil himself appeared in stories, while Spiritualists and Theosophists ignited a surge of interest in nature spirits. Magic items like the Picture of Dorian Grey tended to bring mystery and horror to their owners, rather than power. Most of all, fiction inaugurated the occult investigator who pursued all these phantoms and monsters, with Dr. Abraham Van Helsing as the best-known example.

This might suggest an anything-goes Mystic World like that of a *Champions* setting. Neo-Victorian fantasies like Alan Moore's *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* take this approach, combining wild science and the supernatural in a steampunk version of superheroes and villains. Actual Victorian fiction, however, usually restricts itself to one weird element. Thus, the lengthy "penny dreadful" serial, *Varney The Vampire; or, The Feast Of Blood* follows the family and friends tormented by, and hunting, the vampire of the title. Gamemasters can decide for themselves whether to build a Victorian campaign around one supernatural element, such as ghosts, vampires, or Hermetic sorcery, or stir in everything at once.

Though the enthusiasm for Spiritualism shows that many Victorians welcomed the supernatural — at least if it stayed in the séance-room and left when requested — the fiction suggests a deeper fear. In Victorian literature, the supernatural carries a whiff of horror, or at least of impropriety. Dracula not only killed his female victims, he made them act in un-ladylike ways. Outright supernatural creatures such as vampires and werewolves can appear only as villains. Even in a comedy like *The Sorcerer,* the humor of seeing morals and manners upset by a love potion carried an edge.

Outright magic was not respectable in real life, either. Thoughout the nineteenth century, the Mystic World kept close ties to questionable subcultures such as radical politics, heterodox religious cults, *avant-garde* art, and the dissipated lifestyle of Bohemia and the Left Bank. Asian or Voodoo mystics have the serious social problem of being foreign and "colored," though good manners can compensate somewhat. Stage magicians often adopted Asian personas, and Western intellectuals welcomed Indian religious mystics like Swami Vivekananda: the mysterious Orient fascinated many Victorians, even if they did not respect most Orientals.

Victorian magic is usually low-key. "Realistic" Victorian magic employs long rituals, for subtle effects that can be explained away as coincidence. Sensitive people can feel magic at work, but even a death-curse remains invisible to most folk. Spirits are visible, however, and the new photography can record their images. More romantic campaigns allow standard Heroic-level magic with visible effects, though this slides into pulp sensibilities (just as the Victorian dime novels gave way to the early pulps). European magicians can be Hermetic adepts or evil Satanists; by the end of the Victorian age, there has just barely been enough time for Western savants to study Asian mysticism to some degree. More likely, Asian mystics appear as immigrants in Limehouse and other ethnic enclaves — or as villains.

The Victorian Age also introduces the medium as a distinctive mystic archetype, and the one mystic who could find welcome in even the most refined social circles.

The Medium

The medium is a variety of wild talent. Mediums never claimed to have gained their power through study: communing with spirits was a gift. They are most often female.

The first mediums were the Fox sisters, who gained fame through the way mysterious rapping sounds seemed to answer their questions. Later mediums produced more spectacular phenomena: bells ringing; cords knotting and unknotting themselves; tables tipping and lifting off the floor; production of a mysterious, glowing substance called ectoplasm; and even the medium herself levitating. The point of all these shenanigans, however, was communication with the dead. Soon the spirits did more than knock once for "yes" and twice for "no": they took possession of the medium and answered in her voice, or spoke through a trumpet materialized from ectoplasm.

Millions of eager believers hailed mediums such as Eusapia Palladio as offering proof of life after death, and vindicating religion against the materialism of science. The afterlife the spirits described wasn't exactly orthodox, but the "Summer-land" described by spirits sounded Christian enough to satisfy many Victorians. Eventually the revelations from beyond became codified enough to generate a quasi-religion, Spiritualism, with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the physicist Sir William Crookes as its most celebrated advocates.

The Spiritualist *séance* can take hours. The participants sit in a circle around a table in a pitch-black room. A locked cabinet may hold bells, horns, and other noisemakers the spirits use to announce their presence. Everyone holds hands, both to generate a "circle of power" and to assure guests the medium isn't moving objects herself. Now and then, the medium asks, "Is anyone there?" Eventually the rappings, table-tippings, and other rumpus shows that something has arrived. The trance-bound medium questions the spirit to find its identity, and takes questions from the participants. The spirit may be a deceased relative of someone present, or the medium's special "spirit guide" — perhaps a ghost, perhaps a vaguely angelic spirit from the Summer-land. At last, the spirit departs and the guests can turn the lights on again.

Stage magicians found the mediums alternately irritating and inspirational. Some conjurors worked out "ghost shows" of their own. Others, like Harry Houdini, thought mediums were cruel frauds for playing on the grief and hope of their clients. Scientists and conjurors exposed many mediums as

YVES ROMAINE

Like many of his fellow artists in 1890s France, the painter Yves Romaine combines his artistry with Hermetic magic and Leftist politics. Through magic, Yves sought to penetrate the divine mysteries and find inspiration for his painting. He also found himself reluctantly drawn into feuds between mystical factions. But Yves also recently found that a lodge of dark and bloody wizards — the Circle of the Scarlet Moon — seeks recruits among both the decadent aristocrats of the *ancien regime* and the zealous radicals of Communism and Socialism. Can an artist find trustworthy allies and the power to fight the Scarlet Moon? And can he do it without surrendering to the darkness himself?

Yves Romaine practices Hermetic Theurgy. As a Heroic-level character, he requires a full ritual for almost every spell; his talismans are limited to 10 Active Points' worth of effect; and most of his magic must be "realistic," with no visible effect. Even when he summons spirits, they remain invisible to anyone who lacks *Astral Awareness.*

DOCTOR ERNST HELLGRAVE

Most scientists in nineteenth-century Europe dismissed rumors about a medical student who created a living man from cadavers, but not Ernst Hellgrave. His own experiments at resuscitation went nowhere until he found one of Victor Frankenstein's classmates, and learned how he had cited Agrippa and Paracelsus as authorities. In sorcery and alchemy, Hellgrave found the clues to reconstruct Frankenstein's work, though it took him ten years. His experiments made first Europe, then New York and Boston, too hot for Hellgrave, so he went west to continue his work in the lawless frontier. Hellgrave seeks funding by offering revenant gunfighters and zombie labor to rail barons, mining magnates, and other rich people who want tireless, obedient labor or nigh-unkillable enforcers.

The American Frankenstein's mystic powers are limited to reanimation of the dead through a mixture of necromancy and science. He hasn't found all his hero's secrets, however, and his creations rot without regular electrical infusions. Hellgrave's undead creations are horrific enough; but local Indian shamans say his tampering with life and death stir up the spirit world and may provoke a backlash that dooms red and white man alike.

(Doctor Hellgrave also works well as a villain for *Pulp Hero* campaigns. Just have him live 50 years later, and keep him in the big city.)



charlatans... but while ardent Spiritualists conceded *some* mediums were fakes, that didn't prove they *all* were, did it?

Spiritualism declined in the twentieth century, but mediums re-emerged as part of the "New Age" movement. Séances no longer require darkened rooms, and the table-tipping and noisemaking have dropped out. The "channeler" just lies back, goes into a trance, and his spirit guide starts talking through his voice.

Mediums are Competent Normal characters, or at most Heroic-level. They have few exceptional Characteristics or Skills unless they're frauds, in which case they have a high DEX and great skill at Sleight Of Hand. Mediums tend to have high PRE and are excellent performers; a true medium may also gain a high EGO from his contact with transcendental forces. A successful medium can acquire Money and a *Reputation* Perk.

A medium might have *Astral Awareness* (page 50), but this isn't necessary: if a medium had this power, why would she need to ask if a spirit were present? Telekinesis represents the power to manipulate objects in a locked cabinet. A Mind Link (only to spirits) lets a medium receive messages from ghosts. Actual possession may be left as a Professional Skill (mediumship may be a gift, but it takes practice to bring a spirit past every person's reflexive psychic defenses), or as a form of Images if the medium speaks with the actual voice of the deceased. Images also supplies the speaking-trumpet and other ectoplasmic manifestations. Trance levitation is, of course, a highly-Limited form of Flight.

A "realistic" medium requires a great deal of Extra Time for most of her feats, and absolute darkness (though Palladio was visible when she supposedly levitated past a second-story window). A more Heroic medium could use her powers (with the spirits as her Special Effect) in light, and with less preparation.

WESTERN HERO

The Western is not a mystical genre. If you run a pure Western campaign, the real supernatural should not enter at all. At most, characters might encounter a charlatan out to dupe ranch-hands out of their pay or scare away the settlers so the railroad can buy their land for a song.

A number of "Weird Western" hybrids have appeared, though. In ghost-written stories like "The Mound" and "The Curse of Yig," H. P. Lovecraft found horror in Oklahoma. More recently, TV shows like *The Adventures of Briscoe County, Jr.,* books like Stephen King's "Gunslinger" series and Mark Sumner's "Devil's Tower" novels, and games like *Deadlands* from Pinnacle Entertainment Group, combine Old West settings with Fantasy or science-fictional elements. You can do the same.

First, the Old West is part of the Victorian Age. See the discussion of *Victorian Hero,* above, for some of the people and creatures that might appear in a Weird Western. If Oscar Wilde could tour the frontier to bring culture to the cowpokes, Count Dracula or a Golden Dawn cabal aren't so improbable.

The Native Americans also bring their own supernatural heritage to the mix. Native mythology supplies any number of gods, spirits, and monsters who might appear. The historical Ghost Dance movement thought it could magically bring back the buffalo and exorcise the white man. In a Weird Western, maybe the Ghost Dancers were onto something... something more dangerous than they imagined. Southwestern mythology says this is not the first world, or the first human race. Once you set time and history adrift, how far back do the changes go? And who else wants to return? Coyote the trickster-god, changer of worlds, is sure to bring his special chaos to such a massive magical working.

Since there's no settled genre of Weird Westerns for GMs to follow, you must decide for yourself what mystical elements you want to use, though any campaign is probably Heroic-level.

chapter five:



THE MYSTIC WORLD

MIST AND SHADOW

THE MYSTIC WORLD



...where do inhabit
The shadows of all forms that
think and live
Till death unite them and they
part no more;
Dreams and the light imaginings of
men,
And all that faith creates or love
desires,
Terrible, strange, sublime and
beauteous shapes.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus Unbound

Mystical characters don't exist in isolation. They're part of a subculture: the Mystic World. For people in the Mystic World, the supernatural is an important part of daily life. If they aren't practicing mystics themselves, they still order their lives around their mystical beliefs. Such devotees range from the sorcerous overlord of an evil empire to a businessman who doesn't make important decisions without checking his horoscope.

People can vary in the depth of their involvement with the Mystic World. This subculture has layers, like an onion. Each layer involves greater knowledge and participation in the mystical.

The outermost layer, the *Pop Mystic World,* consists of the most superficial aspects of supernatural belief. In a modern setting, this includes newspaper astrologers, storefront psychics, and other charlatans and honest dupes of the New Age. In a typical Fantasy setting, the Pop Mystic World includes bogus charm-peddlers and village wisewomen. A lot of these people and their clients genuinely believe they tap the wellsprings of mystical power, though most of them wouldn't know real magic if it bit them.

Next comes the *True Mystic World.* These people possess serious knowledge of the occult and mystical, even if they are not practicing mystics. Contemporary examples include scholars who study magical beliefs, members of occult societies like the Ordo Templi Orientalis, and priests of Afro-Caribbean religions such as Voudon and Santería. These people know real magic when they see it.

People in the *Magical World* not only know about the supernatural, they participate in it. Third-layer mystics can cast spells. Other denizens of the Magical World include vampires, werewolves, and other people touched by the supernatural.

The inmost layer, the *Supernatural World,* consists of the gods and spirits themselves. These beings are innately magical through and through. In some settings, the most learned and powerful mystics may hope to join the Supernatural World as gods in their own right.

Not every setting includes all four layers of the Mystic World. For instance, in a "hard" Science Fiction setting, only the first two layers can exist: mystical beliefs survive, but no one can really become a sorcerer. In the usual heroic Fantasy setting, the True Mystic and Magical layers tend to merge, since people who know a lot about magic tend to become spellcasters themselves.

As a default, someone with KS: Mystic World has significant knowledge of his own layer of involvement (and of course the shallower layers). He knows only a little about deeper layers, and his information is vague and probably not very accurate. For instance, in a contemporary setting the local "Psychic Palm and Tarot Reader" only knows about the Pop Mystic World in detail, no matter how high her Knowledge rating may be. At most, she knows how to contact a few serious occultists. If real sorcerers exist in the setting, she doesn't know any of them... though she could buy other KSs to cover those subjects.

CREATING A MYSTIC WORLD



When designing a Mystic World as part of a campaign setting, the first and most important step is deciding how much you really need. For a high Fantasy campaign about competing orders of conspiratorial wizards, you may need a panoply of cults, secret societies, sages, spirits, and other mystical people and groups. In a modern-day espionage campaign, the characters' only contact with the Mystic World might be a politically-connected astrologer or a small cult that smuggles drugs on the side... unless the campaign focuses on how different governments use "mystic assets" in the Great Game, in which case you have to create a lot more details.

PEOPLE

The Mystic World includes many sorts of people with varying degrees of involvement, from telephone psychics to super-sorcerers. Descriptions of some of the more common types follow. As always, individuals may fall into more than one type.

CHARLATANS

Charlatans do not possess real magic powers, but they claim they do. At most, a charlatan might have some minor talent such as aura vision or dowsing. Some charlatans sincerely believe they wield "powers" of some sort, but many charlatans are deliberate frauds who prey on the gullible. They pretend to tell the future, remove (or inflict) bad luck and curses, talk to spirits, or bend spoons. A few of them write weighty tomes of occult doctrine.

In a setting without real magic (such as a hard Science Fiction campaign or gritty contemporary campaign), both sincere charlatans and conscious frauds can flourish; ditto for settings where magic exists but is rare or stays hidden. If mystics practice sorcery in the open, sincere charlatans become less common: either they learn real magic themselves, or they know they lack the power of real mages. Deliberate frauds still prey on the gullible, though, just as modern people still patronize medical quacks despite the existence of real doctors.

Charlatans often feel ambivalent about true mystics. Even a cynical fraud may want the real power a sorcerer commands. Some charlatans may seek out true mystics and beg for lessons. Others stay away from wizards to protect their illusions. Charlatans aren't helpless, though: their skills can gather them great wealth and wide, loyal followings. A charlatan with the ear of the Mayor — or a king — can cause a lot of trouble for a hero.

CULTISTS

Cultists worship supernatural forces. Their leaders may be occultists, charlatans, or true mage-priests. Fictional cultists are notable for fanatic, even suicidal, devotion to their leaders and their gods. Cultists are discussed in more detail beginning on page 165.

OCCULTISTS

Occultists study magical beliefs, but don't necessarily claim to possess any magic powers of their own. Many occultists practice "occult sciences" such as astrology or Pyramid Power, but claim these "sciences" work by themselves, regardless of who uses them. In a contemporary setting, the class of occultists includes scholars who study beliefs about magic powers without believing in the powers themselves, such as anthropologists, folklorists, Fantasy authors, and gamers. Historical examples of occultists include "nature philosophers" (back when people were less sure about the boundaries of the natural world) and fortunetellers. Learned sages may fill the role of occultists in Fantasy settings.

SUPERNATURAL CREATURES

Supernatural beings don't always participate in the mystical subculture. They embody the power that mystics seek, but GMs must decide for themselves whether faeries, demons, ghosts, and other creatures actively interact with mortal mystics. Even the supernatural beings who live in the middle of humanity, such as vampires, might hide their nature from mystics as much as from ordinary people. Conversely, in a world where the supernatural operates in the open, each class of supernatural creature might develop its own peculiar subculture. Thus, KS: Mystic World gives very little information about spirits, undead, or other supernatural beings. At most, knowledge of the Mystic World supplies vague, general and inaccurate information about what sort of ghoulies really exist and which are just fables. A section later in this chapter discusses various sorts of magical creatures and ways they might interact with the Mystic World.

TRUE MYSTICS

This class includes all the character types described in Chapter One: scholar-mages, priests, people with magic weapons, occult investigators who have genuine powers, supernatural creatures, and all other people who at least use magic, even if they aren't wizards themselves. If the setting includes real magic, these are of course the most important members of the Mystic World.

ARCANE SOCIETIES

Chesterton said that Mankind itself was a secret society. Whether it would be better or worse if the secret should ever come out he did not say.

R. A. Lafferty, "About a Secret Crocodile"

Not all mystics operate alone. Many of them band together to form mystical societies ranging from sorcerous supervillain teams to guilds of psychic advisers, crystal healers, and other New Agers. Arcane societies are also called "lodges." This section deals with more or less secular groups. If the group exists for the purpose of worship, it's a cult (page 165).

PURPOSE

Sorcerers and occultists form societies for many different reasons, but these specific motives generally boil down into four main classes. As usual, none of the classes are exclusive.

Social: Many societies form simply as a way for like-minded people to meet each other. Mystics are no different: they want to socialize with people who share their esoteric interests. Such arcane societies range from informal bull sessions to full-fledged professional associations. In a contemporary setting, public associations consist only of occultists and charlatans; any real mage who joins is probably shopping for minions. In a Fantasy setting, arcane societies might operate as openly as any other guild.

Promote A Style Of Magic: People in the same profession often band together to establish standards of competence and protect their "turf" from outsiders such as government regulators or foreign competition — all this was as true for Medieval guilds as for modern trade unions or the AMA. A professional society can also attract people to the profession. Guilds of wizards are probably smaller than a cloth merchant's guild or a bar association. In settings where mystics practice openly, though, a sorcerer's guild might be quite influential.

The GM can describe how widespread, focused and disciplined a mystic's guild may be. At one extreme, all necromancers might belong to the Dread Legion of the Grave and follow a Master Plan to conquer the world. At the other extreme, a society might consist of one master wizard and her students (and, in time, their students), who agree to help each other if they get in trouble.

Magical teaching societies form an excellent part of a mage's background. Such a society explains where and how the character learned magic. If the character maintains good relations with the society, this gives a convenient justification for the character learning a new spell. If the character doesn't maintain good relations with the society that taught him, the society can become a formidable Hunted. After all, they know all the character's tricks....

Schools for sorcerers have an excellent pedi-



gree in folklore and fiction. Medieval and Renaissance Europe had many legends about a "Devil's School" for sorcerers. The wizard's college of Roke, in Ursula LeGuin's *Earthsea* series, is an excellent example from High Fantasy, while the Hogwarts Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry forms the principle setting for the *Harry Potter* series. You could build a whole campaign around a mystical academy.

Promote A Cause: The members of this sort of society might use many different styles of magic, but they share some general goal or ideology. They might all serve or promote some mystical religious or political cause. The Devil's Advocates from *Arcane Adversaries,* for instance, share the goal of destroying technological civilization.

Complete A Project: Mages might gather to achieve some specific goal, such as defeating a common enemy or creating a powerful artifact. When (or if) they achieve the goal, the group splits up.

Groups of mystical PCs probably fall into the third class: the "cause" they promote is "stop the bad guys." The players and GM decide exactly what "stopping the bad guys" entails. It may be as simple as preventing a sorcerous tyrant from conquering the world or as vast and complicated as bringing Enlightenment to humanity.

MAGICAL POWER

While societies of true mystics are most interesting, GMs may find uses for societies of occultists and charlatans as well. These groups can't fight the PCs spell for spell, but they may wield considerable social or financial influence. For instance, in real life the Freemasons never had any magical power, but the group retains substantial mystic ritual and remains an important place for influential people to network.

On the other hand, a group of occultists can become a useful Contact for PCs as well. Not everyone has to be an enemy. Collectively, the occult society may possess more esoteric Knowledge Skills and a better library than PCs can spend points on. Such a group may be happy to help out real mystics, in return for favors such as magic lessons or contributions to the library.

Of course, such a group might become *too* friendly. A gang of hero-worshipping occultists following the PCs around, pleading to become their disciples, could become quite a nuisance!

SIZE

Legends and literature do not often portray large, widespread syndicates of mystics. Indeed, fiction and history (of real occult societies such as the Golden Dawn) suggests that sorcerers (and self-proclaimed sorcerers) are a fractious lot addicted to schism and infighting. The exceptions tend to be evil mystics who serve a Dark Lord (in which case the arcane society may be more like a cult).

Gamemasters may want to follow this tradition. Most importantly, a lack of large mystical societies keeps the campaign focused on the PCs. If no society of benevolent wizards significantly exceeds the PCs' own group in size and power, that keeps the responsibility for stopping the bad guys firmly on the PCs' shoulders, where it belongs. If there's a big syndicate of good-guy mystics, PCs may feel tempted to run to them for help and advice every time they hit a snag — and that's not very heroic.

Membership in an arcane society gives mystical heroes access to lore, lab facilities, teachers, a safe place to study or hide out, and possibly some influence with the local authorities. Give some thought, however, to why this society limits its help to them. In the usual Fantasy setting, slow communications and travel may suffice to throw PCs on their own resources: the society can't help them in the field, they must go to their guildhouse. An arcane society may lack interest in helping members with personal ventures and vendettas, or at least demand more in return than the characters are willing to give. In some settings, rival arcane societies can become locked in a "cold war," with most of their resources devoted to watching and countering each other. Such measures ensure that mystic societies assist heroes and villains, but do not take the place of characters' own efforts.

Of course, all this can apply to villains and their arcane societies, too. Indestructible, inexhaustible enemies aren't much fun: after the PCs knock down their fiftieth wizard from the Syndicate of Evil and wizard #51 pops up spoiling for a fight, the heroes may well wonder what good they're doing. Conceivably, in some settings the whole point is the heroes fight a holding action against a foe they can never destroy (like the aforementioned mystical "cold war" setting, or a horror setting). In other campaigns, however, evil arcane societies need to be of finite size, with finite resources, so heroes know that victory is possible in principle.

OPENNESS

Arcane societies vary widely in how much they let other people see of them. In a setting meant to resemble contemporary reality, any societies of true mystics must hide their magical powers (or the magic must be hard to recognize as such). Societies of occultists and charlatans operate publicly — obscure to most people, perhaps, but not actually hiding. (Charlatans who are deliberate con men may be a little dodgier.) Groups that dabble in fragments of real magic are more secretive: they communicate with other "serious students" but they don't advertise in the Yellow Pages. Groups of sorcerers remain completely hidden from common humanity. After all, they have enemies as powerful as they are. But a cabal of mystics might use a public occult society as a blind, a recruiting device, or as a source of cannon fodder and lab animals.

In most Fantasy settings, societies of wizards are often as well-known as the magic they practice. Arcane societies may hide because they practice a forbidden style of magic (as with the Black Guild in *The Turakian Age*), or because the authorities frown on their goals. For instance, a guild of wizards that seeks to overthrow a particular kingdom had better stay secret (at least within that kingdom). On the other hand, some arcane societies might receive state patronage, or even rule countries themselves.

As always, astute GMs can think of exceptions

to these defaults. For instance, most mystics in a superhero world might stay in hiding, but a team of mystics might operate openly as heroes or villains. Either no one believes they're sorcerers, or no one cares: in a world of superpowered mutants, aliens, super-serums, and battlesuits, a wizard doesn't necessarily stand out much.

ORGANIZATION

Small groups of genuine mystics have very simple organizational charts. Either a leader commands a few followers, or the group is an alliance of nominal equals. Individual members may sport grandiose titles, but these have no practical significance. Sorcerous groups operate according to the personalities of the members, not some abstract chart.

Larger arcane societies, especially teaching orders like the historical Golden Dawn, can become somewhat more complicated. They tend to organize in grades, from rank novices to the masters. A member's rank supposedly shows his magical prowess. A few historical groups claimed hundreds of members — thousands, in the case of Freemasonry, back when it took its occultism more seriously.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Mystical societies tend to fight each other a lot. Usually this doesn't escalate to actual combat; the societies' members just accuse each other of being charlatans, of practicing black magic, or at least of being less enlightened and powerful. Now and then, however, arcane societies embark on vendettas of spell and counter-spell.

Arcane societies also tend to schism. Sometimes the members develop philosophical differences about the purpose of the society and the magic it should practice. Just as often, however, the society splits because of personality clashes and power-plays between the leaders. The Golden Dawn, for instance, split both ways: one group led by A. E. Waite left because of philosophical differences, and Aleister Crowley left to found a rival group because of a power struggle with his mentor S. L. Mathers.

Sample Arcane Societies

Here are two examples of arcane societies GMs can develop further.

THE THALASSENES

This order of Atlantean wizards began with the sorceress Thalasseis, who was rumored to be a daughter of a sea-god. She found how to turn other people into enchanters by fusing their souls with elementals. After her death, Thalasseis became an oceanic demigod.

The Thalassene school occupies a small island in an archipelago south of Atlantis. Three senior mages run the school and do most of the teaching. Thalassene masters send students they think have the intelligence and self-discipline to join their souls to spirits and learn the lore of magic. Wealthy people sometimes pay the school to turn their children into wizards.

Thalassenes specialize in water magic, but can learn other spells too; only fire magic is impossible for them. Every Thalassene has the innate powers to breathe underwater and see spirits. The people of the islands count on Thalassenes to ensure good weather, safe sailing, and abundant fishing. Thalassenes also repel sea monsters and hostile spirits, and serve as diplomats to the merfolk and sea-spirits.

THE VRIL SOCIETY

This arcane society was born from a Victorian novel. Edward Bulwer Lytton (he of "It was a dark and stormy night") wrote *The Coming Race,* a tale of a man who discovers the Vril-Ya, an underground civilization of supermen. Their Utopian society is based on their mastery of *vril,* the force that underlies all other forces. Through *vril,* the supermen light their cavern homes, read minds, run their machines and annihilate solid rock with a thought. Bulwer Lytton never pretended his book was anything but a satiric Fantasy. But he was a leading occultist as well as a popular novelist, so some readers wondered if he published secret lore in the guise of a novel. A collection of loonies tried to develop their own mastery of *vril.* The first Vril Society flourished in 1930s Germany, a nation agog over mysticism and Master Races. A few Vrilists achieved positions in the Nazi Party. They obtained a share in the Nazi trove of sorcerous books, artifacts and experimental data. Decades later, their successors developed true magic powers. What's more, the leaders decided not to wait for the Vril-Ya to emerge from underground, but to impose rule by humanity's closest analog to the all-wise Coming Race — predictably, themselves.

The true Vril Society recruits from other mystical and New Age groups. New recruits practice meditation, yoga, and other mystical exercises to activate their innate *vril.* They also pay most of the Society's bills and keep the Society's leaders living in high style. Recruits who develop psychic powers receive intensive training and abandon their old life completely. The leaders take the title of Vril-Ya, like the Coming Race, and wield potent psychic



and energy-projection powers. Each Vril-Ya carries a Vril Rod, a hollow tube of silvery metal about four feet long, decorated with a knurled collar and a few sliding switches a third of the way along its length. Changing the settings adjusts how vril currents flow and vibrate in the rod. A Vril Rod reduces the fatigue of magic and enables a Vrilist to evoke more spells at once. The Society builds other strange, technomagical devices as well, and its members excel at combining their powers in large workings.

With its powers, the Vril Society could make a serious attempt to subvert and conquer a small nation. That would require the eight Vril-Yas to set aside their own power struggles, however, and that doesn't happen very often. Instead, each Vril-Ya seeks his own allies in the Mystic World, or tries to acquire mystic artifacts and other sources of personal power.

CULTS

Cults form an important part of the Mystic World. They make good adversaries for mystical heroes: just as vigilantes fight crime syndicates or superheroes fight high-tech criminal agencies, mystical heroes and their friends can fight evil cults of dark gods. Like other villainous organizations, the cult provides large numbers of low-power opponents and an ongoing danger. A large cult can become the principle villain of a campaign. The GM must decide upon a cult's purpose, size, magical power, operating structure, aggressiveness, worldliness, and other factors, as well as its deity.

How Cults Work

Cults all follow the same general structure. At the top is an autocratic leader, or perhaps a small cabal of leaders. A cadre of officers conveys orders to the rank-and-file members, and leads them on field missions. (Very small cults may omit the cadre.) Evil cult leaders consider the rank-and-file members expendable. If the cult has multiple leaders, they probably scheme and jockey for power. If the leaders never squabble, most likely they are actually just higher-ranking officers fronting for a secret, true leader.

First and foremost, cults are religious organizations. Cultists aren't soldiers or employees, they're worshippers. Even when cultists rob, extort, or kill, they do so out of faith. They may love their leaders or fear them, but they never doubt them, for the cultists believe their leaders' authority is divine.

The leader's divine authority separates a cult from a normal religious sect. Leaders of mainline sects (real-world or otherwise) may claim to interpret divine will, but they don't say they are their god or gods' sole spokesperson. Cult leaders generally do. In fact, cult leaders may claim to be gods themselves, or at least superhuman. Some of them believe it, too... and in some settings, even have the power to back up their claims!

Belief in divinely infallible leaders gives cultists high morale. They may be quite willing to throw their lives away in a fight. The most fanatical cultists commit the most loathesome crimes without remorse: They perceive no sin or guilt because they're on "a mission from God."

Cults employ lots of magic — though whether the magic really works is open to question. In a Fantasy or comic book world, some cult leaders

cast spells through sorcerous training or the favor of the cult's "god." Cult leaders seldom possess a wide range of magic, but their spells can be powerful within their narrow limits. In other settings, a cult leader's magic may all be humbug, but they can still possess extraordinary skills. Oratory is a cult leader's most important skill, but he may also bamboozle his followers through stage-magic illusions, drugs, or advanced technology (whatever is "advanced" for the setting).

Officers sometimes have weaker versions of the leader's powers. Rank-and-file cultists seldom possess true magic powers at all, but their skills and fanatical devotion make them more formidable than they seem. A few cult leaders might even bestow low-power enchantments or magic items on their followers. They won't, however, give their cultists anything an enemy could use against the leaders, or that the leaders can't afford to lose.

Every cult needs a god to worship. Many real-world cults deify their leaders, who claim they are the reincarnation of Jesus, Vishnu, or someone like that. Fantasy and comic book cults serve archdemons, horrific Elder Gods, or other powerful extradimensional beings. Cults serving ancient pagan gods of evil such as Set aren't unknown, either. Sorcerous cult leaders often have some way to contact or summon the cult's "god." Clashes with cults often involve a time limit: the heroes must stop the cult before the leader can summon his god to destroy them or commit some other nastiness against the world.

As a rule, the more powerful a cult's "god" is, the harder it is to summon. Cultists of a minor demon can summon their "god" almost at will, giving the heroes a tough fight but not an overwhelming foe. Cultists of a horrific and world-destroying Elder God might get only one opportunity to summon their deity as a result of a long and difficult procedure, giving heroes a decent chance to stop them.

Even if the cult claims to worship a more "conventional" god or gods, they twist their religion into a grotesque heresy. Real Christians, Buddhists, Voodooists, and followers of other "legitimate" sects scorn such heretics. The cult might actually worship a demon who impersonates the god in question. For instance, a crazed and murderous cult of Odin might actually be dupes of the evil Norse god Loki.

Cultists seldom devise creative strategies. They can be cunning at getting entrance to where they want to go; if they have time to prepare, they get a cultist hired at the museum, the king's palace, or other place they want to raid. One classic cult story routine is the trusted VIP who turns out to be a ruthless undercover cultist — in fact, usually the cult leader! Once their target for theft or murder comes in sight, however, off come the overcoats, out come the daggers and weird costumes, and the cultists launch a human wave attack while the leader casts spells. Succeed or fail, most of the cultists prove expert in getting away, too, since they always know a lot more about escape routes than the police or heroes do. In fact, they may build secret tunnels to enter and leave.

Oh yes, the weird costumes. In Fantasy and comic books, cultists love to wear floppy robes with strange masks or headdresses. Cult leader outfits tend to be elaborate and gaudy — imagine the Pope gone Heavy Metal. Tasteful understatement is not the cultist way, though many cults prefer the classic hooded black robe for rank-and-file members.

CULT PURPOSE

Cults exist for many different reasons. Most of them, however, fall into several broad categories. None of these categories are mutually exclusive. In fact, most cults belong to two or three categories at once.

Apocalyptic Cults: The cult believes something world-shaking will happen soon, and they want to be ready. Real-world apocalyptic cults usually expect Armageddon and the Last Judgement. The cult sets up a compound with bomb shelters and entirely too much heavy weaponry, or it exhorts everyone to sell their possessions and gather on the hilltops. In the former case, at least, the cult probably cannot complete its desired preparations legally. Of course, fantastic cults may also prepare to summon their god and *cause* the Apocalypse. Real-world examples are legion; the Branch Davidians in Waco and the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan are famous recent cases. Apocalyptic cults are especially common in horror settings, but also work well in contemporary espionage, paramilitary, or other *Dark Champions* games, or in Fantasy epics where they pose an all-too-real threat to summon their god and end the world.

Criminal Cults: Some cults engage in robbery and murder for profit, giving cultists financial as well as religious benefits. Thuggee was a criminal cult; so are the real-world Leopard Societies.

Greedy Cults: Strangely, cults whose members renounce worldly goods often have leaders who acquire worldly goods in amazing quantities — usually from the members. When the cult leader can't shear enough from his loyal flock of sheep, he might look elsewhere. Notably psychotic leaders may use their minions for violent crime instead of the usual bunko schemes, making the cult criminal as well. Anyone who follows the news can think of real-world examples of greedy cults, and such groups could appear in any game setting.

Hereditary Cults: These cults could have any purpose, but they restrict membership to people born into certain families, clans, or castes. Conversely, the cult may expect anyone of a given family, clan, or caste to join. Many tribal cults are hereditary.

Libertine Cults: These cults let members satisfy desires repressed by society — usually involving sex and violence. In some parts of the ancient world, libertine cults operated in the open: they gave structured, socially sanctioned opportunities for occasional frenzy while keeping order the rest of the time. Nowadays, libertine cults must be small and secretive.

Missionary Cults: This sort of cult wants to convert the unbelievers. A villainous black magic cult may

have to work slowly and covertly, but members can still dream of a future age when everyone worships Ug the Unspeakable. Most major religions began as missionary cults.

Occult Cults: These promise their members "secret wisdom" and magical power. Most comic book cults fall into this category. Real-world examples include Theosophy and the "mystery cults" of the ancient world.

Pietist Cults: These promise surer salvation through a closer, more intense experience of deity than "mainstream" sects provide. Charismatic, Pentecostalist, and Fundamentalist Christian denominations are examples of real-world pietist sects, which may turn into cults if they develop an excessive fixation on a leader. In Fantasy settings, pietist cults may provide quite legitimate access to gods.

Political Cults: This sort of cult has a political goal of some sort. It often grows from an aggressive strategy for conversion: more people would worship Ug the Unspeakable if every other religion was illegal. The cult's religious beliefs might also imply some political goal. Real-world examples of political cult goals include forbidding abortion (some Evangelical Christian groups) or kicking out a foreign monarchy (the Chinese Triads sought to expel the Manchu dynasty).

Suicide Cults: Apocalyptic cults such as Heaven's Gate or Jim Jones's cult may seek a personal apocalypse through death. By definition, suicide cults never last long. The challenge to heroes lies in recognizing the danger the cult poses to its own members — though a suicide cult may want to take the rest of the world with it.

Therapy Cults: These cults promise "inner growth" and help with psychological problems, not necessarily with direct experience of deity. Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Hari Krishna, and many "New Age" groups are therapy cults, and this sort of cult bids fair to survive into the future.

Utopian Cults: This specialized form of political cult wants to build a better society. The utopian vision can range from setting up a commune to taking over the world. While political cults usually believe their program would improve everyone's lives, utopian cults make this the reason for their existence. A cult's idea of utopia, however, might not jibe with most people's desires. The Taliban is a contemporary utopian cult that managed to rule a country for several years.

MAGICAL POWER

Cults vary widely in the magic they can muster. Cults that lack real magic still can be dangerous because of what they persuade people to do (especially when the means at hand include automatic weapons, poison gas... or cyanide-laced Kool-Aid). Other cults might possess just enough magical knowledge to cause trouble. The classic scenario is a cult leader who obtains an artifact of real magic, becomes power-mad, or unleashes some dreadful menace. And some cults might control powerful, serious magic of their own. The latter forms the most common cultic opponent to mystical heroes in superheroic or Fantasy settings.

A cult's "god" may bestow magical powers on a cult leader, making him a priest or pacter. Cults may employ ritual magic within a framework of some religious tradition such as Voodoo, Satanism, or Shamanism. Then again, the cult leader may simply be a scholar-mage or wild talent who decides to gather some followers.

OPENNESS

How do cultists feel about the gentiles around them? Some cults retreat from the world of "unbelievers" and seldom endanger outsiders. At the other extreme, some cults want to End Civilization As We Know It. Villainous cults naturally tend toward the latter end of the spectrum, because that gives the heroes a reason to fight them. On the other hand, a reclusive cult might just bide its time until it can summon its god and destroy the world. Some cults pursue their goals quite openly; others keep their true objectives secret even from most of the members.

SIZE

How many people belong to the cult? When the heroes bust a cult with just a few members, that's it: there are no more cultists to carry on. A large cult, however, is probably quite spread out, with several cells in different regions. Even if all the cultists stick together — perhaps they have their own town — many cultists can certainly escape the heroes, and turn up again to work further evil.

Cults used for horror and suspense in fiction are often extremely large. Dennis Wheatley's Satanists, Sax Rohmer's Si-Fan or H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu cultists, for instance, all number in the tens of thousands and operate worldwide. A game setting with more than one or two giant occult conspiracies, however, risks seeming cluttered.

ORGANIZATION

Small cults use the basic schema described above: a leader, a few lieutenants, and the rank-and-file members. Larger cults, however, may need more complicated organizational plans.

The simplest expansion is the polysegmental cult. When one cell grows too large, a cult lieutenant leaves to start a new cell. Each cell stays pretty much the same and operates on its own. Such cults may be persistent, but each cell probably isn't very strong. More commonly, however, some shared hierarchy links the cells more firmly.

Each cell leader might answer to a super-leader. The super-leader may command a larger, more powerful central cult group. In some stories, the overall leader stays in relative isolation at a secret temple. For something different, a super-leader could shuttle between local cults (perhaps by using special magical powers to travel swiftly and/or secretly).

If the cult is very large and old, its "branch offices" could spin off lesser cells of their own. Heroes would start by busting a small, local cult, move on to the more powerful regional cult center,

then finally tackle the deadly master cult itself. An entire campaign can focus on fighting such a cult.

Leaders seldom command in isolation. Every leader likes to have a staff to handle the routine work and stroke his ego. This staff of special functionaries creates a more complicated hierarchy within the cult. This might not matter in combat — the Most Reverend Keeper of Sacred Missives is probably just a regular cultist with special duties — but when heroes want to learn the cult's secrets, finding the right person to interrogate can become important.

What's more, cults with internal hierarchies develop infighting as officers jockey for position and the leader's favor, leading to all sorts of additional plot seeds and story complications. For example, internal rivalries may be strong enough that one officer betrays another to the heroes.

Gamemasters don't actually have to create complicated organizational charts, even for the campaign's largest and most important cult. After all, the players will never see most of it. In designing an important cult, however, GMs may find it worth their time to note a few cult officers who present special problems or opportunities to the heroes in the adventure planned.

The Cultists

Cultists don't come from nowhere. In the real world, people join cults because they like what the cult offers: a close society of like-minded people; a profound religious experience; a purpose to life; and so on. Here are some common reasons — real or cribbed from fiction and urban legend — why people join cults.

Attracted By Points Of Doctrine: People might like one aspect of its beliefs or practices (such as free love, shared property, or isolation from corrupt, secular society) enough that they excuse less savory aspects (such as human sacrifice).

Kidnapped And Brainwashed: Some cults recruit members by grabbing people off the street and brainwashing them into loyal zombies. Few real cults brainwash members to ensure their loyalty, and none recruit genuinely unwilling members. Fictional cults may be more aggressive.

Progressive Radicalism: People who feel the need for a more intense religious experience may go from a mainstream church to a pietistic sect to a loony-tunes radical cult.

Raised In The Cult: This begs the question, but it does give a reason for a cultist's faultless loyalty. Cultists tend to raise their children as cultists too. Of course, all members of ethnic or hereditary cults were raised in the group.

Recruited By A Significant Other: A friend, relative, or lover invites the person to join the cult (at first probably not saying what the cult really is — see below). The person joins to keep or increase the emotional relationship.

Recruited Under False Pretenses: The cult pretends to be some other sort of organization, which can recruit people openly. This could be anything from a normal church to a kennel club. The cult gradually draws members into stranger, more secretive, and less wholesome activities.

Thrillseeking: Some people might join a cult just to shock their staid relatives, to play dressup, or because they think belonging to a secret society is romantic. They get more than they expected.

Sample Cultist Weapons, Magic, And Powers

Low-end cultists, suitable for relatively "realistic" campaigns, are merely Competent Normal people. They carry mundane weapons or know a smattering of martial arts, but Skills and Talents represent most of their abilities. In more fantastical campaigns, such as pulp adventure, wild martial arts, or sword and sorcery, cultists may possess a few abilities that are clearly extraordinary and qualify as powers rather than mundane equipment or skills. In High Fantasy or superheroic campaigns, cultists may wield truly magical powers. Although they remain significantly weaker overall than the heroes, the cultists can possess weapons or spells that grant them a few attacks that pose serious danger.

MINOR POWERS

Crazed Force Of Will: The cultists' fanaticism renders them more resistant than normal to Mental Powers.

Mental Defense (5 points + EGO/5). Total cost: 5 points.

Intimidating Display: Military history shows people often break and run when a gang of howling lunatics charges at them. It doesn't matter whether it's the famous Rebel Yell or "Kill for the love of Kali!" Some cults send the cannon fodder into battle screaming the praises of their god, hoping for a Presence Attack good enough to let the cultists get in the first shot.

+15 PRE (15 Active Points); Only For Fear-Based Presence Attacks (-1), Incantations (throughout; -½), Requires Multiple Users (9 or more; -1). Total cost: 4 points.

Fanatic Resistance To Pain: Some cultists suck up amazing amounts of damage without falling. They suffer just as much injury as anyone else, they just don't care! Until tissue damage (*i.e.,* BODY loss) actually kills the cultist, he keeps going. Any attack powerful enough to knock out a cultist with this power probably kills the cultist anyway.

The cultist's resistance to pain and shock usually requires some special display of faith. This example uses a hymn, prayer, or chant constantly repeated, but cultists might also rely on a holy symbol (OIF) or some other Limitation.

+15 PD (15 Active Points); Incantations (throughout; -½), Only Versus STUN Damage (-½) (total cost: 7 points) ***plus*** *+5 ED (5 Active Points); Incantations (throughout; -½), Only Versus STUN Damage (-½) (total cost: 2 points). Total cost: 9 points.*

MAJOR POWERS

Hellish Drug: In pulp fiction, cults often know how to concoct drugs that act more quickly and powerfully than any mundane narcotic. The drug may be administered in various ways. Injection or forced inhalation — clapping a pad dosed with the drug over the victim's face — are the most melodramatic methods, but cultists might use more subtle techniques. An undercover cultist might slip the drug into a victim's food or drink, or conceal an inhaled drug within a perfume spray or a corsage. A drug might be a contact toxin, absorbed through the skin, painted on something the victim handles, or in a liquid "accidentally" spilled on the victim. Some versions may require time to prepare, or a Sleight Of Hand roll to use. Whatever the method, the cult places several cultists on hand to keep the victim unconscious.

Contact or Ingested: *Energy Blast 8d6, NND (defense is Life Support [appropriate Immunity, and Self-Contained Breathing for gaseous drugs]; +1), Trigger (victim consumes drug or touches poisoned object; +¼) (90 Active Points); IAF Fragile (drug; -¾), No Range (-½), 1 Charge (-2). Total cost: 21 points.*

Injected or Sneakily Administered: *Energy Blast 8d6, NND (defense is Life Support [appropriate Immunity]; +1) (80 Active Points); IAF Fragile (drug and injection/administration device; -¾), No Range (-½), 1 Charge (-2). Total cost: 19 points.*

Self-Sacrificial Summoning: Cultists with this power use themselves as human sacrifices to summon a powerful servant of their god — or perhaps the god itself. A cultist stabs himself in the heart, cuts his own throat, blows himself up, or leaps to his death from a precipice, while calling out a prayer... and something really nasty appears. Typically, just a few especially "favored" cultists receive this power.

The spell cannot be stopped once the cultist inflicts the fatal wound, not even by healing the cultist: the spell makes sure the cultist dies. The means of the cultist's suicide don't matter.

Summon 500-point divine minion, Loyal (loyalty applies to the cult; +½) (150 Active Points); Side Effect (mortal wound on self, always occurs; -2), 1 Charge that Never Recovers (-4). Total cost: 21 points.

Vampire Dagger: The Vampire Dagger is obvious, potent magic. It looks like a dagger of unusual design. It might have a blade made of glass, or enameled some color, or its hilt might look like a demon. When the cultist wills, the dagger's blade shines with eerie light and it slides through flesh, clothing, armor, or even Force Fields. The victim feels the pain and damage, however, as his flesh withers. A few strikes from a Vampire Dagger can kill a normal person, leaving a shriveled, aged corpse.

HKA 1d6, NND (defense is Life Support [Longevity]; +1), Does BODY (+1) (45 Active Points); OAF (-1), 12 Charges (-¼). Total cost: 20 points.

Sample Cults

Here are two sample cults. Gamemasters can flesh out these brief descriptions however they like.

The Astral Light Fellowship: This cult is suitable for a Heroic-level contemporary campaign. The Astral Light Fellowship keeps the details of its rituals secret, but it advertises in the local Yellow Pages under "Metaphysical." The cult offers a limp sort of New Age "mystic wisdom": all is One, all is Love, and all is God; you can develop psychic powers through meditation, an odd diet, and wearing the right crystals; anything is true if it's "true for you"; and great spiritual Masters guide human development from the Astral Plane. Every month a few members join and a few members leave, but total membership stays about 50. Members are all



normal men and women with no special skills (*i.e.,* they're mostly dupes of the cult leaders).

Nobody in the Fellowship — including its beloved guru, the Reverend Orville Makepeace — has any real magic. The Reverend knows just enough occultism, however, to get into serious trouble if a real magical artifact fell into his hands. The Fellowship's structure is very simple: there's Reverend Makepeace, a few minor officers such as the treasurer, and everybody else.

Leopard Societies: These West African cult groups could appear in Victorian, pulp adventure, or contemporary mystical campaigns. Gamemasters could also transplant the cult into a Fantasy setting. The Leopard Societies combine banditry with their murderous religion. Native anti-witch movements, colonial authorities, and modern African governments all failed to eliminate the Leopard Societies. Not only do the Societies provide a religion, comradeship, and loot to their members, they promise lethal power.

Society members supposedly gain the power to turn into leopards. They use this power to rob and murder. Anthropologists describe it as a classic bit of totemism... but what scientists don't know is that the Leopard Societies' magic really works. Cultists start out with leopard-skin costumes and metal claws. Through ritual murders, in which they eat part of the victim's flesh and drink a potion brewed from his intestines, they become true were-leopards. This, however, is their only magic.

The Leopard Societies — the "real" cults and the "copycats" with the same murderous attitude but without the magic — grow with ominous speed at the start of the twenty-first century. The bloating coastal cities of West Africa are full of restless, unemployed young men eager for money, action, and a group to call their own.

LOST CIVILIZATIONS

Mysterious, "lost" civilizations are so common in Fantasy and pulp fiction they've become a cliché — Tarzan alone seems to have discovered dozens. In any genre or setting, the Mystic World can include a magical, lost civilization, providing the campaign with a source for legendary magic items and the ancients' secret lore. Lost civilizations also leave eerie ruins protected by curses, immortal monsters, or savage, tribal cults, but full of treasure and mystic lore. The lost civilization is itself a big secret for mystics to know.

Gamemasters can also use a lost civilization as a fable to illustrate the moral framework of the campaign. If the civilization destroyed itself by misusing its magic powers, the GM can make the danger of hubris a theme of the campaign. Perhaps the main villain of the campaign finds a potent relic of the lost civilization's magic and unleashes its deadly power; perhaps the PCs find the relic, then confront the temptation to use or misuse it. A civilization that vanished in a natural disaster adds a melancholy note of loss to the setting, if not an outright pessimism that the world inexorably decays from the primal Golden Age. *The Lord Of The Rings* uses both approaches to great effect: Middle-earth is haunted by ruins and remnants of kingdoms that doomed or exhausted themselves.

Myth Of A Greater Past

The idea of a magical, lost civilization is nothing new. The Egyptians looked back to a mythic age when the gods ruled on Earth, and Sumerian myth included a lost, Earthly paradise called Dilmun. Greek writers like Hesiod agreed the people of their day couldn't measure up to the great heroes of the mythic past. Plato tied everything together when he created his tale of Atlantis: a kingdom ruled by divine kings, mightier and more splendid than any current state, but destroyed and forgotten by everyone except the priests of another mystic land, Egypt. The myth gained extra resonance for Europeans of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, who lived in the shadow of the fallen Roman Empire.

In modern times, the occultists did the most to develop the myth of a magical, lost civilization. Many real-world mystical traditions hold that once, long ago, the lore of magic existed in a pure and complete state. Superior beings from higher dimensions, such as angelic powers or God Himself, taught it to humanity. Over the millennia, humanity lost or corrupted the secret lore. Occultists hardly ever admit to inventing anything: they prefer to claim they rediscovered the original lore from Egypt, Tibet, Atlantis, or wherever, perhaps with the help of those superior extradimensional beings.

Although occultists are very good at ignoring contrary evidence, they prefer to ascribe their magic lore to extinct cultures of which little is known. Egypt was popular as the fountainhead of

magic ever since Roman times. In the nineteenth century, however, scholars translated the Egyptian hieroglyphics and systematic archeology began. Occultists looked for new progenitors. The mysterious East and its ancient, exotic magical traditions filled the bill for a while. Tibet proved the most popular. Occultists who stuck to European sources invoked the Druids, who were long dead and obligingly wrote nothing down.

In 1882, however, a lawyer named Ignatius Donnelly provided the perfect ancient civilization through his epochal book, *Atlantis: The Antediluvial World.* Occultists found a civilization older than Egypt; they could invent whatever facts they wanted; and *no one could prove them wrong!* Donnelly made comparatively modest claims for Atlantis as the birthplace of civilization. Occultists such as Edgar Cayce and H. P. Blavatsky added tales of mingled sorcery and super-science that have been a fixture in "lost continent" fantasies ever since.

Naturally, some occultists wanted to hog the glory by inventing their own lost continents. Blavatsky took "Lemuria," a hypothetical land bridge connecting South Africa to India (proposed by nineteenth century biologists), and rewrote it as a lost continent more ancient than Atlantis. Early in the twentieth century, "Colonel" James Churchward promoted his own version of Lemuria, which he called "Mu" and moved to the Pacific Ocean. Other occultists added polar lost lands such as Hyperborea and Thule.

Atlantean and Lemurian revelations continue, obtained by channelling dead wizard-priests and warrior-kings, or by perusing "Akashic records" on the Astral Plane. Continental drift and direct studies of the ocean floor prove that lost continents could never have existed, but that doesn't bother occultists a bit... or the Fantasy and comic book writers who crib from them. The Champions Universe includes its own take on the myth, with the Fantasy settings of the Turakian, Valdorian, and Atlantean Ages.

The Legend Of Atlantis

In case you want to use Atlantis, Lemuria, and the like in your campaign, here's a brief overview of their history and culture as revealed by the crackpots (or "learned sages," if it turns out in your campaign that they were right). It is of course a compromise between many conflicting sources.

Civilization is immensely older than the 5,000 years or so that historians and archeologists know about — hundreds of thousands of years older. Civilization began on Mu or Lemuria and spread to other continents, most notably Atlantis. First Mu collapsed into the sea, leaving Atlantis as master of the world. Atlantis in turn set up colonies in Central America and Egypt (which is why both the Egyptians and Aztecs built pyramids), plus a few other places. Then Atlantis sank about 11,000 years ago. This let the Gulf Stream reach Europe, ending the Ice Age. Cut off from the mother land, the colonies fell into barbarism, but secret priesthoods and legends preserved the lore of Atlantis (or at least fragments of it).

The Atlanteans and Muvians were sun-worshippers with caste-based societies. One ruling class consisted of priest-magician-scientists who commanded technology and sorcery of vast power. The other ruling class consisted of a European-style feudal nobility that controlled the military. The king (who was also sometimes head priest) took Ra or Atlas as his title.

In their wisdom, the priests knew that ordinary slobs would misuse their knowledge and powers, so they selflessly kept the common folk living like medieval peasants. Thus, the Atlanteans had flying warships and ray guns for the aristocrats, but not spin dryers or automobiles for the commoners. Such was the wisdom of the angels, gods, or space aliens who taught civilization to Mu and Atlantis.

Unfortunately, the priest-kings weren't wise enough to predict their continent sinking and save themselves. Atlantists fall into two schools about this. One group says the catastrophe happened naturally: a giant meteor destroyed Atlantis, or one day the Earth simply hiccupped, and Atlantis was gone. (Some claim the convulsion happened worldwide, and the present continents rose from the sea as Atlantis and Mu sank.) The other group says the Atlanteans fell into wicked ways, misused their vast powers, and blew up the whole continent.

Historical Lost Civilizations

About a million Fantasy writers have already used Atlantis in fiction. If you want a magical, ancient civilization for Earth, however, you don't need tired old Atlantis or other lost continents. Archaeologists have found several genuinely "lost" civilizations... and some of them aren't that ancient! Legends suggest other civilizations you could add to the ancient world without tossing out basic facts of history and geology.

In the last few decades, Soviet archeologists uncovered the Bactrian civilization in central Asia, contemporary to Pharaonic Egypt. The centuries of Bactrian history remained virtually unknown to the empires of ancient Europe and the Middle East.

Satellite surveys of Saudi Arabia discovered the ruined city of Ubar, long believed mythical. Long ago, Ubar formed the hub of a trade network that vended frankincense throughout the Middle East. Ubar presents a genuine mystery, for this little walled town was built in the heart of Arabia's "empty quarter," the driest and most hostile desert on Earth. What's more, Ubar met its end in a truly Atlantean cataclysm, when a huge cavern under the city collapsed.

The first Phoenician traders to visit Tartessos in Spain (the Biblical Tarshish) had to cast their anchor stones of silver, so much of the metal did they receive for their cargo of wine and oil. Now, not even the ruins of Tartessos remain.

The Indus River cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa remain mysterious as well. Their writing defies translation, and little is known of their societies as a result.

Moving forward in time, Sub-Saharan Africa saw over a dozen major kingdoms spanning more than 2,000 years of history: Kush, Axum, Ghana, Zimbabwe, the Swahili trade cities, Songhai, the holy city of Ife.... Africa doesn't need made-up empires; the real ones were fabulous enough. Muslim Timbuktu, the center of Africa's trade in gold, had a university equal to anything in Europe. A Dutch traveller to Benin in the seventeenth century reported that the King's palace was larger than the whole city of Haarlem. African civilization collapsed from a combination of European exploitation and wars among themselves. State-supported Portuguese piracy ravaged the opulent trade cities of East Africa. The slave trade set the West African kingdoms at each other's throats and drained away the best and most skilled workers. Attacks from Morocco and nomads like the Tuareg further weakened the African states. By 1900, the empires that dazzled European visitors three centuries before had vanished into ruin. Their histories either were never written down or were lost in the sacking of their cities.

Legendary Lost Civilizations

Myths and legends speak of cities and kingdoms that *could* have been real, even if they weren't. For instance, the Aztecs claimed that they came from a land called Aztlan, somewhere to the north. Speculations place Aztlan anywhere from northern Mexico to Washington state. (Lost continent theorists have not ignored the similarity of "Aztlan" and "Atlantis," either.) Centuries later, the Spanish Conquistadors chased the mirage of Cibola, the City of Gold.

Buddhist legends in India mention Shamballah and Agharti, somewhere north of the Himalayas. Another version of the legend says the cities are subterranean, located in vast cave networks beneath the Tibetan plateau. (See *Champions Universe* and *The Mystic World* for a brief treatment of these mythical cities.)

Very ancient Mesopotamian myths tell of a yet more ancient Earthly paradise to the east called Dilmun. Some archaeologists think Dilmun might be the island of Bahrain; in fact, they've found traces of irrigation systems dating back to Sumerian times. The Bible contributes the city of Erech, founded by Cain in the land of Nod, somewhere east of Eden.

None of these historical or might-have-been nations can match the occult magnificence of Mu and Atlantis, with their flying warships, giant power-crystals, and eons of history. It doesn't take a million-year empire, however, to account for magic artifacts and the like. Most of the great achievements of antiquity, like the Parthenon, the Great Pyramid or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, were built in less than one human lifetime by nations whose glory days lasted a few centuries — in some cases, only a few decades. A nation's size doesn't really matter, either. The tiny city-state of Athens achieved heights of culture and influence surpassing the cruel, thousand-year empire of mighty Assyria.

Gamemasters can create local Golden Ages for little-known or imaginary kingdoms without wrenching real history: most people forget the bright centuries when Cairo, Baghdad, and Timbuktu were centers of art and scholarship. Bactria, Tartessos, or Dilmun could have had wizards on every streetcorner without any modern historian being the wiser. Gamemasters who want to leave poor old Atlantis to rest in peace can do a little reading and build their own lost citadels of wizardry.

Inventing Your Own

If your campaign isn't set on Earth, you have to design your own lost civilizations. This isn't difficult: just take Rome, Egypt, or some other antique civilization, and add magic. Pick whatever style of magic seems most appropriate for your purposes — ritual magic based on Hermetic Theurgy, comic book light-show magic, or even Atlantean power-crystals, if that's what you need for your "relics of ancient wizardry."

You can also mix up elements from different civilizations. For instance, you could start with Rome, but splice in Zoroastrian fire-worship, Egyptian pyramids and tombs, or (for an evil empire) Aztec human sacrifice. Change all the names, and your players will be none the wiser.

MYSTIC TOMES

Books of eldritch lore are a minor but common element of Mystic Worlds. Some of the first real books were grimoires: the Egyptian *Book Of Coming Forth By Day* (better known as the *Book Of The Dead*), a collection of funerary spells; collections of exorcisms for Sumerian sorcerers. Egypt also gave the world its first fictional book of magic: the *Book Of Thoth,* written by a god, telling the ultimate secrets of magic... and protected by an inexorable curse. Horror writer H. P. Lovecraft started a trend by making the fictional grimoire the *Necronomicon* a central feature of many of his stories, and many other authors and GMs have imitated him ever since.

If book-learning plays an important role in a setting's magic, GMs should certainly invent a few occult tomes. Mystical characters can quest to find a long-hidden grimoire, or an enemy might become more dangerous because he obtains a powerful book of spells. Mystic tomes also supply obscure prophecies, the secret weakness of a foe who seemed unstoppable, the location of a lost city, temple, or tomb, and other information needed to drive adventures. On the other hand, occult librams may bring danger to those who seek or use them. A tome may carry a dreadful curse, like the *Book Of Thoth...* or like the *Necronomicon,* the book may be so horrific that readers risk madness. Such "forbidden books" are particularly a staple of horror Fantasy.

To create a mystic tome, first decide on the general contents of the book: spells, ancient history or legend, prophecies, liturgies of forgotten cults? Then invent an author and a provenance. Some tomes are

anonymous, but most are written by great wizards, prophets, or savants of the past — maybe even a god or spirit, directly or channeled through a mortal. Give some thought to when and where the author lived, and how he gained this mystical knowledge. H. P. Lovecraft not only gave the *Necronomicon* an author, the "mad Arab" Abdul al-Hazred, he supplied several translators, condemnations from the Church, and other historical details.

Last but not least, choose a format and appearance for your mystical tome. The basic crumbling scroll or large, leather-bound book is always good, but books can take many other forms. Some Asian cultures wrote books using long, narrow sections of palm-fronds as pages, and paper books imitated this form. (These books also are not bound.) Mesopotamian civilizations wrote on clay tablets — a bit heavy to transport. In addition to scrolls, the Egyptians covered coffins and the walls of their temples and tombs with writing: characters who find such a "book" must copy it to some more portable form. In contemporary settings, mystic tomes might be turned into data files and stored on CD-ROM, but this lacks a certain romance. Of course, a regular book might be bound in dragonhide or some other exotic animal's skin, or the covers could be made of wood, metal, or ivory to make the tome seem more "mystical."

Sample Mystical Tomes

Some of these grimoires are real books, although one has been lost for over a thousand years. Others come from legend, but someone claimed they were real.

The Key Of Solomon: This famous grimoire from Western ceremonial magic claims to be written by King Solomon himself (though the *Key* can't possibly date from before the Middle Ages). The *Key* tells how to summon spirits and extort services from them, with instructions — *insanely complicated* instructions — for making the numerous magical tools required. It also tells how to enchant talismans for a wide variety of purposes.

Although English translator S. L. Mathers called the *Key* a book of "white magic," the use of animal sacrifice in the *Key* casts doubt on his claim. Still, the *Key Of Solomon* has a reputation as the supreme book for summoning and controlling spirits. Of course, no real sorcerer would use the Mathers English translation: he'd own an unexpurgated Latin manuscript.

The Lesser Key Of Solomon: Also called the *Lemegeton,* this volume concentrates on summoning devils and provides a list of 72 demon lords with their appearance, powers, and sigils. The rituals in the *Lesser Key* call on God, but their applications — lust, greed, power, destruction — are far from heavenly.

The Chaldean Oracles: The "last holy book of the ancient world" was written around the first century AD, either by the magus Julianus the Chaldean or his son Julianus the Theurgist. The book itself is lost, known only through quotations by other late Classical authors — or at least, no one admits to owning a complete copy.

The *Chaldean Oracles* give instructions for Neoplatonic Theurgy, a system of religious magic based on Greco-Roman gods. Neoplatonic mages consecrate idols to give them magic powers, and seek messages from the gods by channeling them in seances. The *Oracles* also tell how to rise through the layers of the planetary spheres in visions, with magic words and sigils to get you past the lesser gods and spirits of each planet. The mystic's goal, the realm of the Supreme Godhood, lies beyond the planets and the stars.

Raudhskinni: In English, the "Red Skin." This deadly, Satanic grimoire comes from the legends of Iceland. Its author, Gottskalk Niklasson the Cruel, became Iceland's most notoriously evil sorcerer despite his rank as Bishop of Holar from 1497 to 1520. Bishop Gottskalk wrote the *Raudhskinni* in golden runes on red parchment, and bound it in red leather. Legend says the *Raudhskinni* contained "black magic from the heathen age," but the evil Bishop's power can be judged from a legend about a man who tried to obtain his book.

The *Raudhskinni* was buried with Niklasson. Two centuries later, a scholar of Holar called Loptur tried to raise Niklasson from his grave to wrest the *Raudhskinni* from him. Loptur had already mastered another powerful grimoire, the *Graskinni* or "Grey Skin," but his encounter with Bishop Gottskalk left him a broken man. Niklasson keeps his dreadful secrets still.

The *Raudhskinni* came in two sections. The first half, written in Roman characters, told of lesser magicks such as *glimguldur* (wrestling magic) and *lofalist* (palmistry). People who read the first half could still repent and save their souls. The second half, however, was written in coded Norse runes, and readers were irrevocably damned.

The Stanzas Of Dzyan: This monumental, enigmatic guidebook to the origin and history of humanity and the Universe was invented by Madame Helena Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy. She claimed *Dzyan* was the fundamental text of occultism, preserved in secret by the Mahatmas of Tibet. Sha called her own magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine;* it's a commentary on excerpts of the *Stanzas.* Skeptics pointed out that her quotes from the *Stanzas* closely resembled sections of the well-known Hindu *Rig-Veda;* Blavatsky shot back that the *Rig-Veda* was plagiarized from the divine *Stanzas Of Dzyan.*

Blavatsky's "quotes" from *Dzyan* are splendid examples of mystical gibberish. They babble of Dhyan Chohans, lotus buds, Fire Mists, and the Seven Rays. Her voluminous explanations make their meaning even more opaque. Clearly, the *Stanzas Of Dzyan* is a masterpiece of Cosmic Wisdom, and probably a potent grimoire of High Magic.

MAGIC AND SOCIETY



Most Fantasy settings tend to assume that mystics operate in the open. People know magic really exists. In contrast, more-or-less contemporary settings usually assume magic stays hidden. Pulp heroes encounter curses when they explore long-hidden tombs, anger witch-doctors of remote tribes, or clash with diabolical secret societies. Horror-hunters don't tell the world about the existence of vampires, demons, and other monsters.

Superhero settings have it both ways. Some supernatural creatures operate openly as heroes or villains. The public accepts mythological gods, enchanted Amazon princesses, demons, and magical swordsmen along with the aliens, mutants, and victims of lab accidents. On the other hand, supersorcerers tend to keep a low profile, or even erase the memory of witnesses to supernatural events. The usual reason given is that people are "better off not knowing."

But not knowing... what? Throughout all history, virtually everyone believed in ghosts, demons, and black magic; skeptical materialism is a very modern thing. Most people still believe in a god of some sort who personally intervenes in their lives. Tens of thousands of psychics, astrologers, palmists, crystal healers, and other occult types practice in the United States alone, with millions of clients at every level of society.

And that's in the *real* world. Think what the belief level must be in a typical comic book world, full of people who can fly, lift a truck, shoot ray beams from their eyes, or read minds. Persuading people that something is magic would not be a problem. If anything, the problems lie the other way: no doubt myriads of educated Americans believe superpowers come from pacts with Satan instead of mutation or chemical accidents. Similarly, in some Urban Fantasy settings, magic is taught in universities, so there's no question of "belief."

THE TRADITION OF SECRECY

So it seems strange that real mystics — even the villains — would avoid the public eye when so many people believe in them anyway. If you keep this tradition in you campaign, however, a mystic can find more or less rational, practical reasons to keep a low profile.

Believers are more dangerous than skeptics — especially believers in positions of power. Sensible villains don't want the awesome manpower and firepower of agencies like the FBI brought against them. Remember, mystics are people of superior intelligence. Evil mystics just *might* notice that flamboyant, public supervillains spend a lot of time in jail. Mystical heroes don't want hordes of would-be acolytes pestering them, and of course they're too enlightened to prostitute their hard-won skills in big business or the talk show circuit. Nor do they want religious fanatics shooting at them.

Nearly all mystics agree the Secret Arts are, well, *secret*. Maybe you could rend the veils of mystery and make wizardry a science as accessible as electrical engineering, but would that be wise? Selfish mystics prefer to stay "the few and the proud." Knowledge is power, after all. They spent years tracking down the cryptic lore of sorcery and winning their initiations. No way do they want ordinary slobs picking up a copy of *Thaumaturgy For Dummies* and doing just as well!

Other mystics worry about the effects of unsupervised dabbling in the Black Arts. Even a villain might shudder at the thought of thousands of blundering Sorcerer's Apprentices unleashing forces far worse than animate brooms.

Socially responsible mystics might also want to keep the common people in the dark about the real supernatural menaces facing mankind. The supernatural forces most people believe in are really quite feeble. As such, even people's witches, demons, and other bogeymen give them comfort — because they can face and control them. How will people react to dark powers appeased by no ritual, blocked by no charm, conquered by no friendly god? The horror writer H. P. Lovecraft warned:

We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far... Some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

"The Call of Cthulhu"

MISINFORMATION

Just because people believe in magic doesn't mean they know much about it. Even in settings where people know magic really exists, they can be ignorant or completely deluded.

They might believe in magic that doesn't really exist. For instance, the Inquisition spent centuries pursuing Satanic witches who only existed in their imagination. The witch-hunters built elaborate fantasies about pacts with the Devil, Black Masses, infant sacrifices, and other horrors. After enough torture, of course, accused persons would confess to anything, but this fantasy killed thousands of innocent people. None of it bore much resemblance to the folk charms actually practiced by common folk, or to the occult theories of Hermetic mystics.

On the other hand, the public might not believe in real magic happening under its collective nose. Horror settings, in particular, presume the public has no clue what dire mystical forces stalk the night. Lovecraftian horror takes this a step further, with a "magic" that bears little or no resemblance to any mystical tradition; depending on the writer, this leaves most occultists and self-styled magicians in the dark as much as everyone else.

Fantasy settings rarely include misinformation about magic. The mere fact that wizards flaunt their powers in a Fantasy setting does not, however, make misinformation any less plausible. After all, well-educated people in the real world can believe ludicrous conspiracy theories about faked Moon landings, alien autopsies, and who really killed JFK. Why should people in a Fantasy world be more sensible?

PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Mundane people can hold a variety of attitudes to magic — sometimes at the same time. This has nothing to do with what they actually know about magic.

Pragmatic

Some people accept magic as an ordinary tool they use for ordinary goals. This attitude usually applies to weak but common magic that society says anyone can use, such as good-luck charms or blessings from a priest. Magic inspires stronger emotions when it becomes scarcer and more powerful.

Awe

Benign magic can inspire gratitude, even reverence. Mundane people love a mystic who can heal the sick, make the crops fruitful, and drive out evil spirits. Mystics who perform such feats of white magic seem touched by divinity. Magic that satisfies curiosity, or simply entertains, doesn't inspire such awe, but many people may still admire the mystic.

Greed

On the other hand, greed and ambition explain much of magic's allure. People want an edge over everyone else. They see magic as a way to cheat: to get the girl who won't look at them (as in Stephen King's short story "I Know What You Need"), to make money without earning it, to take revenge on a foe without getting caught. Any mystic who displays his powers can expect requests for such feats of black magic.

Hatred And Fear

A mystic who uses his powers selfishly, for himself or clients, inspires fear and hatred in everyone who suspects he lost out due to a magical cheat. How does an ardent suitor feel when his beloved drops him for a man she ignored before? When a magician sells curses, any misfortune might be the work of an enemy, not simple bad luck. Even a "white" magician cannot entirely escape suspicion: people wonder if he can use his powers for darker goals.

In a world where people know magic really works, fear becomes rational. A mystic can harm other people using methods they can't defend against... except by hiring a magician of their own. Fear easily slides into hate.

It doesn't matter if a mystic never harmed anyone else, or if he lacks any dangerous powers. The fear of what he *might* do gives some people enough reason for hatred... and how are people to know the limits of a mystic's power? If a mystic says, "Sorry, I don't have the power to help you," maybe he's just selfish. Maybe he made your trouble in the first place! A mystic who neglects his community relations — or doesn't hide his powers — must inevitably make enemies. Is it any wonder if a mystic chooses to live in a remote tower... or gets fed up with the suspicion and decides he might as well give the fools reason to fear him?

MAGIC, LAW, AND GOVERNMENT

"There are virtually no laws against the practice of Black Magic in this country now. Only that of 1842, called the Rogues and Vagabonds Act, under which a person may be prosecuted for 'pretending or professing to tell Fortunes, by using any subtle Craft, Means or Device'!"

Dennis Wheatley, The Devil Rides Out

Horror and urban Fantasy stories often assume government authorities don't know about the supernatural. These stories assume both good and evil mystics have no desire to tell the authorities what's really going on, and magic is rare and subtle enough the government doesn't find out on its own. This assumption is necessary if a story tries to preserve the illusion it could be set in the real world.



Other stories and game settings may presume governments *do* know about the supernatural, but join in the cover-up. Such an assumption is equally plausible: what, no mystic *ever* patriotically offered his services to his country? The cops *never* busted a sorcerous cult and encountered real magic or demons? Generations of social scientists *never* found a shaman or witch doctor with real powers? The authorities hide the truth, though, to protect the public, to exploit the power — or because supernatural forces subverted the government and use state power for their own ends.

On the other hand, some stories and settings presume the supernatural doesn't hide. In superhero settings, sorcerers, demons, and other magical characters become heroes and villains with very little attempt to hide what they are; in high Urban Fantasy, spells are a part of everyday life and taught in schools. The government would *have* to know the truth. Research and intelligence agencies would certainly look for more information. A few games and stories also present contemporary or near-future Fantasy settings where the supernatural has gone public. The existence of the supernatural would challenge many aspects of government.

INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

In the real world, the CIA and KGB both studied ESP (and decided it was hooey). In a world with real magic, mystics may find themselves under pressure to assist in programs of "ESPionage." Magic would be just too *useful:* agencies would love spies who could read or control minds, walk through walls, turn invisible, or kill from a distance with no weapon at all.

Spy agencies tend to run out of control. When the Agency asks Dr. Weird to teach them about magic, they might take no for an answer... but then go to his nemesis Count Evil and cut a deal with him instead. The results won't be pretty: in real life, Secrecy and National Security have led to reckless experiments on human subjects, and magic is far more dangerous than brainwashing or LSD.

The nation and its government might not benefit from spies going supernatural. People who use magic carelessly often end up used by the magic instead. "Enslaved" spirits become the masters. Minds warp in strange ways. In a world of open magic, public oversight *might* protect intelligence agencies from themselves. Or it might not. In a world where governments keep the secret, the "occult research" units of intelligence agencies could easily turn into cults following demented versions of National Security. Their agents might not even be human anymore.

MAGIC AND THE LAW

In a pseudo-contemporary setting with wizards and elves and God knows what-all running around, bizarre legal questions are bound to arise. For a start, do the courts believe magic is real, or will a claim that a crime was committed by magic get the case thrown out of court? Even if a judge accepts the existence of magic, proving that Count Evil murdered someone from miles away with a Voodoo curse could be tricky. Worse, Count Evil might produce witnesses who saw him sitting quietly while the victim collapsed from a sudden heart attack — witnesses without Mental

Awareness, who couldn't sense Count Evil's deadly psychic bolts striking his victim down.

Then there are civil rights. Have summoned and bound spirits been kidnapped and enslaved? Can nature spirits claim aboriginal rights? If your wife dies and comes back as a vampire, are you still married? If a hero stakes her, is it homicide? The mind reels at the possibilities of giving Social Security and the vote to vampires, ghosts and liches: "Excuse me, we object to the term "undead." We prefer to think of ourselves as "living-impaired"...." (Then again, Chicago is notorious for all the dead people who still vote.)

Police agencies might embrace magic gone public: cops will use any tool that helps them catch criminals. If the police mystic can solve crimes by looking back in time, that's great. If he can *predict* crimes, that's the world of the story/movie *Minority Report.* For less social disruption, mystics might merely provide another form of forensic evidence: they'd use the Law of Contagion to match bullets to guns, or divinations to detect curses. Randall Garret's "Lord Darcy" series of detective fantasies are set in an alternate history where forensic magicians help sleuths gather the clues to mysteries.

Folklore is full of judicial magic meant to reveal guilt or innocense. Gamemasters might want to forbid such magic, though, because it ruins stories. At the very least, the setting needs some way to fool or limit the magic, so characters can still fall victim to false accusations and still need to be clever to see their foes receive their just desserts.

WHY DON'T MYSTICS RULE THE WORLD?

After all, mystics can control minds, see the future, kill without trace, and twist Fate itself to their will — so why aren't they in charge? In some settings, cabals of mystics, vampires, or other magical creatures *do* rule entire nations. Ruling a country — especially from secret — is not as easy as you might think, though, even with magic.

Running even a small country requires the cooperation of large organizations such as the army, the police, the bureaucracy and major industries. If they don't cooperate, the country falls apart. A mystic could secretly influence a government (or some other large institution) by controlling the leaders' minds... but societies have more "leaders" than most people think. Controlling one or two isn't enough to hold a nation in a grip of iron. Either a lot of mystics must cooperate to rule the nation, or they need an extensive cadre of non-mystical Followers to assist them.

Alternatively, a sorcerer might try influencing the masses directly, using Mind Control over wide areas to put ideas into people's heads. Enhanced Presence used on people via television could give a similar effect. But does anyone need to be reminded of the public's fickleness? A mind-controlling mystic might not enjoy much greater advantage than a person skilled at Oratory.

How would the world look different if mystics took control? Mystics often have ways to know the future — a formidable power in itself. A nation's power brokers would embrace a mystic with genuine precognition like their long-lost brother. With leaders warned of every disaster and opportunity, the nation's government would display uncanny



efficiency and wisdom. That's a more unbelievable Fantasy than dragons or superheroes: the real world is a chaotic mess.

But that's not a problem if the Secret Masters *want* chaos, confusion, and misery. They could: if they weren't evil, after all, why wouldn't they go public? At least, *one* set of manipulators wants that. The Mystic World could include several secret cabals jockeying for control and undercutting each other's efforts. In that case, the game world is just like the real world, with lots of little power brokers working at cross-purposes — only some of the interest groups have magic.

MYSTICS UNDER LAW

Perhaps the most intriguing possibilities, though, come from settings where governments have more power than the supernatural. The state knows magic exists, and wants to regulate it. National police agencies might include special squads of horror-hunters who pursue vampires, evil mystics, and other antisocial supernaturals. On the other hand, mystical creatures who pay their taxes and don't commit crimes might receive the same rights as any other citizen... difficult for some creatures, but not impossible. In a light-hearted campaign, characters from the secret supernatural task force might be sent to a vampire's lair — to protect him from the fanatic horror-hunter who doesn't care that he buys his blood from the butcher shop. Characters might even be supernatural creatures themselves who work as cops, spies, soldiers, or other sorts of government agents.

MAYBE IT'S MAGIC

Controlling governments is not the only way in which supernatural forces could affect the mundane world. If the GM wishes, mystic forces could cause quite a lot of current affairs. Here are a few examples just to start your imagination working.

"ALIEN" ABDUCTION

By now, everyone knows the story: aliens paralyze people in their beds and levitate them out through windows and walls that mysteriously turn insubstantial, into flying saucers. In the United States, the aliens are short and grey, with huge, jet-black eyes. (Other parts of the world report aliens who look quite different.) The aliens stick their victims with needles, perform medical tests, and sometimes implant small metal objects in them. Then the aliens levitate their victims back.

Now, obviously this can't be happening at the rate that abduction promoters claim: tens of thousands of people floating over city streets into big flying saucers just could not be hidden. Nor has anyone recovered and studied any of the metal implants. The whole thing seems to be a dream or hallucination, patterned by decades of bad sci-fi movies.

But that's the real world. In a *magic* world, there's no problem. Obviously the "Greys" aren't *space* aliens, they must operate from the Astral Plane. Nobody sees flying saucers hovering over houses and apartment buildings, or bodies floating through the air, because the aliens pull out people's astral bodies. The implants don't show up on X-rays because they're made of ectoplasm.

But what are the implants for? What are the Greys up to? It can't be good for humanity, and it's a major operation. Mystical heroes had better put a stop to it!

EARLY WARNING

Mages can have better intelligence sources than any spy agency. Some of them can divine the future. Others commune with spirits who see just about everything.

Even if wizards do not meddle in politics or business, they might discreetly intervene when warned of global disaster. For instance, consider how much coincidence affects the lives of superheroes. A hero finds himself in a bank, in his Secret Identity, right when the supervillain decides to rob it. His reporter girlfriend stumbles onto the mastermind's scheme to take over the city. And somehow, heroes always learn about plots to conquer the world or End Civilization As We Know It before it's too late. Perhaps mystics subtly help them along — prompting a hero to patrol near the Technodyne Building on the night the arch-villain's henchmen steal the Neutronic Reverser, or nudging the villain to issue his demands before he's really got the world by the throat.

SCHOOL IS HELL

In May, 2004, Bisika Primary School in Uganda was closed due to attacks by demons called *mayembe.* Affected children shook violently, undressed themselves, foamed at the mouth, or babbled nonsense. A local witch-doctor used herbs, incantations, and a cloth-wound cow's horn to exorcise the demons and the school. A local man was arrested for bringing the *mayembe* to the area. The man did not deny he had summoned the demons, and said he released them when he found their demand for the blood of 300 virgin girls and cows excessive. The exorcist lamented that too many people in the province were summoning demons in hopes of gaining wealth or killing their enemies.

In August of 2004, a girls' school in Dolagobind, India, was closed due to an epidemic of possession by cat-spirits. The possessed girls clawed at themselves and yowled like cats. The affected children were sent to a local *ashram,* or hermitage of a holy man, who performed fire rituals and had the girls recite Vedic mantras as therapy. Magicians were also called in to exorcise the school.

These aren't unusual cases, either. In the western world, belief in demons isn't fashionable. In the Third World, people accept malevolent spirits as a fact of life. Demonic attack is just another childhood malady, like mumps or chicken pox. Grown-ups are just as susceptible, though.

PHYSICAL ANOMALIES

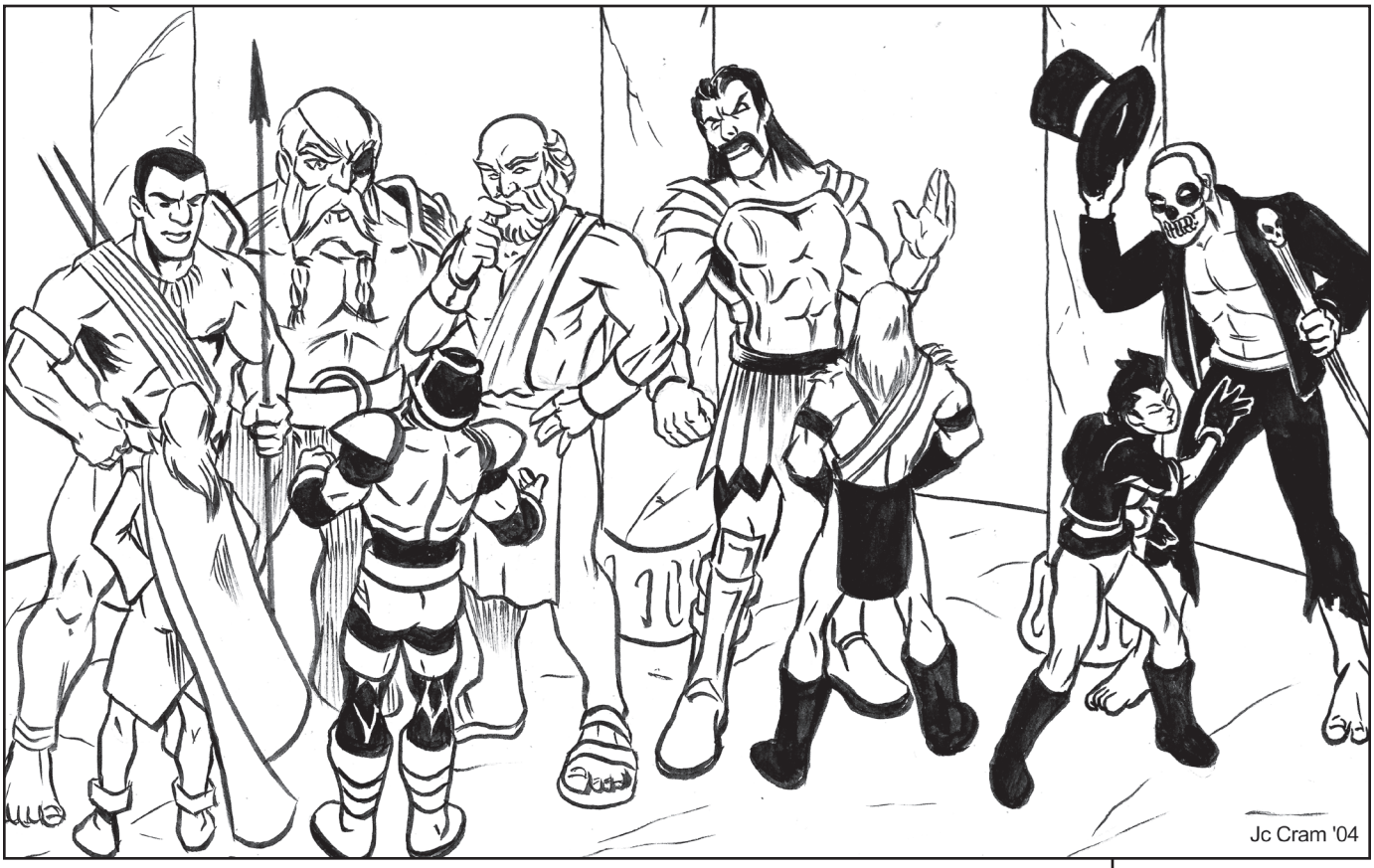
A lot of strange stuff happens that can't be adequately explained. In the early decades of this century, Charles Fort gained some notoriety through his books about rains of frogs and other oddities. More recently, Robert Corliss produced similar collections of anomalous events reported by scientists and witnesses of good character, ranging from cases of rapid fossilization to unconfirmed sightings of new planets.

Most physical anomalies are merely rare. Science faces no challenge from the "Green Flash" at sunset, or from rocks that give a musical tone when struck. Strange lights on the Moon, local darkening of sunlight on clear days, and rains of peculiar objects are less easily explained away. Perhaps they are side effects of powerful magical forces used in the area: physical anomalies would make an intriguing special effect for the *Noisy* Limitation.

HISTORICAL ANOMALIES

Sometimes things happen for no apparent reason. *Big* things. Experts try to explain them, but the explanations seem weak. It's as if an elephant knocked down a house without leaving any footprints. So maybe once in a while the paranoids are right and secret forces *are* at work — not all the time everywhere, just once in a while. It's not conspiracies of Catholics or Jews or Communist Bankers... it's *magic.* Let's take two examples from modern history:

■ In 1988, the Soviet Union was a superpower. By 1991, the Soviet Union abolished itself. Did a wizard use Mind Control on the Soviet Congress



of People's Deputies? Did some vast and terrible Power decree an empire's doom through some incredible curse? Or (a scarier thought) was it all an accident? When a wish to change history becomes too improbable, does history buckle and warp to remove the glitch? If so, there's no telling how far the effects could reach. Did the Soviet Union have its history pulled out from under it?

■ In the 1960s, NASA was an amazingly competent organization. The American space program had a bad start, but NASA learned quickly and developed dozens of new technologies, from multistage rockets to ballpoint pens. The Apollo Project put a man on the Moon *ahead* of schedule (!) and *under* budget (!!). The Space Shuttle, however, is constantly plagued with delays, cost overruns, and technical problems, leading to two deadly accidents and numerous missed opportunities for scientific exploration. But that's what a reasonable person would expect from a hideously complicated machine using several experimental technologies. Instead of being put under a curse, did NASA lose the blessing of some outside patron? And if NASA did receive mystical help, why did its patron want so badly to reach the Moon? Were the astronauts really just picking up rocks? Then again, in a setting like Ptolemy Resurgent, bits of another planet might be incredibly powerful links to the mystic forces of the planet's astral analog.

DENIZENS OF THE MYSTIC WORLD



Through ultimate cycles, as in cycles old,
Phantoms and apparitions manifold,
Shall pass before the spectral eyes of Man
In whom illusion doth itself behold.

Clark Ashton Smith (Fragment)

Mystics cannot avoid interacting with other creatures of myth and magic. Often, they try to exploit supernatural creatures, for good or evil. Sometimes they must defend against supernatural threats to the community. Other times, they mediate between mortals and the supernatural world, as priests, shamans, or simply people with enough magic that the supernatural will respect them, but human enough to work with ordinary people, too.

This section describes some of the wider categories of magical creatures within the Mystic World. Rather than provide detailed writeups based on specific legends (since you can find that sort of thing in *The HERO System Bestiary* and *Monsters, Minions, And Marauders*), this section explores the legends to suggest new possibilities outside the Generic RPG Warehouse.

You'll notice that many supernatural categories overlap. Games draw hard-and-fast boundaries between vampires, ghosts, faeries, and other creatures, but legends often do not. As you select and design magical denizens for your mystical setting, don't be afraid to blur the divisions between types of creatures, or to challenge your players with creatures who aren't what they seem to be.

ANGELS

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.
And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Gospel of Luke, 2:9

Everybody knows about angels. Well, everybody *thinks* they know about angels. Many angels do not fit the popular stereotype of a blandly handsome man or woman with a white robe, white wings, and a tinsel halo. Some sorts of angels do not look human at all. Nor are angels all the doers of good deeds depicted in movies, TV shows, and coffee-table books. Time and again in the Bible, an angel's first words are, "Be not afraid." Real angels are scary — even the "nice" ones. Angels carry the will of God as his messengers, his watchmen, his soldiers, and sometimes his executioners. In their heart of hearts, most people know they are not worthy to face such perfection.

Rabbinical and priestly lore describes many ranks of angels, with no great attempt at consistency. Some ranks have names, such as Cherubim, Seraphim, Archangels, Thrones, Powers, and Principalities. Less familiar, Hebrew names for various angelic classes include the Aishim ("Flames,"), Ophanim ("Wheels"), and Aralim ("Valiant Ones"). Many individual angels receive names, often ending in *El,* one of the names of god. Thus, the archangel Gabriel's name means "God is my strength," while Raphael's signifies "God has healed."

The most powerful angels are holy terrors who can destroy entire cities. They certainly equal the power of the mightiest demon kings. Even minor angels are no pushovers, and their very appearance proclaims their terrible power. The aralim are made of white flame; the aishim, of mingled fire and unmelting snow; while the ophanim are compared to fiery coals.

Not all angels are humanoid, either. Some angels have multitudes of wings and eyes. Some appear as whirlwinds of fire, or as strange beasts:

the vision of Ezekiel describes cherubim in terms of shining wheels within wheels, with four wings, a multitude of eyes, and the faces of a bull, a man, a lion, and an eagle.

God creates each sort of angel for a single purpose. Some purposes are general: warrior angels, messenger angels, healing angels of mercy, and so on. Some purposes are very specific: Jewish lore tells of angels who exist only to sing one hymn of praise to their Creator before plunging to their doom in the river of fire surrounding the throne of God. Every planet, month of the year, day of the week, and hour of the day has its own ruling angel. Some angels govern natural phenomena, such as Barakiel, the angel of lightning. (See page 103 for a list of more angelic governors of natural forces.) Others patronize professions, such as Anauel, the angelic guardian of commission brokers. However, accounts of angels often ascribe different functions to the same angel or class of angels.



Notable Classes Of Angels

Angels of Mercy: Modern sensibilities prefer the angels who assist the faithful in times of danger. Angels of mercy heal the sick, guide lost children to safety, restore faith to the despairing, and perform all manner of good deeds.

Angels of Punishment: One source lists seven angels who rule over the seven divisions of hell: Kushiel ("rigid one of God"), Lahatiel ("flaming one of God"), Makatiel ("plague of God"), and so on. Rabbinical lore also mentions five archangels of punishment forged from "chains of black and red fire," such as Kezef (angel of wrath and destruction), Hemah (angel over the death of domestic animals), and Mashhit (angel over the death of children).

Angels of Wrath and War: Some angels exist to battle demons and punish the wicked. The fiery aishim and aralim often fill this role. According to legend, angels continue to intercede in mortal wars: the spectral bowmen who assisted the British Expeditionary Force at Mons, in World War One, soon morphed into a an angelic woman in white who terrified the German troops and struck them dead without a mark upon the bodies.

Archangels: Although universally listed as a distinct order of angels, most individual archangels are also described as seraphim, cherubim, throne angels, or members of other high orders. Most "named" angels are called archangels, by one authority or another.

Cherubim: This order of angels actually predates Abrahamic religion. In Mesopotamian myth, the cherubim are winged, human-headed bulls or lions. They were often pictured on walls and gates as spiritual protectors of the city, temples, palaces, and the king. As angels, they attend the throne of God, excel in knowledge, and are associated with the winds. In Hermetic theurgy, they are the angels of the material world. One account says their numerous wings are blue, like sapphires.

Guardian Angels: Some Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe every person has a personal angelic protector. Angels may also guard saints and holy sites. The mightiest guardian angels, however, are the cherubim who drove Adam and Eve from Eden, and still guard the fabled garden and the Tree of Life from mortal intrusion. These angels carry swords of fire, and are referred to once as "the flame of whirling swords."

Herald Angels: While every angel is an emissary of some sort, some angels exist specifically to deliver messages, as in Luke and many other places in the Bible. A herald angel can find anyone, anywhere.

Seraphim: Their name means "fiery serpents." This high order of angels has dominion over fire. They have four faces and six wings of scarlet hue.

Thrones: The third in the triad of supreme angelic orders (with cherubim and seraphim) are of golden hue, and implement God's justice.

Notable Angels

A few of the more important and well-known angels include:

Azrael: The Angel of Death's name means, "Whom God helps." In Muslim legend, Azrael separates soul from body by holding an apple from the Tree of Life to the dying person's nose.

Gabriel: This archangel delivers God's most important messages. He brought God's wrath to Sodom and Gomorrah, and destroyed the army of Sennacherib (though this feat is also ascribed to Michael, Uriel, and other archangels). Gabriel told Mary she would deliver the Savior. As Jibril, he taught the Koran to Mohammed. Joan of Arc claimed Gabriel told her to take up arms for France. At the end of the world, Gabriel shall blow the trumpet to announce the Last Judgment. The Pope recently appointed Gabriel as the patron of telecommunications.

Metatron: Many sources describe this mysterious figure as the mightiest of all angels, as tall as the world, and the only figure other than God Himself with authority over Michael and Gabriel. The *Book Of Enoch* says that after God took the prophet Enoch into Heaven, he became Metatron. Other sources identify Metatron with the countenance of God — the mask he shows to the angels and prophets, God's true essence being beyond even their comprehension. Some kabbalists say Metatron wrestled with Jacob, and guided the Israelites through the wilderness.

Michael: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources all call Michael the greatest of all angels. His titles include Chief of Archangels, Prince of the Presence, Angel of Repentance and Mercy, Prince of Light, and Guardian of Jacob and the nation of Israel. He stayed the hand of Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac (though Metatron and other angels receive credit for this too). In *Paradise Lost,* as well as various mystical accounts, Michael drove Satan from Heaven and is destined to deliver final destruction to the rebel angels. He is also the angelic patron of policemen.

Raphael: His name means "God has healed," and this archangel's lore consistently describes him as healing wounds rather than inflicting them. Muslims identify him with Azrael, as delivering the final cure for all pain. Raphael is also one of the most sociable of angels: he, with Gabriel and Michael, visited Abraham disguised as mortals; and, again in disguise, guided Tobias in the *Book Of Tobit.* Angelic lore associates Raphael with light, the sun, joy, and science.

Amesha Spentas

Angels are best known as the servants of Jehovah in the Abrahamic tradition. Nevertheless, some other religions and mythologies include similar beings. The clearest case, with the closest connection to the Abrahamic faiths, comes from Zoroastrianism. According to the first Middle Eastern monotheism, the "Good Mind" of light, Ahura Mazda, is assisted by the six *Amesha Spentas* or Amschaspands, the "holy immortal ones":

Ameretat, spirit of immortality

Armaiti, spirit of holy harmony

Asha, spirit of righteousness

Haurvatat, spirit of salvation

Kshathra Vairya, spirit of kingship

Vohu Manah, spirit of good thought

Of lesser rank are the Yazatas ("Worshipful Ones"), including Atar, the spirit of fire; Anahita, the spirit of water; and Mithra, the spirit of light and truth. Tishtriya, or Sirius, also has an angelic role as commander of the stars and distributor of blessings. The amesha spentas, yazatas, and the stars battle the powers of evil, including the planets, led by the "Bad Mind," Angra Mainyu or Ahriman.

Other Angelic Beings

Other religions and mythologies include divine messengers who technically count as angels. The Egyptian gods could project spirit doubles of themselves, called *bau,* to intercede in mortal affairs for good or evil. The Vedas say the storm-gods Marut and Rudra command legions of spirits named after themselves, who assist the gods in their battles with demons. Shining spirits called *hsien* attend the Celestial Emperor's court in Chinese mythology. Some of them are former mortals transformed into spirits by the Elixir of Immortality; but some Western scholars prefer to translate *hsien* as "fairy."

COSMIC ENTITIES

In most mythologies and religions, one or a few gods stand out as older and mightier than the rest. They are truly cosmic entities, in that they came before the world and personify truly universal concepts. These "elder gods" show far fewer human traits than their descendants. Few of them receive worship directly: after creating the world, they withdraw from it, or are usurped by younger gods.

In Greek mythology, for instance, the Olympians descend from the cosmic union of Ouranos and Gaia, Sky and Earth. Gaia remains an active presence in the mythology by sponsoring oracles and spawning giants and monsters. Ouranos, however, is a cipher. When Greek myth turned literary, writers like Hesiod added whole generations of abstract, primordial deities such as Nox (Night), Thanatos (Death), and Morpheus (Dream). Other philosophers and mystics promoted minor figures to cosmic status, as when the Orphics declared Eros (Love) the architect of the universe.

Hindu mythology carried the progression further. The nature-oriented gods of the Vedic period, such as Indra and Varuna, gave way to the cosmic figures of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, whom still later philosophers declared mere aspects of Brahman, the eternal and wholly abstract principle behind all reality. Modern Hinduism encompasses all three stages of belief, from direct propitiation of very human and local gods, to the most philosophical reverence for Brahman.

The Abrahamic religions carry this evolution to its conclusion. The Yahweh who emerges from the welter of Middle Eastern tribal gods first commands his people to worship no other god, then declares there are no other gods at all. Over the centuries, though, simple folk have come full circle and treated subordinate religious figures — saints, Mary, the Imam Ali, even the Devil — as if they were independent gods, creating new polytheisms in defiance of doctrine.

In recent times, ethnologists have discerned more cosmic entities behind the details of mythology. According to some ethnologists, the gods of myth are merely local, cultural manifestations of more abstract and archetypal entities.

The Trickster, for instance, acts in the form of many human gods, wearing them as a human might wear a mask. As Thrice-Great Hermes, god of messengers, merchants and thieves, he brought divine visions to human wizards. As Loki, he wove webs of treachery and laughed at the death and destruction he caused. Anansi, Coyote, Eshu, Satan — his names are legion. Whatever mask he wears, the Trickster seeks to upset established power and custom and make life... interesting. Fortunately, he is a bit of a dolt at times, and can himself be defeated by trickery.

The *Triple Goddess* assumed literally hundreds of forms on Earth. Indeed, she took more than two dozen roles within the Greek pantheon alone. Her manifestations always involve three women — most famously, as a young maiden, a mature woman, and an old crone, but she can appear as other triads too, such as goddesses of different natural realms.

The Triple Goddess is one of the great powers of Nature. Her motives are especially hard to fathom, for she embodies the full cycle of birth and death. She kills as easily as she nurtures. Goddess theologians say her killing is itself a form of nurturing: she hurries one creature to the grave to become fertilizer for other beings yet to come. This is cold comfort, though, when you're about to become mulch.

Coping With Cosmic Entities

The more cosmic the entity, the less directly it intervenes in worldly affairs. Often, cosmic entities only interact with the gods, and do all their work in the mortal world through intermediaries. A mystic who wants to stop a cosmic entity's plans for the world doesn't fight the entity itself; that's as pointless as attacking the laws of arithmetic. Instead, the mystic fights the entity's minions. Cosmic entities also traditionally allow metaphysical challenges, as when Yahweh agreed to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if Abraham could find ten righteous men in these most wicked of cities. A character might also defeat a cosmic entity by maneuvering it into abandoning its sphere of control.

Cosmic Entities In The Campaign

In a campaign, cosmic entities serve as gods to the gods. They supply an origin for the world, and personify its moral and mystical structure. The Greek mythic world, for instance, appropriately begins with the enigmatic and fearsome figure of Night: this world has no moral order, only the whims and vendettas of jealous and capricious gods. The trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, on the other hand, anchor an Indian worldview of endlessly cycling creation and destruction, with the undivided abstraction of Brahman as the fundamental reality. The Abrahamic religions begin with Yahweh commanding both physical and moral order as he creates the universe, which he continues to rule as king and judge. When you create a setting, your choice of cosmic entities says a lot about the nature of good and evil in the campaign, or the primary mystical forces that shape the world. Even to duck the question and not define any cosmic entities is to declare something about the putative Supreme Powers: either there aren't any, or he/she/it/they deliberately stay hidden and unknowable.

Cosmic entities don't need Characteristics, Skills, Powers, or other game traits. Their chief power is Plot Device: a cosmic entity can do anything the GM wants, within its particular field of concern, to drive a story. The Trickster, for instance, can deceive *anyone,* even another cosmic entity. Death, as everyone knows, takes everything in the end simply because everything ends.

Gamemasters should use cosmic entities sparingly. They won't inspire much awe if they show up too often. A cosmic entity's appearance should be a big event in a campaign, even in a magic-intensive campaign. They don't show up just to kibitz, take tea,



or swat the characters down. If characters encounter a cosmic entity, they've stumbled into something that concerns the fate of the world.

Example: *Witchcraft, the super-mage member of the Champions superhero team, receives more than she expects from a divination spell. Instead of a clue to a villain's plans, she finds herself facing the Triple Goddess. The Goddess says the Champions shall soon face a test for the destiny of mankind. Depending on how they choose, the Goddess shall give humanity a marriage, from the Maiden; a birth, from the Mother; or a death, from the Crone. If they choose wrongly, the consequences for humanity shall be... unfortunate. Naturally, the Triple Goddess doesn't say what the test will be.*

DEMONS AND DEVILS

We are the ministers of pain,
and fear,
And disappointment, and
mistrust, and hate,
And clinging crime...

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus Unbound

Every culture in the world has legends of dangerous spirits. Some are hostile and consciously evil; some are merely mischievous, or become a danger when they leave their proper sphere of activities. All these spirits may be called demons.

"Demon" comes from the Greek *daimon,* a spirit intermediate between gods and mortals. *Daimones* could be good or evil. Many *daimones* were functionally angels — messengers from the Greek gods. Christianity, however, could not tolerate any sort of "pagan" spirit. *Daimones* had to be evil.

The Greeks' own name for an evil spirit was *diabolos,* from *daballein,* to slander or vilify; this became "devil." The evil spirits of the Abrahamic tradition can be called demons or devils interchangeably. *The Ultimate Mystic* refers to other cultures' evil spirits only as demons, to reflect the different moral frameworks in which they operate.

Devils

Abrahamic devils are entirely evil spirits. They exist only to do harm and lead mortals into sin. They range from Satan, the arch-adversary of God Himself, down to petty imps from Jewish legend who do nothing except spread gossip. Two separate stories account for their existence.

Genesis briefly alludes to "sons of God" desiring "daughters of men" and spawning "mighty men, men of renown." The apocryphal book of *Watchers* amplifies this story. The "sons of God" were angels, the Watchers or *Grigori.* The Watchers descended to Earth because they wanted wives and children. They taught their mortal in-laws about astronomy, calendars, cosmetics, metalwork, sorcery, and weapons of war. The forbidden union of mortal and fallen angel produced terrible giants who devastated the world with their rapacious hunger. When the giants died, their rotting flesh produced foul spirits to plague the world forever after.

Christian doctrine prefers another story. The usual version goes that the great angel Lucifer rebelled because he would not bow to Adam and acknowledge this creature of mud as greater than himself. Lucifer persuaded many other angels to join his revolt. God cast them out of Heaven; the Light-Bearer became Satan, Prince of Darkness, overlord of Hell. Their rebellion and expulsion turned the fallen angels into creatures of absolute evil, dedicated to spoiling God's creation. Some devils set themselves up as false gods of the ancient Hebrews' neighbors, the better to attack God's

favored children and lead them astray: hence the appearance of Beelzebub, Moloch, Dagon, and other devils with the names of Canaanite, Syrian, Phoenician, and Philistine gods. Christ's sacrifice and resurrection broke the power of the devils. From then on, Satan and his legions could work evil only through deceit, if they could fool mortals into submitting to them. At the Last Judgment, Satan and all the devils shall receive their final punishment when God annihilates them in the Lake of Fire. Some theologians speculate that devils could repent and receive forgiveness; but orthodox doctrine says they shall never do so.

Muslim folklore is much like the Christian tale, but includes particular devils who fell separately out of love, as in the story of the Watchers. In Iranian legend, for instance, the angels Harut and Marut fell in love with Zuhrah, a mortal woman, and revealed the secret name of God to her. Zuhrah used the Name's power to ascend and become the spirit of the planet Venus. The blabbermouth angels were imprisoned head-down in a pit near Babylon, where they teach sorcery.

Jewish lore describes several varieties of devils, such as the gossip-bearers and filth-spirits already mentioned. Some Jewish devils sound more like social commentary on mortals: for instance, the *gibborim,* or Mighty Ones, "erect synagogues and colleges, and place in them scrolls of law with rich ornaments, but only to make themselves a name." This suggests breeds of demons based on particular sins. In Christian lore, however, only the succubi and incubi, sexual demons who couple with sleeping mortals, receive distinct mention. Instead, exorcists and sorcerers report a plethora of individual devils, each with their own name, appearance, and powers.

THE DESCENDING HIERARCHY

The Bible and apocryphal scriptures mention several enemy gods and archdevils such as Satan, Belial, and Beelzebub, but without systematizing them into a coherent mythology of evil. That would wait for later centuries, when exorcists compiled the names of devils driven from patients and sorcerers supplied lists of evil spirits to conjure for various purposes. The idea grew that devils form a government — a Descending Hierarchy in opposition to the graded choirs of angels. Some devils bear special responsibilities for evil in particular countries. Others hold court or military titles. Each demon lord rules a host of minor devils. The grimoires say if a demon lord is too busy to appear in person, he can send these servitors instead.

The longest listing comes from the *Lemegeton,* also called the *Goetia* or *Lesser Key Of Solomon.* This grimoire describes 72 demonic Kings, Princes, Dukes, Marquises, Earls, and Presidents. They serve under Amaymon, the King of the East; Corson, King of the West; Ziminar, King of the North; and Gaäp, King of the South. This list also appears (with minor variations) in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie Of Witchcraft.* See the sidebar for some of the more colorful demonic nobles.

The *Grimorium Verum* and *Grand Grimoire* describe the rulers of devilkind. They list Lucifer as Emperor of Hell; Beelzebuth [sic] as Prince; and Astaroth as Grand Duke. These overlords command six lieutenants. The *Grand Grimoire* lists Lucifuge Rofocale as Prime Minister, Put Satanachia and Agaliarept as Commanders-in Chief, Fleurety as Lieutenant-General, Sargatanas as Brigadier-Major, and Nebiros as Field Marshal and Inspector General. The *Grimorium Verum* offers a somewhat different list of six. The six officers, in turn, command many subordinates of their own, many of whom also appear on the *Lemegeton*'s list.

In *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum,* Johann Weyer offers a different list of dignitaries in the "False Monarchy of Demons." Beelzebuth is Supreme Chief of the Infernal Empire, with Satan as Leader of the Opposition, Moloch as Prince of the Land of Tears, Eurynomous as Prince of Death, Proserpine as Arch-She-Devil and Sovereign Princess of Mischievous Spirits, and so on. Ministers include Adramalech, the Lord High Chancellor;

DEVILS FROM THE *LEMEGETON*

Astaroth: The Grand Duke Astaroth appears as a foul angel, perhaps with skin pied black and white. He rides a dragon and carries a viper. The Magician must hold a magic ring in front of his face to protect himself from Astaroth's deadly, stinking breath. Astaroth tells of the past, present, and future, discovers all secrets, and gives skill in "liberal sciences." He also tells of the fall of the angels, but pretends he was exempt. He is also the Descending Hierarchy's ambassador to America.

Baal: A great king who rules in the East. He appears with the head of a man, a cat, a toad or all three. Baal imparts invisibility and wisdom. He may be the same as Beelzebub, in which case he can do far more.

Belial: Created next after Lucifer, this king appears as a beautiful angel in a flaming chariot. Belial gives senatorships, familiars, and favors from friend and foe alike. The summoner must offer sacrifices to Belial, but he is a habitual liar who cannot stay within the truth for an hour, unless constrained by divine power.

Caym: This infernal president appears as a thrush or blackbird, then a man with a sword, wearing a tufted cap and with a peacock's tail. He grants the power to talk to animals and can prophecy the future. Caym is also a keen debater, well able to confuse virtue and sin, heresy and orthodoxy.

Furcas: This duke appears as a cruel old man with a long beard and white hair, riding a pale horse and carrying a spear. He teaches philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, logic, palmistry, and pyromancy.

Furfur: An earl who looks like a hart with a fiery tail, then an angel. He makes specified people fall in love with his summoner, cause storms and command winds and lightning, and tell of secret and divine things.

Gamygyn: This marquis appears as a horse or ass, then in human form. He teaches "liberal sciences" and summons ghosts from Purgatory. He may have other necromantic powers, too.

Lerajie: A marquis who appears as an archer clad in green. Lerajie causes fights and battles, and his arrows leave putrefying wounds.

OTHER DEVILS

Eurynome: The mighty and terrifying Prince of Death has long, sharp teeth, a hideous body covered in sores, and fox-skin clothing. He feeds on corpses, and his touch is deadly.

Minos: In the *Inferno,* the legendary Greek judge of the dead appears as a minotaur who assigns the damned to the proper circle of Hell, according to their sins.

Ukoboch: This minor devil has a puffy, inflamed body. He invented fireworks and fried foods. Beelzebub assigned him to tend the oil in Hell's cauldrons.

Xaphan: Another minor devil, who carries a bellows and fans the embers in Hell's furnaces. Xaphan has an inventive mind and is an enthusiastic arsonist.

Astaroth as Grand Treasurer; Nergal as Chief of the Secret Police; and Baalberith as Minister of Treaties. Belphegor is ambassador to France; Mammon, to England; and Rimmon to Russia. Officers in the Royal Household include the paymaster Melchom, the chief of eunuchs Succor Benoth, cup-bearer Behemoth, and Mullin, First Gentleman of the Bedchamber. Asmodeus is Superintendent of Casinos, while Antichrist serves as juggler and mimic for the court's amusement. Weyer, however, does not describe the specific powers and appearances of these demonic courtiers.

Perhaps appropriately, many devils appear in multiple and inconsistent roles. Astaroth, for instance, is one of the three supreme devils in the *Grand Grimoire,* but merely a Duke in the *Lemegeton,* and a Treasurer according to Weyer. Any account of the Descending Hierarchy could be a lie told to a gullible sorcerer, as deception for its own sake or to make the speaker seem more important.

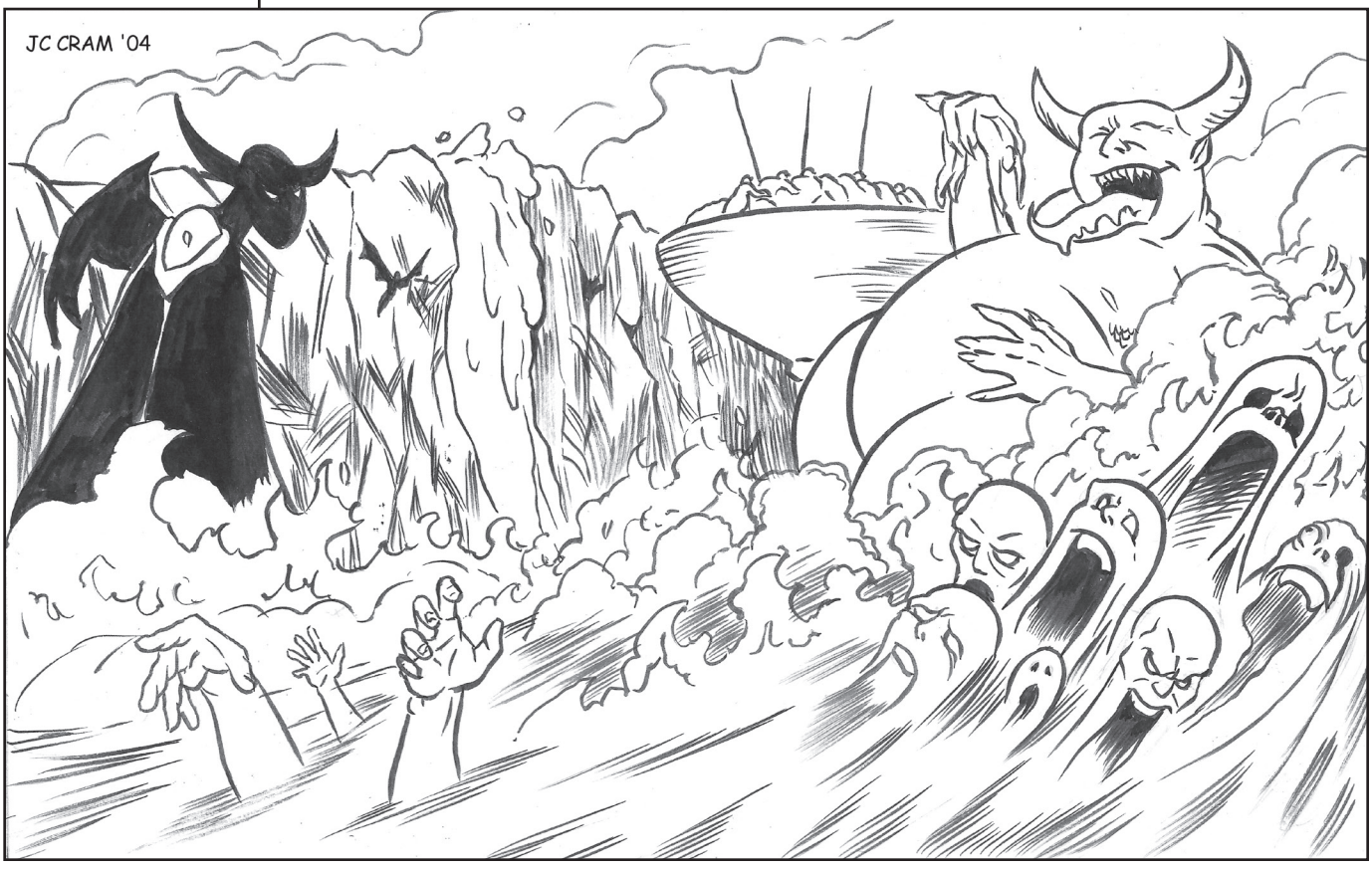
NOTABLE DEVILS

The grimoires don't describe the personalities of most devils. Their powers tend to be stereotypical as well: give wealth, power, and status; teach arcane knowledge; destroy the magician's enemies; deliver whatever woman he wants to satisfy his lust. A few devils stand out as actual characters, but not from the grimoires.

Satan: The Devil himself, appropriately, has the most personality of his breed. *Paradise Lost* turned Satan into one of the great characters in fiction. Milton's Satan alternately rages and despairs at his punishment, but his pride does not let him repent. "Better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven," he tells the wavering fallen angels, and finally resolves his own doubts into "Evil, be thou my Good!". His indomitable courage would suit a hero... but it comes from fear of losing face before the other fallen angels, and lust for revenge. The would-be usurper of God steadily shrinks to a sneaking serpent telling spiteful lies. Milton's Satan is the Devil as epic supervillain, able to present himself as a worthy adversary of God — but his grandeur is false.

Mephistopheles: This famous devil comes from the legend of Faust. Early versions do not describe him as a great archdevil; he is merely Faust's personal familiar spirit. His promotion to archdevil comes later, in grimoires attributed to Faust, in which he joins the roster of names drawn from the *Lemegeton, Grand Grimoire,* and other books.

The early stories also say Mephistopheles looks like a tubby little monk. Dramatists turned



Faust's familiar into a tall, lean, saturnine man dressed in red satin, with a little cape and a peaked hat. Since Mephisto, the Devil has stayed in the height of fashion.

Mephistopheles is a dastardly gentleman with a mocking honesty. He warns Faust against the pact; then points out that in summoning him, Faust already damned himself. Mephisto is the demon for deal-with-the-devil stories — evil's silver-tongued salesman who tempts and deceives without telling an outright lie, who offers pacts that seem easy to escape but hold cunning traps of ambiguous phrasing, and who laughs as he finally drags his victim to Hell.

Put Satanachia: Some sources identify this archdevil with the "Sabbath Goat," the bestial devil said to appear at witches' revels. As depicted in Eliphas Levi's *Rituals Of Transcendental Magic,* the Sabbath Goat has a hairy, human torso with erect male genitals and female breasts, the head and legs of a goat, and black, feathered wings. A torch burns between his horns, and his forehead bears a pentagram. This high officer of Hell leads Satanic cults in perverse debauchery. The Sabbath Goat shows no Miltonic grandeur or Mephistophelean wit: he is coarse, lewd, and equally contemptuous of those who defy him and those who surrender to wallow in their appetites.

Other Demons

World mythology supplies too many kinds of demons to describe. Many demons fall into various types, though, based on their activities. Some demons fit in more than one type.

ANTI-GODS

The most powerful demons are actual gods of evil. They exist to oppose the legitimate gods and attack the cosmic order. Anti-gods often command legions of lesser demons.

Anti-gods should not be confused with gods of death. In most mythologies, the death-gods are part of the system — not a nice part, but accepted as part of the pantheon. Trickster gods like Raven or Coyote are seldom demonic, either.

Loki is a special case: he functions as a trickster through most of the Norse myths. But as the father of doomsday monsters like Jormungandr and Fenris, he shows a more demonic aspect. He becomes a full-fledged anti-god at the end of the world, when he dooms Baldur to death and pilots the ship of the giants against Asgard.

Ahriman, the principle of evil from Zoroastrian religion, is the prototype for Satan. Ahriman, however, is evil from the beginning. At the world's creation, Ahriman introduces chaos and evil to counter each good thing wrought by Ahura Mazda, the principle of Good. Ahura Mazda creates the spirits of the virtues; Ahriman creates demons of the vices. Ahura Mazda sets the stars in unchanging order; Ahriman sets the planets wandering among them. After humanity's creation, Ahriman became responsible for the greatest mortal villain in Persian myth. The disguised arch-demon managed to kiss the shoulders of the king Zohak. Serpents grew from the kisses, and the king had to feed each serpent a man's brains every day to keep them from turning on him.

The *Asuras* are an entire class of anti-gods from Indian mythology. They existed at the beginning of the world, and the gods needed their help to produce the nectar of immortality and other divine treasures. The asuras include the gigantic *Daityas* and *Danavas,* as well as many individual demon-gods of note. *Mahisha-Asura,* for instance, not only surpassed all the gods in physical strength, every drop of his blood could become a copy of him. The goddess Parvati, consort of Shiva, finally destroyed Mahisha-Asura by taking the form of Kali and drinking each drop of the arch-demon's blood before it could spawn another duplicate.

Mara, the archfiend of Buddhism, embodies all the fears, desires, and illusions that deceive mortals and keep them from enlightenment. When Gautama vowed to meditate until he reached enlightenment, Mara sent his three daughters to seduce him, an army of demons to terrify him, and finally tried to kill the sage in person. Gautama's pure resolve withstood every attack, and he became the Buddha whose doctrine gives liberation from all Mara's snares.

TROUBLEMAKERS

Most demons prefer to attack weak mortals rather than powerful gods. They inflict harm on mortals because, well, it's what they do. Demons may cause all manner of trouble.

The Mesopotamian *maskim* or *rabishu,* for instance, cause disease. They play little role in mythic tales like the *Epic Of Gilgamesh.* Knowledge of the demons comes chiefly from tablets of incantations used against them. The Mesopotamians did not even show what the maskim look like.

Lamashtu was often pictured, though. The greatest Mesopotamian plague-demon has a hairy female body, the head of a lion, the teeth and sometimes the ears of a donkey, the feet of a bird, and long, claw-like nails. She holds snakes in her hands and suckles a piglet and a puppy. Lamashtu preys on pregnant women and infants, causing miscarriage and crib death. Unlike other Mesopotamian demons, she never acts at a god's behest; her evil is entirely self-willed.

Indian legend describes several sorts of troublemaking demons. The most powerful are the murderous, shape-shifting *rakshasas.* They have blue, green, or yellow skin, and their eyelids move side-to-side instead of up-and-down. Rakshasas often take animal form, until they attack. They prey on travelers and try to disrupt religious ceremonies. Despite their criminal deeds against men and gods, they treat each other with honor.

Ravana, the king of rakshasas, became one of the most determined enemies of the gods. Ravana had ten heads and twenty arms, but he could change his shape to appear as a pall of smoke, a stone, a gigantic corpse, or anything else he pleased. He was strong enough to break mountains or stop the sun and moon with his hands.

A fantastic, millennia-long ascetic rite won him complete invulnerability from gods, beasts, and the forces of nature — but he did not ask to be invulnerable to such feeble creatures as humans. Ravana was addicted to abducting wives, and this led to his doom: he kidnapped the wife of Rama, who was actually an incarnation of Vishnu... but mortal, and therefore able to kill the Rakshasa King. The island of Lanka prospered under Ravana's reign, however, and Rama felt no shame in asking the dying demon to teach him the secrets of statecraft. Ravana's hymn to Shiva is widely known in India to this day.

Like Ravana, the serpent-demon Vritra combines the roles of troublemaker and anti-god. Vritra appears in the sacred *Vedas* as the personification of drought. His hissing and snorting strike terror into others, and he causes thunder and lightning, mist, and hail. Again and again, Vritra steals the cloud-cattle, and Indra overcomes him with thunderbolts and releases the rain.

Among less potent Indian demons, the aerial *panis* lure people into folly, slander, and impiety. *Grahas* possess people to sicken them or drive them mad. The *pisachas* stalk the burning-grounds to steal and eat corpses. They also rape sleeping women and are widely regarded as the most contemptible and vicious of all demons. Pisachas are expert at surgery, however, and can cure disease if properly propitiated — a rare case of demon servitors in Indian mysticism. The demon-hag Putana, like Lamashtu, causes crib death.

In fact, just about every culture seems to have a demon that sickens and kills children or adults. The Greeks have the *empusa, lamia,* and *mormo,* all vampire hags who disguise themselves through illusion. The Aztec *civatateo* are demonic ghosts of noblewomen who suck the blood of children and infect them with a wasting disease. These creatures also inflict night-terrors, like the European *mora* or ancient Greek *ephialtes.*

A related sub-class of demon can appear human to seduce and marry unfortunate mortals: see page 209 regarding these "demon brides." The Chinese *kuei* can be ghosts, demons, or animals that gain supernatural powers through their great age: in one bizarre case, a kuei was identified as a spirit generated from a rotting rope sunk in a bog. Whatever their origins, kuei often take the form of beautiful women, but their husbands suffer lethally bad luck.

The New World has demons, too. The Native Brazilians, for instance, believe in a grotesque demon called Kuru-Pira that stalks hunters who take too much game. Kuru-Pira's urine is instantly fatal to mortals. Immensely strong, he can crush a person to death, suck out his flesh, then inflate his skin so he seems to live again.

DEMON MINIONS

Demons who serve sorcerers form another large class of evil spirits. The European grimoires focus on demons that can perform services for their summoners. Many folkloric demons form enduring bonds with sorcerers as familiar spirits.

QLIPHOTH

Kabbalism defines its own demons: the *qliphoth,* the "shells" or "husks." These malign entities are relics of "practice worlds" God created and destroyed before this world... or perhaps the Divine Light of Creation cannot exist without casting a shadow. Each of the Sephiroth has a dark counterpart, expressing some facet of evil and destruction, and a class of malign spirits. Some mystics see the qliphoth merely as a more esoteric description of devils. Others think the qliphoth are something worse. They are literal Things From Beyond — darker than darkness, fouler than evil. They are Anti-Life, whose intrusion into Creation undermines sanity and reality itself. If a campaign includes Nameless Horrors and Things That Should Not Be, they might be qliphoth (as they are in the Champions Universe). Or at least, that's what kabbalists will call them.

Aleister Crowley's *Magick In Theory And Practice* offers this list of qliphoth. Some are single entities, the spirits of the anti-sephiroth; others are classes of spirits.

QUEMETIEL: "Crowd of Gods"
BELIA'AL: "Worthlessness"
A'ATHIEL: "Uncertainty"
THAUMIEL: "Twins of God"
GHAGIEL: "Hinderers"
SATARIEL: "Hiding," "Concealers"
GHA'AGSHEBLAH: "Smiters," "Breakers in Pieces"
GOLACHAB: "Flaming Ones"
THAGIRION: "Litigation," "Disputers"
A'ARAB ZARAG: "Ravens of Dispersion"
SAMAEL: "False Accuser," "Deceivers"
GAMALIEL: "Obscene Ass"
LILITH: "Woman of Night"
BA'AIRIRON: "The Flock"
ADIMIRON: "Bloody"
TZALALIMIRON: "Changers"
SCHICHIRIRON: "Black"
SCHALEHBIRON: "Flaming"
TZAPHIRIRON: "Scratchers"
A'ABIRIRON: "Clayey"
NECHESHTHIRON: "Brazen"
NECHESHIRON: "Snakey"
DAGDAGIRON: "Fishy"
BAHIMIRON: "Bestial"
NASHIMIRON: "Malignant Women"

The Malays, for instance, believe in the *bajang,* a demon kept in a bamboo tube and sent out to kill its master's enemies with disease. The South African *impundulu,* who appears as a handsome man, becomes a witch's lover as well as her servant. If she does not send the impundulu to suck the blood of humans and cattle, however, the demon will turn on her. Many demonic familiars have this vampiric aspect (and are described under "vampires," below).

PROTECTIVE AND RIGHTEOUS DEMONS

How can people defend themselves against bad luck, disease, and other demonic evils? Why, with other demons. Several cultures believed in ferocious spirits that worked for the gods, or at least that a magician could enlist to drive away other demons. Even the Abrahamic tradition carries a hint of the righteous demon: in Hell, devils don't reward sinners, they punish them.

The many hells of China include such demons of punishment as well. These demons are of human shape but have the heads of horses or oxen, and may wear military-looking uniforms. The ten *Yama Kings* who rule the Chinese hells, led by Yen-Lo Wang, appear as black-skinned men dressed in the gorgeous robes of royalty. Unlike the Abrahamic faiths, Chinese hells are temporary prisons, since all but the worst sinners receive reincarnation. Yen-Lo-Wang is in fact a Bodhisattva — a Buddhist saint — who chose this post to help sinners by overseeing their punishment and rehabilitation.

Buddhist legend includes many other demons, too, mostly drawn from Tibetan or Burmese sources. Many individual Buddhist demons are known because a sage converted them to Buddhism. These demons became *dharmapalas,* "guardians of the law" or "wrathful protectors," who turn their powers and ferocity to good use. They guard holy sites, punish wickedness, and drive the faithful to confront their own ignorance and desires.

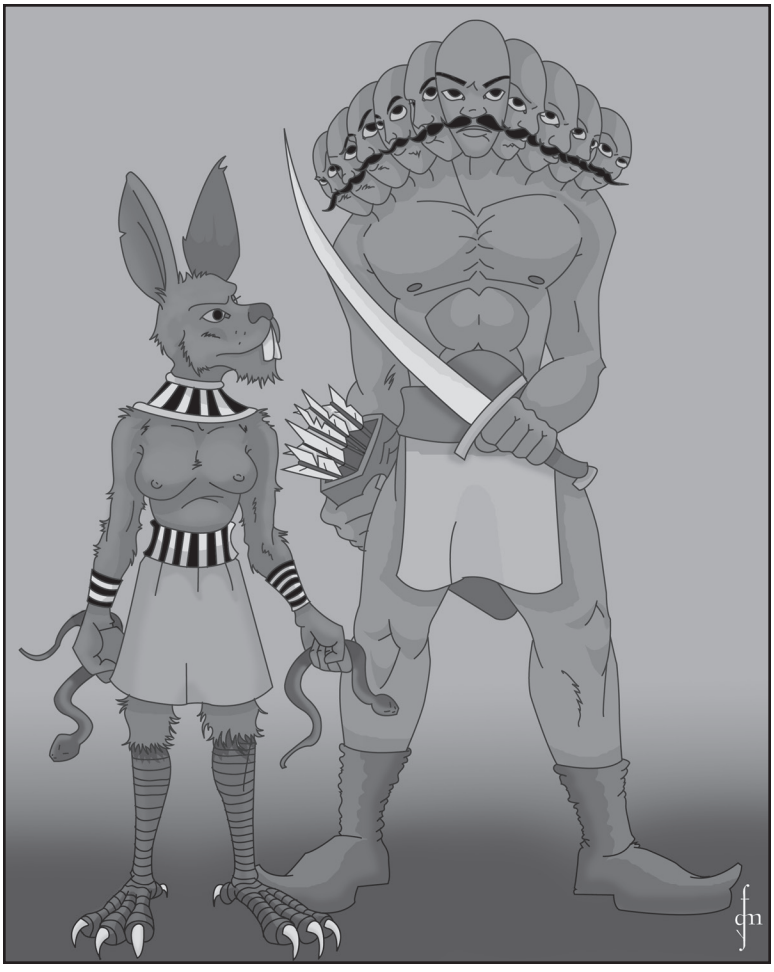
Hinduism tells of a few righteous demons, too. The asura king Bali almost overthrew the gods through his excessive merit. The gods defeated Bali only because he would not break a promise, and they left him a kingdom in Patala, the underworld of asuras, rakshasas, and other demons.

The Mesopotamians surpassed all other cultures in using demons to fight demons. People placed figurines of strange, hybrid creatures in their homes to protect them from evil spirits. The most notable is the Scorpion-Man (*girtablullû*), who has the horned cap of a god, a bearded human face and torso, the hindquarters and legs of a bird, and a scorpion's tail. Tiamat created the Scorpion-Man as part of her army of monsters. After their conquest, however, the Scorpion-Man and Tiamat's other "demons" seem to have worked for the gods full-time as protective spirits.

When Tiamat's monsters weren't enough, Mesopotamian exorcists turned to Pazuzu. This Assyrian and Babylonian demon has a man's body covered in scales, a canine face with bulging eyes, and the wings and talons of a bird. Although inscriptions call Pazuzu "king of the evil wind demons," pregnant women wore amulets of this demon-god to protect them from Lamashtu. Many plaques show Pazuzu forcing the demon-goddess back to the Underworld. He could probably cause or avert storms and plague, too.

Coping With Demons

Some demons, such as rakshasas, can be slain using ordinary weapons. Most demons, however, require spiritual measures to defeat. The Abrahamic faiths recommend faith, prayer, and virtue as the chief defense against devils. Christianity adds holy water, eucharistic wafers, the cross, and holy relics for especially stubborn demons. In a similar manner, Buddhists recite the sutras of their faith to drive away demons, or they ring a consecrated bell. Ancient Sumerians asked their city's patron god to protect them from demons; modern Voodooists conduct their own style of exorcisms.



Many people, however, don't fully trust their god to keep them safe, and so they turn to magic. The clay-tablet grimoires of Mesopotamian magicians give instructions for elaborate exorcistic rites. The later Jews and Muslims of the Middle East employed a wide variety of amulets to ward off devils. India, China, and just about every other culture in history has its own protective charms and spells.

Some demons have peculiar weaknesses that allow anyone to drive them away. Japanese *oni,* for instance, cannot stand the presence of beans. During a yearly festival, Japanese people throw beans around the house while shouting, "Go away, oni!" Chinese *kuei* recoil from spitting. If you place your hands in the footprints of Kuru-Pira, his legs stiffen and he falls over, giving you time to run away. Many Indian demons detest the smell of turmeric.

Mortals can do little to

harm the great anti-gods. Only the gods themselves can fight these mighty entities. Mortals can join the struggle against them, however, by resisting the temptations of anti-gods like Satan, Mara, or Ahriman and staying on the righteous path.

Demons In The Campaign

In superhero and Fantasy campaigns, demons often appear as simple adversaries for heroes. Their plans seldom go far beyond "Kill, crush, destroy." Sometimes a subtler sort of demon forms a cult around itself, or an evil mystic makes a pact with a demon. That doesn't exhaust the possibilities for demons, though.

The anti-gods are mighty, but remote. An anti-god like Satan or Mara may try to tempt characters, but doesn't stick around to brawl. The asuras make a good model for high Fantasy "Dark Lords" such as Sauron or Morgoth from *Lord Of The Rings,* who are powerful and present in the world, but who also let their armies of minions do the fighting. If mere mortals defeat them, it's because the anti-god has some special weakness the heroes can discover and exploit. A more active demon-god like Ravana or Loki could appear in a superhero setting as a Master Villain: tremendously powerful, to be sure, but smart, cautious superheroes can still survive an encounter and thwart the anti-god's evil schemes.

At lower power levels, a troublemaker demon becomes a more dangerous enemy if you play up its spiritual nature. How do you find, let alone fight, a disguised empusa preying on the community, or an invisible, plague-bearing maskim? And in a modern setting, how do you convince skeptical, modern people to take precautions that seem like archaic superstition?

Evil mystics sometimes have demonic familiars. Demons like the bajang and impundulu suggest possibilities beyond the usual imp.

Righteous and protective demons may be adversaries in some circumstances, allies in others. For instance, mystic heroes may need to pass a Scorpion-Man to reach the inner sanctum of a long-lost temple, or a dharmapala may decide the characters present a danger he must quash. On the other hand, in some settings a mystic may be able to "defeat" a demon by converting it. In Superheroic-level campaigns, you could even play a righteous demon.

The usual comic book universe assumes all gods exist (even if they're just incredibly-powerful immortal humanoids, not truly "gods"), which suggests all religions are true (or at least justified). Gamemasters should decide what happens when characters use one religion's methods against another religion's demons. For instance, Christian legend says missionary saints banished pagan spirits using the cross, the scriptures, and church-bells. Does this work against rakshasas, too? How about dharmapalas or the demonic officers who serve the Yama Kings? They aren't evil, after all.... Or, what happens if a Buddhist mystic tries to convert one of the Descending Hierarchy to the Noble Eightfold Way, turning him into a dharmapala? Either choice — that each religion only affects its own class of spirits, or that every religion can use its methods against all demons — has points in its favor in terms of story potential and dramatic action. But each also has the potential to offend religious players. If you think such situations could arise in your campaign, you might want to solicit your players' views about what approach they consider acceptable.

On the other hand, mere magic should generally remain culture-specific. Amulets and banishing-spells against kuei, maskim, or pisachas shouldn't work against devils, or each other. Most settings, from modern comic books to Fantasy set in made-up worlds, assume faith and the gods are greater and more universal forces than sorcery.

FAERIES

And on the tawny sands and shelves
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
By dimpled brook and fountain brim,
The wood nymphs, decked with daisies trim,
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:
What hath night to do with sleep?

John Milton, Comus

Mythology and folklore describe many creatures too magical to be mortal, but too much part of the world to be angels or demons, and not powerful enough to be gods. This is the domain of faerie, the twilight realm between good and evil, flesh and spirit, the demonic and the divine. Faerie creatures eat and sleep, like mortals, but their elusive habits and magical powers suggest a connection to the spirit world. Some faeries look more or less human; some look like animals; and a few are entirely monstrous.

Legend gives many origins for faeries, any one of which might be true for any particular creature. You don't have to give faeries just one origin or nature. In fact, defining faeries too precisely reduces their mystique.

Some faeries seem to embody the powers of nature — "small gods" tied to particular environments, or particular locations. Others may be gods of antiquity, half-forgotten and diminished by the loss of worship. Some tales say the faerie-folk are angels cast out for not taking sides in Satan's rebellion — not deserving either Heaven or Hell. Other legends say faeries are spirits of the dead, visiting from their Otherworld. On the other hand, some people view faeries as members of half-human races who live in hiding. They might be descendants of Cain, Ham, or other cursed sinners, or spawned from unions between mortals and spirits or gods.

A few modern writers see similarities between the behavior of faeries and the extraterrestrials encountered by UFO contactees, and speculate that faeries are actually aliens... or that today's "aliens" are actually faeries, taking a new guise for the new age.

The British Isles offer an especially rich body of faerie-lore, or at least the folk-tales are especially well documented. Most of the examples below come from British folklore, but with selections from other lands to show the ubiquity of faeries.

Types Of Faeries

As you might expect, the twilight nature of faeries seldom permits scientific classification. Scottish folklore divides faeries into two camps, the Seelie and Unseelie Courts. "Seelie" faeries may be well-disposed to mortals, if the mortals show proper courtesy. Even the seelie fairies often play pranks, though, and take horrible revenge for insults. "Unseelie" faeries are wholly malevolent, and don't care how you act — they'll kill someone, or ruin his life, just for the fun of it. Many types of faeries are always Unseelie, and these can be more awful than devils: demons embody human evil, but faerie monsters embody fear itself. Few types of faerie are always Seelie, so you can seldom tell if a faerie may be well-disposed just by looking, making the distinction less useful than it might appear. The most consistent division is between "trooping faeries," encountered in groups, and "solitary faeries," who stick to themselves. The most evil faeries tend to be solitary, unique monsters. Many faeries also favor particular environments, which provides an easier way to "classify" them for gaming purposes.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

Backwards up the mossy glen
Turned and trooped the goblin men,
With their shrill repeated cry,
"Come buy, come buy."

Christina Rossetti, The Goblin Market

Trooping faeries are sometimes encountered holding a fair, with vendors and entertainers. Other times, a troop of faeries comes to visit mortals, offering goods for sale — food, animals, everyday items, or seeming treasures. Such faerie markets are always perilous, but occasionally rewarding. Some faerie markets, like the one in Rossetti's poem, are outright traps: the tempting treats and treasures carry deadly curses, and you're lucky if the price is merely in gold. Evil faeries are more likely to demand years of your life, your first-born child, or your soul. Valuable items may also turn to garbage at the next dawn. On the other hand, a courteous man may buy some commonplace item such as a wooden mug or a frying pan, and have it turn to gold or reveal magic powers. And sometimes a faerie gift or purchase is both blessed and cursed to reward the humble and honest, but punish the arrogant or greedy.

TROOPING FAERIES

Faeries encountered in groups tend to be the more human-looking sorts. Trooping faeries range from cavalcades of knights and ladies distinguishable from mortals only by their otherworldly grace and majesty (and, in a modern setting, their archaic garb), to miniscule sprites that can wear a heather-bell for a cap and hide behind a blade of grass. All such faeries enjoy music, dancing, and revelry; their circle-dances leave the "fairy rings" of mushrooms or trampled grass, echoed by modern crop circles. The human-sized faeries sometimes take mortal lovers, but such liaisons are fraught with peril. Even if the faerie lover is not a deadly Unseelie predator, the mortal may break some prohibition and find himself cast back to the mortal world. After that, he gets off lucky if he merely wastes away and dies from grief and longing.

The grandest of the trooping faeries are the *Daoine Sidhe* (pronounced *theena shee*). Once they were the old gods of Ireland, the Tuatha de Danann. They have lost much of their power, but retain a superhuman grace and beauty. Sometimes the Daoine Sidhe appear child-sized, or smaller, but they often appear human-sized.

The Daoine Sidhe have great magical powers. They can travel between the Land of Faerie and the mortal world, grant wishes, and cast extremely powerful spells and curses. Many of them are also great warriors and riders, able to fight the most skilled human swordsmen with ease. (Not only were they once gods, they were also the superhuman heroes of the Fenian Cycle of legends.) Like many faeries, however, they may suffer mysterious restrictions that force them to recruit human allies in their wars against other faeries or to lend their strength in sporting contests.

The *Sluagh* — the Host of the Restless Dead, the ghosts of those who have died unshriven or by violence — form a more terrifying sort of trooping faerie. They fight ghostly battles in the night sky, and in the morning, their blood stains the rocks in the form of blood-red flowers called *fuil na sluagh.* Although some of the Sluagh want to redeem themselves for their sins in life, and thus win entrance to Heaven, most are malicious and spiteful. They use poisoned arrows and darts to kill cats, dogs, cattle, sheep, and even men, and they love to frighten travelers. Traditional charms offer some protection against the Sluagh, but magic works even better.

FAERIES AND TIME

Many legends say faeries live outside the normal flow of time. Not only are they immortal, but humans who encounter faeries may return home to find decades or centuries have passed. This is especially likely if the mortal ventured into the faeries' own domains, beneath a hill or across the sea. Rip Van Winkle is the most famous case of this, but an almost identical story comes from China. Sometimes the mortal returns not having aged a day; sometimes he finds himself aged along with everyone else; and sometimes the deferred years are kept in a little box, which he is told never to open... and always does.

CHANGELINGS

Come away, O human child!
To the water and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

William Butler Yeats, The Stolen Child

Faerie legends often speak of *changelings:* human babies or children stolen away by the faeries, with unruly (or downright malicious) faerie babies/children sometimes left in their place. The unlucky human mother is left to raise an incorrigible faerie, while the faeries get a delightful human baby to play with. In some tales the human mother can get her child back by mistreating the faerie baby, which inspires uncharacteristic pity in the faeries and makes them bring the human baby back when they rescue their own poor, put-upon child. In other cases, the humans simply have to make the best of things. The stolen human child may lead a life of bliss... but usually the faeries either tire of him and kick him out, or in longing to meet his own kind he leaves Faerieland, ages instantly, and dies.

The changeling concept offers many possibilities for character creation. A player could create a character who's a faerie raised in human society and has somehow overcome his capricious faerie nature enough to become a hero, or a human child who learned magic from his faerie foster parents and has now returned to the Lands of Men to make use of it. Or, either type of person could become a villain: the faerie retains his mischievous or malicious nature despite his human "parents'" best efforts; the human raised by faeries learns nothing of compassion or morality.

PLANT AND FOREST FAERIES

Few faerie creatures like cities or buildings. The forest, which settled people see as mysterious and dangerous, is a perfect haunt for faeries. Some faeries even associate themselves with one particular type of plant or tree and act as its guardian.

An excellent example is the *ghillie dhu,* a Scottish faerie with black hair, green skin, and long arms. They wear clothes made of moss and leaves, and guard woodlands and thickets (particularly birch trees). If these malicious faeries catch someone in their woods, they transform him into a spirit and enslave him. A few ghillie dhu are benevolent, however. They comfort lost travelers, especially children, and silently lead them home.

The *leshii* haunt the forbidding forests of Russia. A leshii may appear as a tall man covered in black hair, but he may have cloven hooves for feet and small horns. A leshii can also take other forms such as a wolf, a bird, or even a mushroom — or he may disguise himself as your friend. Leshii can grow as tall as a tree, or shrink to the size of a blade of grass. A leshii in human guise always wears his shoes on the wrong feet, however, and his eyes glow in unguarded moments. Leshii enjoy leading travelers astray, and may abduct people who take wood, nuts, fruit, or mushrooms from the forest without leaving something for the leshii as payment... or the leshii might steal their children. On the other hand, peasants occasionally make deals with leshii to keep their cows from roaming into the forest and getting lost.

The ancient Greeks populated their woods with faerie creatures. The forest nymphs — *dryads* and *hamadryads* — are the "small gods" of particular groves. *Satyrs* are wilder and less predictable creatures whose revelry isn't safe for mortals to join. After all, they often roam with *maenads,* the frenzied but mortal devotees of Dionysus. The *centaurs* are also faerie creatures, though their supernatural ancestry did not grant them any magical powers.

Travelers in the forests of Japan may meet the *tengu.* These creatures are part human and part raven. A tengu might sport a giant raven's head and wings, or maybe just a suspiciously long and beaky nose, for like many faeries they are masters of shapeshifting and illusion. Tengu enjoy all sorts of pranks, but a priest can make them quit their fun by reciting Buddhist sutras. Some tengu are expert swordsmen: a few Japanese heroes learned swordplay from a well-disposed tengu.

Chinese or Japanese foxes may be faerie creatures. *Kitsune,* or fairy foxes, can take human form and create illusions. In their animal form, fairy foxes have nine tails, or are pure white. Though they normally live in woodlands, fairy foxes mingle freely with mortals as well to play their pranks or seduce mortals; these love affairs occasionally turn out well.

The Ashanti, from present-day Ghana, tell of the evil *asanbosam.* This creature has hooks for feet and iron teeth. It lives in dark forests, where it hides in trees, uses its hook-feet to scoop up passing travelers, and kills them to drink their blood. Other stories say an asanbosam may creep up on sleeping victims and drain their blood through the victim's thumbs. Sunlight destroys an asanbosam but cannot kill it permanently: only a priest or holy man using sacred objects or spells can achieve the true death of an asanbosam. These creatures seem more like vampires than faeries — but there are male and female asanbosam, and even children. Whether you call them vampires or a faerie race is a matter of taste.

MOUNTAIN AND WILDERNESS FAERIES

Some faeries like to live in mountains, gorges, deserts, and other wild places. Sometimes they haunt the ruins of old human towers and castles. Many of them have enormous strength in addition to any magical powers they may possess.

Hags and giants stalk the wilderness of Northern Europe. *Hags* — gigantic, supernatural crones — often become well known as individuals. The hag called *Black Annis,* for instance, has a blue-black face, long white teeth, iron claws, and a very loud voice. *Cailleach Bheur* is a gigantic, blue-faced hag who guards all animals, and also wells and streams (whose flow she can staunch or

release). In winter her powers become even stronger — she can blight the growth of plants and create snow. She wears tattered clothes of black or blue-white and carries a staff of holly with a carrion crow's head on top; its touch kills any man instantly. The most infamous of all hags, however, is Russia's *Baba Yaga* ("little grandmother"). Baba Yaga lives in a wooden hut that spins on oversized chicken-legs, surrounded by a fence of human bones. She travels in a giant mortar that she poles along with a pestle, sweeping out her track behind her with a broom. Her magic has few equals. Brave heroes or virtuous maidens can capture her or outwit her, however, and obtain amazing magical treasures... but no more than they need to triumph over some greater villain. Any intruder who is not pure of heart becomes Baba Yaga's meat!

The *jotuns,* or frost giants from Norse myth, live in cold, wild lands far from humanity. Their realm of Jotunheim might be another world. In addition to their great size and strength, some jotuns wield tremendous powers of magic and illusion that make them worthy adversaries for the gods.

The intensely supernatural and otherworldly jotuns have plenty of latter-day cousins on Earth. Two races of giants ruled Ireland before the Tuatha de Danann arrived. First came the *Firbolgs* (or Fir Vulag) — huge, terrifyingly ugly brutes. A few remain in Ireland, led by their king, Eochaid, and sometimes they prey on men. The later *Fomorians* left Ireland entirely to live in the sea. However, they have no trouble breathing air, and come ashore to loot, pillage, raid, and kill. Fomorians are grotesque, with enormous bodies that look like they've been assembled from mismatched human and animal parts (though they always have arms and legs of some sort). Both races wield enormous weapons and hold great hatred for the Tuatha de Danann (now the Daoine Sidhe).

Everyone knows the story of Jack and the Beanstalk: the giant who lived in the clouds was surely kin to the jotuns. European legend offers many other giants who emerged from Fairyland to oppress humanity. One example is *Jack-In-Irons,* an enormous ogre who wears clanking chains and the heads of his victims. Jack-In-Irons ambushes travelers on the roads, kills them, and eats them. He wields a giant club and can be affected by normal weapons. The *trolls* of Scandinavia also persisted long after the age of myth. These huge, lumpish creatures are as strong as they are brutal, but the slightest beam of sunlight turns them to stone. A number of hills (including one in Norway's capital, Oslo) are said to be petrified trolls.

Some wilderness faeries are as tiny as the giants are large. *Pixies* (also known by many, many other names) are tiny faeries that sometimes have wings like those of insects. Their heads are too large for their bodies, with pointed ears, arched eyebrows, sharp noses, and red hair. They like to play tricks on people and "pixy-lead" them off their chosen path: sometimes a pixy does this by creating a light to lead a traveler astray when he expects a farmstead; or sometimes a pixy simply changes the traveler's surroundings through an illusion. Like their cousins the leprechauns, pixies love to sing, play music, and dance. Traditional charms offer protection against pixies, especially iron: the mere touch of iron can kill a pixy.

The *barguest,* or Black Dog, is a nonhuman faerie travelers encounter on lonely roads. Barguests look like large black dogs with sharp teeth and claws and large, fiery eyes; sometimes they also have horns. They may kill travelers, but often all they do is put in an appearance, for seeing one is regarded as bad luck and a portent of coming death. On the other hand, sometimes a black dog protects a traveler from other hazards. Supernatural hounds also accompany various spectral hunters, from the Wild Huntsman himself down to the ghost of Sir Francis Drake, who occasionally drives a hearse into Plymouth in the company of a pack of headless dogs.

Other parts of the world have their own wilderness faeries. The Arab *djinn* can appear as grotesque giants, as black or spotted animals, or as whirlwinds; but they may walk invisibly anywhere. They live in ruins, tombs, the deep desert, or under the sea. Not only can the djinn change size and shape, they can grant wishes and inspire poets. Some djinn remain pagans, but many are Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, and they have kings and cities of their own. God made the djinn from black, smokeless fire 6,000 years before the creation of Adam.

In contrast to these brutes, the *mimi* of Australia are small and so thin and frail a breeze could break them in two. They live inside boulders, which open like a door when a mimi blows on them. Nowadays, they stay away from mortals, or turn invisible. Long ago, however, the mimi taught the Aborigines to sing, dance, and paint on stone, as well as how to hunt kangaroos. Mimi can be friendly, but any mortal who eats their food becomes one of them.

WATER AND SEA FAERIES

The *bean-fionna* are a broad class of water-faeries. They live beneath the surface of lakes, rivers, and streams, and drag children and unwary adults into the water to drown. They dislike iron, however, and avoid anyone who wears or carries the metal. Most bean-fionna resemble beautiful women dressed in flowing white gowns, but some regions or bodies of water have hideous water-hags such as Lancashire's *Jenny Greenteeth,* who has green skin and fangs and haunts stagnant pools at the edges of rivers; and *Peg Powler,* who lives in the River Tees in Ireland.

Some water-faeries take animal form. The *aughiskey* (*each uisge* in Scotland), or water-horse, lives in lakes, lochs, and pools (but not running water). On land these creatures look like sleek, beautiful horses, but anybody who climbs on one to ride it finds himself stuck to it, unable to jump off, while it carries him into the water and devours everything but his liver. But if you can put a bridle and saddle on an aughiskey, it becomes tame and the finest horse you could wish for — as long as you don't bring it within sight of water. If it sees

water, it will throw its rider, gallop into the water, and vanish. The kelpie is a similar creature. These fairy animals are examples of *fuath* (pronounced *foo-a*), a Gaelic term for evil water-fairies.

The *Nuckelavee* is perhaps the most hideous sea-faerie. There's only one such monster — one hopes. It has the body of a horse with a man's upper body rising from the center of the horse's back. A great gash of a mouth cuts across the huge human head, and the horse's head has one large red eye. Nuckelavee's skin is flayed off, exposing its red, raw flesh. It may have fins instead of hooves. Nuckelavee emits a foul stench and breathes out mist. This horror can blight crops and destroy livestock, and tears apart any man it catches in its sickle-like claws. Nuckelavee lives in the sea but cannot tolerate fresh water, so you can escape it by crossing a stream.

At the other end of Eurasia, streams or swampy pools in Japan may hold a *kappa.* The kappa has webbed hands and feet, a shell like a tortoise, and the face of a monkey, but with a long nose and black hair in a pageboy cut. Although this greenish, slimy, putrid-smelling faerie is no larger than a boy, it is tremendously strong and delights in pulling people into the water, where it drowns them and sucks out their guts through the anus. The top of a kappa's head is indented like a bowl, and holds a pool of clear fluid. This fluid carries the kappa's strength: to escape a kappa before it attacks you, greet it with utmost courtesy and bow very low. Despite its murderous ways, the kappa is a slave to good manners and must bow in return, spilling the vital fluid; then you may run away. Kappa also possess a great deal of knowledge about medicine and other moderately arcane subjects.

Fortunately, water faeries are not all evil. For example, the *Fin Folk,* who look like beautiful diminutive humans, live underneath the lochs of Scotland in marvelous faerie kingdoms encased in glass. Although they prefer to avoid men, sometimes favored humans are taken below the waves to visit their underwater realm and receive gifts from their fabulous underwater gardens.

The *roane,* known as *selkies* in the Orkneys and Shetland Islands, are seal-faeries. They wear seal-skins to assume the shape of a seal (making them a sort of therianthrope, too). If a roane's seal-skin is taken away, it cannot change shape and thus can be trapped on land. They are usually neutral towards mortals, but may cause storms and wreck boats to punish men who harm seals.

Mermaids and mermen, of course, are found around the world. The *murdhuacha* (pronounced *muroocha*), or merrows, live in Irish seas. The women are gorgeous, and often fall in love with handsome mortal men. The male merrows have green hair and teeth, pig's eyes, long red noses, and flipper-like arms; they hate handsome mortal men. Many merrows are wicked and try to wreck ships and lure men to their doom with siren songs. The ancient Mesopotamians, on the other hand, revered a fish-man named Oannes who came from the sea to teach the arts of civilization.

HOUSEHOLD FAERIES

Although most faeries keep to themselves or their own kind, a few types prefer the company of men, in one form or another. These are often known as household faeries, though some of them actually help with farm work (threshing and herding, for example) rather than housework.

Most household faeries don't want to be thanked or given presents. Some household faeries accept specific types of gifts (for example, a bowl of milk), and may even expect them. However, any other type of present (particularly clothing) or expression of thanks drives the faerie away forever.

Just like people, household faeries want to be treated kindly and with respect, though their standards may differ from a human's. A faerie might not object to a task just because it's difficult. Some faeries have their own specific definitions of unkind treatment. For example, brownies take offense if the homeowner brings home a cat, while other faeries could care less if there's a cat around.

The *brownie,* also known by many other names, is one of the most common household faeries. A brownie resembles a man about three feet tall wearing ragged clothes (usually brown, but sometimes red or green) and a felt cap. Like its clothes, its skin is usually brownish, as are its thick hair and beard; it has pointed ears. Brownies prefer a warm home run by someone humble, gracious, generous, and kind — and who doesn't own a cat! In return for its help with the chores, a brownie merely asks for a bowl of cream or milk and a good bannock (bread-cake). If offered anything else, such as new clothes, it will leave and never return. He can also be "laid" (made to leave) using iron, salt, or clothes turned inside-out. A few Brownies are nocturnal, for the sunlight sickens and kills them; they only live in houses with a rooster, whose crowing warns them of dawn's approach. Scandinavia has its own household faeries, the *nisse* and *tomte;* they act much like brownies.

The *gruagach* guards herds. These solitary faeries look like ugly, little women with lots of hair. They wear green or gold-colored gowns, and carry shepherd's staffs. Male gruagachs look like handsome young men dressed in red and green. Gruagachs of either gender always seem to be cold and wet. Sometimes they stop by houses and ask to sit by the fire to warm themselves and dry out. If let in and treated kindly, they guard livestock, do chores around the farm, and protect households in general. If refused, they may play evil pranks and steal animals and even children (but if you ask nicely, they usually give stolen children back).

Leprechauns live in the Irish hills and forests, but their interactions with mortals make them famous. Their craftsmanship also suggests a connection to household faeries. Leprechauns are small men who wear green clothing, perhaps with a workman's apron, and green tri-corner hats when they want to look their best. They work by them-

selves at shoemaking (less often, other trades). As any schoolchild knows, if you capture a leprechaun, he must lead you to his hidden pot of gold, or grant you three wishes. Leprechauns are wily, though, and use their quick wits and faerie powers to trick you out of the money and vanish. For example, if they can fool you into making a fourth wish before sundown, you lose whatever you gained from the first three — and the gold they gave you to boot! But then, attempts to rob the faeries seldom succeed. Tales do not say what a mortal may gain specifically from hiring leprechauns, but stories like "The Elves and the Shoemaker" suggest they should be as skilled as any other faerie artisans... as long as you follow their rules.

Leprechauns occasionally gather to drink, dance, play music, go foxhunting, and revel. Mortals caught up in these parties may dance themselves to death under the spell of their unearthly faerie music — men need quick wits to survive a leprechaun revel, even if these faeries don't plan to kill their guests. Leprechauns also enjoy playing riddle-games and word-games with men, and may richly reward a clever competitor.

Not all household and farm fairies are benevolent, though. For example, the *alp-luachra,* or Joint-Eater, sits, invisible, next to people who are eating and sucks all the nourishment from their food. The victim can starve to death if this continues, even if he eats six meals a day. You can drive away an alp-luachra by eating a lot of salt beef without drinking anything. Or there's *Awd Goggie,* a unique faerie who lives in orchards and attacks anyone who tries to gather fruit before it's ripe. The mischievous, shape-changing *buachailleen* torment animals (especially sheep) and shepherds; gruagachs are their enemies.

Coping With Faeries

Folklore describes a host of traditional charms, substances, and practices that most faeries cannot abide and will flee from. These include: iron (especially horseshoes), salt, turned clothes (wearing or giving them clothes turned inside out), bells (especially church bells), the Bible, bread, crucifixes and crosses (especially if made of iron), four-leaf clovers, prayers and hymns, churchyard mold, red threads or ribbons, daisy chains, stones with holes bored in them (used to protect horses from faeries), and St. John's wort. These may protect mortals from *some* evil or hostile faeries.

Prudent people, however, don't make enemies among the faeries if they can help it. While you can't negotiate with monsters like Jack-In-Irons or Nuckelavee, many faeries cause serious harm only if mortals intrude on their activities, become rude, or seek to profit at the faeries' expense. With Seelie faeries, at least, good manners may see you through where threats of force would only bring your doom. Quick wits and fast talk may also let you trick your way free from hostile faeries — or help you avoid giving offense when prudence dictates you turn down a faerie's gift, such as faerie food that may curse you to stay with them. Attempts to cheat or manipulate these creatures never seem to work, no matter how cunning. If faeries play pranks on you, laugh it off: getting angry just encourages them to do worse, and they often appreciate (and reward) a good sport.

Faeries In The Campaign

Most faeries would not make suitable PCs, even in a Superheroic-level campaign. Quite aside from their powers, most faeries' attitudes are too capricious for them to cooperate with mortals. At least, that's the way folklore portrays them. J. R. R. Tolkien and other authors have made elves, dwarves, Little People, and the like standards for Fantasy fiction and games by re-inventing them, with only nods to mythology. You can do the same for a lot of faerie races. The roane, for instance, wouldn't overshadow other races in a Fantasy campaign; their chief drawback is simply that their power to take seal-form is useless in most Fantasy game situations. Satyrs, brownies, tengu, and other fairy-folk might make good characters if you tone down their innate powers and make their personalities more trustworthy.

Any faerie can appear as adversaries in a supernatural campaign. Many faeries, from nursery bogies to the Sluagh, can hardly appear as anything else. Faeries supply enemies of every power level. Minor faeries such as pixies or asanbosam are not too much for Competent Normal characters, while the mightiest jotuns can challenge gods. Some faeries can be defeated by force of arms; but many also require magic, or at least a degree of cunning. To keep faeries from becoming mere "monsters," though, you need to keep their motives and powers somewhat mysterious. For instance, there's no explaining the blind malevolence of Nuckelavee — but why does he emerge from the sea on some nights, and not others? How does he select where to hunt, or who to curse?

The more "Seelie" faeries sometimes may become the characters' allies. Legends say that now and then, faeries need help from mortals. For instance, you could build an underwater adventure around a clash between the Fin Folk and underwater horrors like Nuckelavee and the bean-fionna: the Fin Folk's powers don't work against the Unseelie faeries, so they need mortals to defeat their foes. Perhaps the heroes need to find Oannes, or recruit the roane as allies. Many folktales tell of faeries who recruit men to aid their side in sporting contests against other groups of faeries, since a human's raw strength and physicality make him a superior athlete in such games.

A magical setting may include whole regions inhabited by faeries and set apart from the mortal world. These range from enchanted undersea grottoes and palaces under faerie hills, to whole worlds "beyond the fields we know," such as Jotunheim. Since the paths to Fairyland are not open to everyone, or even seen by most, you can bring faerie enclaves into any setting where magic exists at all. Many Urban Fantasy stories, for example, feature faeries brought into the modern world (even cities).

NURSERY BOGIES

Several faeries exist to frighten children into good behavior, or to keep them away from dangerous locations. River-hags such as Jenny Greenteeth, for instance, seem invented to keep small children from playing near river banks, flooded pits, and other places they might drown, while Awd Goggie keeps them from eating under-ripe fruit and reducing the harvest. Other nursery bogies, such as Raw-head-and-Bloody Bones, Tom Dockin, or Tanker-abogus, punish swearing or disobedience by killing and eating the bad children.

GHOSTS

What worlds or what vast
regions hold
The immortal mind that
hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook...

John Milton, "Il Penseroso"

Ghosts are pretty well defined and familiar. Everyone can recognize the transparent phantoms of the dead. Well, except when the ghost seems solid or alive.

Or it's an apparition of someone who hasn't died yet.

Or there's no apparition at all.

Okay, ghosts *aren't* well defined. Just like demons, faerie-folk, and most other supernatural creatures, they overlap with other categories. Hauntings may also resemble other strange phenomena that defy explanation (see text box).

In most real stories of hauntings, the ghosts don't say much or show other signs of real personalities. In many cases, the ghost seems like a sort of supernatural recording, playing over and over again. Spirits of the dead who retain full memories and interact with the living are mostly a product of legends and fiction. Of course, ghosts are most useful in games if they can act as real characters.

Personal Ghosts

Most people think of a ghost as the spirit of a dead person, and such "personal" ghosts form the majority of hauntings in actual ghost reports and in fiction. Most simply, the ghost may look like a specific person: "Omigod, it's Uncle Harry!" A ghost that can talk or write (by itself or with the help of a medium or a Ouija board) can say who it is, or give other indications based on what it knows. When ghosts can't communicate clearly, only detective work can figure out a ghost's identity, based on what it knows, its appearance, or how it acts.

A ghost's appearance can vary widely. Some ghosts look completely alive until they walk through a wall or disappear. A few ghosts even feel solid. Other ghosts appear as the stereotypical transparent phantom. A ghost may look the way he did when alive, or at the moment of his death. Ghosts can appear prepared for the grave (the sheet-clad ghost is dressed in his burial-shroud), or actually dead, rotting, or reduced to a skeleton. In addition to clothing (naked ghosts are very rare), an apparition may include "props" such as clanking chains. Some ghosts are only visible to psychically or mystically sensitive people.

Many "real" ghosts manifest only as a patch of fog, a light, noises, or an inexplicable odor. Reports of hauntings usually agree that the air becomes cold around a ghost: various ghost-hunters say they've registered large drops in temperature. High-tech ghost-hunters also say some ghosts stay invisible but leave images on photographic film, or possess electromagnetic fields that sensitive instruments can detect. One ghost-hunter says he's detected ghosts with a Geiger counter.

Personal ghosts often have some powerful motive for staying on Earth when most people's souls go on to whatever fate awaits the dead. People may become ghosts because they died in great pain, hate, or fear. Ghosts of murder victims often want revenge on their killer: revealing the murderer may be enough for the more lucid ghosts, but some specters lash out in fury at everyone. People also become ghosts because of other unfinished business from life, such as making sure their spouse or children receive an inheritance, or to say goodbye to a loved one. Sometimes a ghost seems tied to a place or object that held great importance in life, such as the house where he lived and died.

The Western ghost story emphasizes misty phantoms, but other cultures have their own traditions. For instance, Japanese ghosts often seem solid and alive. Many Japanese ghost stories concern a wife who comes back from death to stay with her husband... or to punish him for remarrying. Chinese ghosts, called *kuei,* also seem alive until an exorcist banishes them. Chinese tales also often feature female ghosts who marry mortal men, which is always very dangerous for the men. Kuei are sometimes the disguised spirits of animals or objects, or outright demons, however.

The legendary *Lorelei* is the ghost of a woman who threw herself into the Rhine when her lover betrayed her. Lorelei can look solid, but her most important manifestation is her voice. Lorelei's beautiful song can lure boatsmen onto the rocks. Since Lorelei is associated with a specific, hazardous stretch of the Rhine, however, she has aspects of a nature-spirit or faerie. Other legends about wronged women who come back from death to punish men — often by feeding upon their blood or life-force — connect ghosts to the "demon bride" class of vampire.

At the other extreme, the Jewish *dybbuk* never appears visibly. A dybbuk possesses a living person; the only way to tell a dybbuk's around is when someone starts acting like someone dead, instead of like himself. Some African tribes have legends of dead chiefs coming back to possess animals, which connects ghosts to therianthropes.

A channeler's spirit guide acts like a dybbuk, but doesn't take up permanent residence. Some spirit guides merely talk to their mediums, but the most famous examples (like J. Z. Knight's supposed spirit guide Ramtha) take over the channeler's voice to deliver messages directly.

Impersonal Ghosts

Many hauntings don't show a connection to a specific dead person. These "impersonal" ghosts seldom manifest visibly. When they do, the ghost can't be identified as a particular person. For instance, several nurses say they've seen the actual *Grim Reaper* stalk through critical wards a day or two before a patient dies; another man said the Grim Reaper appeared to alert him to his wife's suicide attempt. The legendary *banshee* is another harbinger of death — always appearing to herald a death in a particular family, but not believed to be an ancestral spirit. The banshee usually manifest only as a loud and horrible wail, but these spirits sometimes appear as an old woman with white hair and wearing a long, white cloak (less often, red or black). Some legends say banshees are faeries, but the world has many other legends about ghosts who appear to warn of death and disaster.

The Grim Reaper and the banshee foretell death, but few legends say they take lives themselves. They serve Fate, but some stories hint at compassion. On the other hand, the *Bad Place,* or haunted house, is perhaps the most evil, vicious ghost of all. In many ghost stories, the ghost never manifests as a definable specter. Instead, the place affects people by playing on their anxieties and weaknesses. Some of the greatest ghost stories of the last century involved Bad Place haunts, such as Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting Of Hill House,* Stephen King's *The Shining,* or Ann River Siddons's *The House Next Door.* The Bad Place may create noises, write messages on the wall, or provide other ghostly — but impersonal — manifestations. The Bad Place's most devastating effect, however, is purely mental. The only clue to a Bad Place may be the growing history of murders, suicides, madness, and lives destroyed in other ways. Does a spirit lodge in a house and slowly destroy whoever lives there? Or does a spirit begin with some awful crime or long-continued, slow-burning hatred or neurosis, and grow stronger until it can make new victims of its own?

The last sort of impersonal ghost merely annoys people who must live with it. The *poltergeist* (German, "noisy ghost") makes noises, throws objects around, slams doors, breaks bottles, and pulls other pranks and petty vandalism. Poltergeists seldom try to communicate, and attempts to contact them through seances rarely produce useful information. Ghost-hunters say the most common factor in poltergeist cases is an adolescent who feels more than usually frustrated... sexually or otherwise. They suggest the force of hormone-supercharged teen angst can erupt as psychokinetic force, or create a spirit.

GHOST-LIKE PHENOMENA

Paranormal researchers collect reports of events that resemble ghosts enough that it's easy to imagine there's a connection... but they differ in important ways, too.

Ghosts Of The Living: Sometimes people report seeing apparitions of people who aren't actually dead yet. "Crisis Apparitions" appear when a person is dying, so maybe the soul sometimes leaves the body before the body stops working completely. But sometimes the apparition is of a person who's alive and well. Apparitions of the living often appear solid, until they vanish.

Ghosts Of Objects: Stories of ghostly ships, carriages, trains, or other vehicles go back a long time. Some stories include whole ghostly buildings that appear and disappear. Now, ghosts often have "props," but a whole ship or house? That seems like a lot for one ghost to sustain. Sometimes there's more than one ghost... but in cases like the phantom of Lincoln's funeral train, which appears complete with a full military band, where did the ghosts come from?

Doppleganger: If meeting the spirit double of a living person is strange, meeting a ghost of *yourself* is mind-blowing. Nevertheless, many people say they have encountered doubles of themselves.

Time Slips: Some haunting events involve many figures and multiple "props" — so many it seems like a witness slipped in time. Many witnesses reported seeing ghostly re-enactments of a battle in the English Civil War. Two ladies visiting Versailles in 1901 found themselves amid figures from before the French Revolution. And in one eerie case, an aviator swore he tried to land at a disused English airfield and found it occupied... by planes and ground crew he recognized years later, in World War Two. A ghost from the future?

Vardogr: The Scandinavians have tales of the "goer-ahead," a spirit double who sometimes appears ahead of a traveler's corporeal arrival. You may arrive at a place for the first time and find people already know you, because for them it's your *second* visit. This may be a good or bad thing, depending on what your vardrgr did.

Coping With Ghosts

In most real encounters with ghosts, a person merely has a brief, odd, but harmless experience. Most ghosts (or ghost-like phenomena) happen only once. Persistent specters seldom become more than minor nuisances: the idea of a ghost seems to frighten living residents more than anything the ghost actually does.

Mortals have several ways to deal with the more dangerous ghosts of legend and literature. Exorcism is one option: bring in a priest, shaman, or witch-doctor to conduct the appropriate rites. Ghost-hunters ruefully observe that their scientific instruments seem to be effective ghost expellers, too.

If a ghost sticks around because of some unfinished task, help finish it. This may be difficult if the ghost cannot clearly communicate its desires. Of course, the "unfinished business" may not be possible to complete. "Tell my wife where I hid the money" becomes awkward if the wife moved away and died a few decades ago. "Kill my murderer" is ethically dubious.

ATAVISMS

Poltergeists, Bad Places, and some other impersonal haunts and ghost-like phenomena seem sufficiently different from personal ghosts that you may want to split them into a separate category of spirits. Perhaps they are *atavisms* (see page 24). A poltergeist could be an atavism created by turbulent adolescent emotions. A Bad Place spirit could be a powerful atavism spawned by a long period of hate, fear, or madness. The ghosts who mindlessly repeat a single action might be atavisms, too. Death, after all, is about as traumatic as you can get — especially a violent death, like a murder.

A ghost bound to a person, place, or object might be exorcised if that focus is sufficiently changed. Remodel the house; destroy the treasured item; get the frustrated teenager a date. Bad Place haunts can be especially tenacious, and burning down the building may be the only solution.

Simply exposing them for what they are sometimes dispels *kuei* and other ghosts who pretend to be alive. By then, however, they've usually done their damage. Some ghosts don't know they're dead, and convincing them of this may send them to the Great Beyond (as in the movie *The Sixth Sense*)... though some ghosts are reluctant to accept the truth and often become angry.

And of course there's magic. Genuine mystics can attack ghosts mentally, and spells with the *Affects Desolidified* Advantage (and possibly *Transdimensional,* in some settings for some types of haunts) can affect ghosts. Targeting an unseen spirit can be tricky, though — especially for Bad Place haunts, which permeate an entire building and have no distinct location.

Ghosts In The Campaign

Ghosts usually appear as adversaries, or at least as problems. Ghosts can appear in any type of campaign: just adapt the ghost's power to the PCs' level of competence. In a campaign for Competent Normal occult investigators, for instance, ghosts might be more puzzling than dangerous, and even the occasional deadly spook can be exorcised if you figure out its twisted motivations. On the other hand, even superheroes might have trouble with a Bad Place haunt that can play on their Psychological Limitations.

In some mystical campaigns, ghosts may be acceptable PCs. A ghost character must spend a *lot* of points on Invisibility, Desolidification, Total Life Support, and other powers, though, leaving few points for anything else. A character who can't be hit may seem attractive to some players... but if he can't hit back, he's not much fun. A ghost needs some way to interact with other characters and the material world to operate in a group. This doesn't matter so much in an all-ghost campaign: in *Phantom Hero,* PCs can be actual ghosts, or characters who interact easily with the spirit world such as mediums, shamans, or astral projectors.

In stories, ghosts usually appear as isolated individuals, or at least tightly contained hauntings by a group of specters. Some ghosts can travel, though, and that raises the possibility of whole societies of ghosts. Some cultures have legends of "ghost countries" where the dead live much as they did on Earth. A few movies, such as *Beetlejuice,* portray afterlife societies; a few games, such as White Wolf's *Wraith: The Oblivion* and *Orpheus,* have explored this premise as well. So, what do people do when they're dead?

GODS

...all the gods
Are there, and all the powers of nameless worlds,
Vast, sceptered phantoms; heroes, men and beasts...

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus Unbound

Gods may not be the most powerful entities in every campaign's Mystic World, but they are among the most powerful creatures a GM would ever need to write up. (Cosmic entities are more powerful, but they exist as pure plot devices.) When a society reaches a certain threshold of size and complexity — usually at the tribal stage, when communities expand to hundreds of people — they invent or adopt gods (or get adopted by them, depending on your viewpoint). Some gods start as ancestral spirits. Others personify the powers of nature, or particular occupations such as hunting, writing, or rulership. The culture often organizes its gods into some social structure, like a family — a pantheon. A culture's pantheon can grow quite large and complicated as the society absorbs smaller groups or borrows gods from its neighbors. Over time, some gods become more popular, while others decline. The character of individual gods may change, too.

Polytheism has not fared well in the last 2,000 years. Most people now follow "ethical religions" such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, which propound more remote, abstract, and philosophical concepts of divinity. The Abrahamic faiths declare the existence of only one god. Buddhism acknowledges many gods, but says they don't matter much: personal enlightenment makes a mortal greater than any god. Many of the old pantheons survive only as stories. Some pantheons, however, remain the focus of living religions, and neopagan groups such as Wicca try to revive and update older religious traditions.

The following sections offer *very* brief descriptions of a few pantheons, with special emphasis on gods of magic and mysticism. You can use a pantheon "as is" in a campaign, or adopt one as a model for designing your own gods for an invented world. There are plenty of books on mythology and pagan religions out there if you'd like to learn more.

Coping With Gods

In most settings, characters don't encounter gods directly. If gods really exist at all, they stay out of worldly affairs. Characters only need to worry about the gods' priests and worshippers. And that's quite enough.

In settings where gods do intervene personally, characters usually have no choice but to endure their whims. The gods are just too powerful. If a gods tells you to do something, you do it, or the god strikes you down, turns you into an animal,

or otherwise makes you part of a new myth about Why You Should Do What Gods Want. Your only hope is the protection of some other god.

In some *Fantasy Hero* or *Champions* settings, of course, a PC might *be* a god. And in some settings the gods are not so powerful that an exceptionally powerful or skilled mortal can't fight them. In the *Iliad,* for instance, the hero Diomedes routs Ares, god of war, from the field. (Though admittedly, the Greeks thought Ares was a buffoon among gods.)

Otherwise, the characters' only hope is if the campaign forces some special, *ad hoc* weakness on the gods. In the Champions Universe, for instance, gods cannot normally wield their full power on Earth: they must empower mortal proxies, or reduce their own power so they are (conveniently enough) comparable to normal superheroes. Only in their home dimensions do the gods become nigh-omnipotent. In a High Fantasy campaign, the gods' special weakness may be a legendary god-slaying weapon, or a magic item that enables mortals to resist their power. In Mesopotamian myth, for example, the gods needed the Tablet of Destinies. When Anzu the storm-bird stole the Tablet, he ended their rule of the world until the hero-god Ninurta was brave enough to take the Tablet back.

Gods In The Campaign

Gods serve many functions besides being direct adversaries. Most importantly, they're part of the cultural framework. Gods reflect the nature of the setting and campaign. Just look at the sample pantheons and their attendant mythologies: the Norse gods, for example reflect a world of constant war between mortals and an ongoing struggle against nature. This pantheon would be impossible for a settled, urbane culture like China. Just as the Norse imagined their gods as Norsemen writ large, the Chinese imagined their gods as a celestial version of their bureaucratic empire. A campaign inspired by Norse myth would feature a small band of heroes striving to hold off doom another day; in a China-inspired campaign, order is the right and natural state of the world, and a hero's job is to help that order reassert itself. In Norseworld, the gods may help you, or may not, at their whim — much like other petty kings and chiefs. In Chinaworld, the gods respond if you follow procedure and offer a bribe (though the answer may still be "no").

The gods also reflect a setting's mystical framework. Even if mystics don't actually call on gods, the pantheon has some connection to the prevailing style of magic. Many pantheons include a god of magic who's also the patron of whatever the culture links to sorcery: writing for Egyptian Thoth, the spirit world for Greek Hermes, asceticism for Indian Shiva. Kabbalism, of course, is principally a system for mystical communion with Jehovah. The current form of Hermetic theurgy, on the other hand, is very much a creation of the modern, secular, scientific world. The rules of magic — the planetary correspondences, the sephiroth, the powers of name and number, sympathy and contagion — work by themselves, and a mystic can use these powers for whatever goal he wants.

On a more down-to-earth level, the conflicts between gods can drive world events in the campaign. For example, the Trojan War started because of rivalry between Greek goddesses, and half the Greek pantheon participated on one side of the war or another. The Zoroastrian religion cast all of history as a war between Ahura Mazda, god of light and good, and his evil counterpart Ahriman. Most Fantasy epics follow this model to some degree with their struggles against Dark Lords or Evil Empires. If a Fantasy epic's "Big Bad" isn't a demon-god himself, he probably worships one or wants to become one.

Heroes can serve gods too, without having to be priests. Every Greek hero had a god as his special patron (and often another god as his special enemy). The heroes of Arthurian legend, the Charlemagne cycle, and other Medieval romances were Christian knights who often fought Saracen invaders and pagan giants and witches. In any genre, characters might feel their adventures serve some higher purpose set by a god.

Aztec Gods

The conquering Spanish burned most Aztec literature. As a result, information about most Aztec gods is sketchy, but the broad outline of Aztec religion is clear. Human life depended on the gods of the sun, rain, and the soil's fertility. To keep the gods strong enough to sustain the world, mortals had to repay them with a variety of gruesome human sacrifices. The Aztec Empire existed to collect tribute — including thousands of sacrificial victims every year. The patron god of the Aztec state, *Huitzilopochtli* ("Blue Hummingbird on the Left," or "Blue Hummingbird"), was of course a war-god, with no following outside the Aztec capital.

The Aztecs shared their other gods with the other tribes and city-states of southern Mexico. Five of the most important are linked in the myth of the Four Suns who ruled four previous ages of the world. Successive sun-gods created their own races of humanity, but jealous rivals knocked them from the sky and destroyed their worlds. Different versions of the myth agree on the cataclysmic ends of each world-age, but not on their order.

One version begins with *Tezcatlipoca* ("Smoking Mirror"). This baleful god of the night and sorcery bore titles such as Lord of Misfortune. He was also patron of the schools for young warriors. His name comes from his obsidian mirror, in which he sees everything in the world. Tezcatlipoca appears like a young warrior with black skin crossed by white stripes, or as a jaguar, a headless corpse with its belly split open, or as the invisible night wind. The rival god Quetzalcoatl knocked Tezcatlipoca from the sky, plunging the world into darkness. In revenge, Tezcatlipoca turned himself into a jaguar, and the stars descended in the form of jaguars to devour the first race of humanity. This cataclysm happened on the day 4 Jaguar in the Aztec calen-



dar.

Quetzalcoatl ("Feathered Serpent") is the great culture-hero of Central America, credited with imparting most of the civilized arts such as architecture, the calendar, and goldsmithing. Quetzalcoatl was also a god of weather and the planet Venus (of great importance in Central American calendars). One myth says he came from across the eastern sea to rule the pre-Aztec city of Tollan. His reign brought justice, peace, and prosperity — so Tezcatlipoca used his sorcery to destroy the kingdom and drive the now-aged god-king back across the sea, or to suicide. Tezcatlipoca had earlier ended the god's tenure as the Second Sun by sending a great wind that blew Quetzalcoatl from the sky and destroyed the second race of humanity. This took place on the day 4 Wind.

Tlaloc ("Sprouter"), the god of rain, took his place as the Third Sun. This god was crucially important for agriculture, since his anger could result in drought, floods, sleet, or unseasonal rains that mildewed the crops. The Aztecs placed his shrine next to Huitzilopochtli's, as the second-most-important god of the empire. Quetzalcoatl ended Tlaloc's world with a rain of fire on the day 4 Rain.

Tlaloc's wife *Chalchihuitlicue* ("Lady of the Jade Skirt"), goddess of streams and lakes, became the Fourth Sun. On the day 4 Water, floods washed her world away.

The gods finally agreed to a truce at the pre-Aztec city of Teotihuacán. A poor god afflicted with boils cast himself into a sacrificial fire and was reborn as *Tonatiuh,* the Fifth Sun of the present world. Tonatiuh receives every sacrifice, for when a priest rips the heart from a sacrificial victim, he first raises it to the sky before offering it to the temple's own god. Like all the previous solar gods, however, Tonatiuh's reign is limited. Earthquakes shall destroy the world when the year ends on the day 4 Motion.

OTHER NOTABLE AZTEC GODS

Some other noteworthy Aztec deities include:

Centeotl ("Maize God"): God of maize, the chief staple crop of Central America.

Coatlicue ("Serpent Skirt"): An earth goddess. She gave birth to Huitzilopochtli after she found a ball of feathers that dropped from the sky. The god began his career by slaughtering his brothers and sister, who found the circumstances of his birth extremely suspicious and sought to kill their mother for her supposed infidelity.

Mictlantecuhtli ("Dead Land Lord"): God of the dreary Land of Death. Quetzalcoatl created the current human race from bones taken from Mictlan. The death-god's images remain popular five centuries after the Spanish conquest, as the skeletons and sugar skulls used in the Mexican Day of the Dead festival.

Xipe Totec ("The Flayed One"): A vegetation god. His priests wore the flayed skins of his victims, as new growth covered the earth. The skins dried to a golden hue, and so Xipe became the god of goldsmiths.

Xiuhtecutli ("Fire Lord"): God of fire, ritual, and the calendar. At the end of each 52-year calendar round, all fires were extinguished, and then new fires kindled by the priests. The Aztecs also called him Huehueteotl ("Old, Old God").

Chinese Gods

The Chinese people worship an enormous number of gods derived from folk tradition, Taoism, Buddhism, and fiction: a number of gods began as characters in novels. In the Chinese view, the gods are not the supreme forces of the universe. Even the gods are subject to the impersonal forces of the Five Elements, the two principles of Yin and Yang, and the Tao that encompasses all things.

Chinese mythology stands out from most other faiths in that most gods are deified mortals — a natural extension of Chinese ancestor worship. An entire community, not just his own descendants, might revere a person who distinguishes himself in life. In time, his worship becomes widespread and officially recognized by the Imperial government. Mortals can also become gods through Taoist magic or Buddhist enlightenment,

as Immortals or Bodhisattvas (Buddhist saints).

The Chinese saw the divine and infernal worlds as close reflections of the mortal world, with gods and demons organized in bureaucracies. Just as a mortal bureaucrat could work his way up from a minor clerk to a high court official, a petty local god could receive higher and higher rank. In fact, the mortal emperor could issue such promotions and demerits.

The divine bureaucracies are also as corruptible as their earthly analogue — in fact, a significant part of Chinese religious ritual is explicit bribery to obtain favors. The custom of burning "Hell Money" as an offering to your ancestors, for example, is so they can bribe their way out of punishments in the afterlife.

Shang Ti, the Celestial Emperor, leads the divine bureaucracy. Only the mortal Emperor worships Shang Ti, but common folk honor him indirectly through incense offerings to T'ien, the personified Heaven of all the gods. Shang Ti is also identified with *Yu Huang Ti,* the August Personage of Jade, a Taoist figure. Just as mortal emperors die, Yu Huang-Ti is not the first Celestial Emperor, and will not be the last. The heavenly bureaucracy has 18 departments and countless sub-bureaus, for weather, fertility, and every other aspect of life.

Many Chinese say the most important "gods" are three deified sages: *Confucius;* the historical *Buddha* Gautama (or Sakyamuni); and the founder of Taoism, *Lao-Tzu.* The last is the most important divinity for mystics, as he is himself the Supreme Magician and authority in the spirit world. His deputy as Master of Spirits is *Chang Dao-Ling,* the "Taoist Pope," a mighty magician who made the Pill of Immortality and ascended to Heaven. (See page 213 for more about Chang Dao-Ling.)

The *Eight Immortals* also set an example for aspiring Taoist mystics. Chinese legend mentions dozens of Immortals, but these eight are the most famous and have many adventures together. In true Taoist fashion, they take a whimsical approach to godhood, and often upset stodgier deities, but they are great friends to humanity.

Kuan Yin, Goddess of Mercy, is one of China's most beloved gods. She is a Chinese (and gender-altered) version of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion. The Chinese adapted other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to their mythology as well. For example, Maitreya, the Buddha To Come, becomes Mi-lo Fo, one of several Chinese gods of prosperity and happiness.

OTHER NOTABLE CHINESE GODS

The *Chêng-Hwang* are the patron gods of cities. Some of them are former officials who killed themselves to protest unjust actions by their superiors. Any mystic would want to stay on good terms with his local overseer of the spirit world.

Fu Hsi, the First Sovereign, helped create the world and humanity, and founded civilization. His sister *Nu Kua* repaired the sky after a demon ripped a hole in it. Both of these primal divinities are represented as snakes with human heads.

Hsi Wang Mu, the Queen Mother of the West (and in some myths, the consort of Yu Huang Ti), guards the peaches of immortality that ripen every 3,000 years.

Kuan Ti, a war god, provides an example of promotion through the Celestial Bureaucracy. After death, this third-century mortal military hero (whose exploits are recounted in the *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*) was divinized in 1120 with the title of Faithful and Loyal Duke. Over the centuries his rank increased until the Ming emperor Wan Li gave him his present name and the title of Faithful and Loyal Great God, Supporter of Heaven and Protector of the Kingdom. Kuan Ti averts the horrors of war when he can, and becomes the god of strategy and valor when he can't. He's said to have appeared in the sky in 1856, leading an Imperial victory. Many trades and professions also claim this popular god as their patron.

Lei Kung, Duke of Thunder, is an important official in the celestial ministry of weather and storms. His favor may prevent storms that destroy crops. This ministry includes many other important gods, such as *Ch'ih Sung-Tzu,* God of Rain, and *Wên Chung,* Minister of thunder.

Tsao Chun, the Kitchen God, watches over every household. Before his yearly report to Heaven, the lips of his image are dabbed with honey so he speaks only sweet words about the family.

Wen Ch'ang, the God of Literature, may help scholars win government posts. This makes him popular with Confucians.

Yen-Lo Wang leads the *Yama Kings,* or rulers of Hell, who oversee the punishments of the wicked. He is a Bodhisattva who took this unpleasant post to help sinners expiate their crimes and so gain a better chance to reach enlightenment in their next life.

Egyptian Gods

The Egyptian religion lasted more than 3,000 years until the country's conversion to Christianity swept away the native gods. In that vast stretch of time, the Egyptian pantheon changed many times. The Egyptians saw their gods as a series of divine families, but they never nailed down exactly who was related to whom. Each city had its own favored gods, and as one city after another rose to lead Egypt, their version of the pantheon became dominant as well — but never fully displacing other versions. What's more, the Egyptians frequently identified one god with another, merged gods into composite figures, or hypostasized aspects of a god into separate deities. In short, there's no "official" version of the pantheon.

Early in their history, the Egyptians merged

THE THREE RELIGIONS

The Chinese see no particular conflict between Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Christianity and Islam have existed in China for over a thousand years but remain minority faiths, distinct from the main trend of Chinese religion. When the Communists took power, they made China officially atheist, but their destruction of temples and execution of priests and monks had little effect on popular faith. Ironically, Mao Tse-Tung is himself now propitiated as a god.

Confucianism sees itself as more a philosophy than a religion. Confucius (or Kung Fu Tzu) said the gods and afterlife were subjects beyond his knowledge or interest; his doctrines are about right conduct and social order. He endorsed worship of the gods as part of tradition.

Taoism is concerned less with mortal ethics than personal enlightenment and harmony with nature. The *Tao* or "Way," the totality of existence, is itself not expressible in words, but may be mystically apprehended. Taoism forms the basis of most Chinese magic.

Mahayana Buddhism came to China in the first century A. D. It supplies Chinese religion with personal morality, complementing the social morality of Confucius. Mahayana Buddhism places less emphasis on the complete transcendence that is Nirvana, and more on personal virtue and sacred ritual as a way to achieve an afterlife reward of a better incarnation or bliss in a Buddha-Land paradise. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas may help the faithful in this world or the next.

several sun-gods into the composite figure of *Ra,* the supreme deity and creator of the world. As *Atum,* Ra spontaneously arose from the primevel waters of Nun. As *Khepri,* the divine scarab-beetle, he rolled the sun across the sky. Indeed, just about every god was identified with Ra at one point or another, to make one or the other seem more important. Ra became the first ruler of both gods and humanity, in the age when gods dwelled on Earth. Ra retired from active rule when he became old and feeble, but he retained the ultimate power. Egyptian mystics walked in a circle during their spells to imitate the sun's circular path around the world, and so identify themselves with the limitless power of Ra.

Ra's great-grandchildren were important gods in their own right, and their family life supplies most of the drama in Egyptian myth. *Osiris,* a god of fertility, became ruler of the gods. This outraged his brother *Set,* the warlike god of darkness, storms, and the desert. Set believed he deserved the job because of his service fighting the monsters that obstructed Ra in his nightly journey through the Egyptian Underworld. Set murdered Osiris and usurped the throne. Their sister (and Osiris's wife) *Isis,* however, possessed great skill at magic. She had even extorted Ra's true name from the sun-god, which gave her power over him. Isis restored Osiris to life and conceived a son, *Horus,* before Set killed Osiris again and did a more thorough job this time. Osiris became god of the dead, and eventually became more widely worshipped even than Ra. Horus grew up to defeat Set and sire the first mortal line of Pharaohs.



Osiris received the souls of people who lived righteously, but the Egyptians weren't sure their souls would reach him without help. The famous "Book of the Dead" (properly called the *Book Of Coming Forth By Day*) is a collection of spells to help a person reach Osiris's paradise, the Field of Reeds, and give the deceased magical powers in this afterlife.

Osiris, Isis, and Ra were all important gods for Egyptian mystics, but not the only ones. *Anubis,* Osiris's son by his other sister *Nephthys,* was the god of mummification and conductor of souls between worlds. Jackal-headed Anubis could harry evil spirits back to the Underworld... or let them out, to work his wrath.

Ibis-headed *Thoth* was second only to Isis as a magician among the gods. Thoth was the god of writing, and the Egyptians regarded writing as a supremely magical act. He was also a god of the moon.

The Egyptians also personified magic itself as a god, *Heka.* This god, whose very name means "Magic," was completely abstract, however, and seldom received real worship.

OTHER NOTABLE EGYPTIAN GODS

Ram-headed *Amun,* patron god of Thebes, became the supreme deity during the New Kingdom. Amun was, of course, identified with Ra but he was primarily a god of kingship itself.

Aten, the deified visible disk of the sun, became the focus of Egypt's one attempt at enforced orthodoxy. The pharaoh Akhenaten declared that Aten was the only god, and suppressed the temples of other gods. This outraged both the priests of Amun, by then a very powerful group, and the common people. Akhenaten, history's first totalitarian, was murdered and his name stricken from every inscription the priests could find.

Bes, a lion-faced dwarf, was often invoked in spells to drive away bad luck.

Ptah, the artisan-god, was represented as the mummy of a man with a shaved head. He was an alternate creator of the world.

Every god had an animal form, or sometimes several. Ra was pictured as a falcon, a scarab beetle, and as a lion or leopard. Horus was pictured as a falcon, too. Ra's daughter-wife *Hathor* had the head of a cow. She was sometimes identified with the lioness-goddess *Sekhmet,* who could inflict or heal disease; her priests were also physicians who employed spells as well as medicines. Set could take the form of a black pig, a crocodile, a hippopotamus, or a strange, donkey-like beast with square-topped ears. Various temples kept sacred animals believed to be actual incarnations of gods. For example, the bull Apis was the avatar of the Nile-god Hapi, or of Ptah.

Greco-Roman Gods

The principle Greek gods form an extended family descended from the Titans, an elder generation of gods. The six children of Kronos, king of the Titans, overthrew him as punishment for trying to eat them all. Zeus, their leader, became the new world-ruler. His divine progeny swelled the ranks of the gods. Most principal deities dwelled on the holy mountain of Olympus. The world also holds a great many other gods of greater or lesser importance. Heroes are almost always descended from a god.

Zeus, god of the sky and storm, commands the irresistible thunderbolt. His countless extramarital affairs spawned several other gods and numerous heroes, much to the disgust of his sister-wife *Hera.* Only Zeus can countermand the decrees of the three Fates, who set the lifespans of mortals.

Apollo and *Artemis* are twin children of Zeus by Leto, a daughter of the Titans. Artemis, goddess of the hunt, vowed to remain a virgin forever. Apollo rivaled Zeus for his amours. Both the twins are expert archers whose arrows cause disease. Apollo is also the divine patron of medicine, music, and the shrine of Delphi — Greece's most important oracle.

Hermes, another by-blow of Zeus, showed himself a trickster almost from birth. He became the gods' herald, and the god of merchants and thieves. His duties include conducting the souls of the dead to Hades. This role helps make him one of the Greeks' principle gods of magic.

The crone-goddess *Hecate* came from outside the Olympian family. This daughter of the Titans is mistress of the crossroads, of boundaries, and of witchcraft. She has the privilege, which even Zeus does not challenge, to grant or withhold the heart's desire of any mortal.

Every Greek city has a set of patron gods. Zeus, naturally, claims the widest favor. Certain families serve as hereditary priests, but people also take up priesthood as a profession. Animals sacrificed to the Olympians have their throats cut and the fat and thigh-bones burned as an offering. The meat is then served at a communal meal. Animals sacrificed to Hades and other Underworld gods, however, have their blood poured in a trench and then the whole body is burned.

Oracles play an important role in Greek religion. People ask the gods questions, and the priests deliver the gods' answers. At Delphi, vapors from a cleft in the ground sent the priestess into a trance in which she delivered Apollo's words. Other oracles used different methods.

Some Greeks join mystery cults, which offer special initiation and communion with the gods. The Eleusinian Mysteries, in honor of Demeter, and the frenzied rites of Dionysus are the most famous.

The Roman pantheon is much the same as the Greeks', but with different names in many cases. Zeus and Hera become Jupiter and Juno; Hermes becomes Mercury; and so on. The Romans freely adopted other gods, though... sometimes by force. As part of its program of conquest, the Romans tried to co-opt every god they could, and they believed they were successful in buying out the gods of conquered nations — all but the god of the Jews and the new offshoot faith of Christianity, which eventually conquered Rome itself.

OTHER NOTABLE GREEK GODS

Poseidon (Neptune to the Romans), Zeus's brother, rules the sea but often seeks domains on land, with little success.

Hades (or Pluto), Zeus's other brother, rules the dead. His wife Persephone, a daughter of Zeus, spends half the year in the Underworld and half with her mother *Demeter,* the goddess of agriculture and a sister of Zeus. Witches and sorcerers who want to summon the dead must placate Hades and Persephone.

Hestia (or Vesta), Zeus's third sister, is the patron of home life. Every hearth is sacred to her.

Ares (Mars) and **Hephaistos** (Vulcan) are Zeus's sons by Hera. The Greeks regard Ares, the god of slaughter and war-fever, as an impetuous, brutal bully. Hephaistos, the lame god of smiths and craftsmen, forges magic weapons and armor for gods and heroes. The Cyclopes and magically animate women of metal assist him.

Dionysus (Bacchus), yet another of Zeus's bastards, was the god of wine and ecstatic madness.

Two origins are given for **Aphrodite** (or Venus), goddess of love. One story says she was Zeus's daughter by a goddess named Dione. Another myth says she sprang from sea-foam. She was married to Hephaistos, but preferred the embrace of Ares, and took many other lovers besides.

Athena (Minerva), born from Zeus's head, was goddess of skill, both of domestic arts and of battle. She assisted many of the Greek heroes.

Hindu Gods

The gods of Hinduism have changed greatly over thousands of years. The hymns of the *Rig-Veda* describe the earliest form of Hinduism, when the Aryan tribes invaded India from the northwest and conquered the earlier Dravidian population. The Vedic gods resemble those of the Greeks, Germans, Slavs, Persians, and other Indo-European peoples: gods of the sky, the sea, war, fertility, and other natural phenomena and occupations of a barbarian culture. People offer them sacrifices to win their favor. Later Hinduism became more concerned with the nature of reality and consciousness, and

this more philosophical Hinduism (developed in the *Upanishads* and other scriptures) needed different gods. Modern Hinduism ranges from subtle and abstract philosophy to magical cults centered on living "god-men."

A Hindu's goal is *moksha,* or liberation. Notions of *moksha* range from a state of logical clarity to becoming a god through magic. Whatever its form, *moksha* is an escape from *samsara,* the cycle of reincarnation, and *maya,* or illusion.

People are born repeatedly because of *karma,* the moral debts and attachments resulting from their deeds. Good deeds and enlightened thought can grant a person a better life in his next incarnation — even a life as a spirit or god. Bad deeds and low, bestial thought bring a miserable incarnation, perhaps as an animal or demon.

All these possible incarnations are an illusion, though. True reality consists of *Brahman,* the supreme Godhead, whose essence consists of pure consciousness aware of nothing but itself. Everything and everyone is Brahman; the world of the senses is just a dream. Even the gods are illusions... but these illusions can be powerful.

Hindu gods are often distinctive for having multiple arms, heads, or eyes. These symbolize a god's multiple spheres of power. Shiva's third eye, for example, represents mystical enlightenment: the god sees truth, which the unenlightened do not. Shiva's third eye also destroys whatever it looks upon, because Shiva sees through the illusion of reality.

Indra, the principle god of Vedic Hinduism, is a god of storms and war. His thunderbolt is the gods' ultimate weapon against the demons and other enemies of the Aryan tribes, and he prefers to fight while roaring drunk on the sacred liquid, *soma.* Indra remains the official king of the gods, but a great mystic can take the god's identity.

Modern Hinduism places greater emphasis on the three great gods of creation, preservation, and destruction. Collectively, these gods are called Trimurti:

Brahma the Creator brings each new cycle of the world into existence.

Vishnu the Preserver defends the cosmos from the demons that would usurp the gods. The ultimate master of *maya,* Vishnu changes shape and incarnates himself in a series of avatars to assist in the world's maintenance. A Vaishnavite — a devotee of Vishnu — draws a V-shaped mark on his forehead, with the point on the bridge of the nose.

Shiva the Destroyer is the god of everything catastrophic, from natural disasters and death to the lightning-flash of enlightenment. He is the gods' supreme mystic and ascetic. Shiva's devotees mark their foreheads with a dot.

OTHER NOTABLE HINDU GODS

Agni, god of fire, receives all offerings and turns them into himself. This makes him an important god for magic as well as Hindu sacrificial rites. Hindus burn their dead because Agni makes even corpses pure.

Brihaspati, the god of the planet Jupiter, appears in the *Vedas* as the gods' priest, magician, and vizier.

Ganesha, the son of Shiva, is the god of practical wisdom, writing, and luck. He can create or remove obstacles to any endeavor.

Lakshmi, Vishnu's wife, is the goddess of fertility, wealth, love, and all the blessings of life.

The **Atharva-Veda,** a collection of spells, often mentions *Nirriti,* the goddess of disease. The Vedic spells implore Nirriti to take back diseases inflicted on a magician's clients, or to punish a magician's enemies.

Parvati, or Shakti, is Shiva's wife. She is power and energy, united to Shiva's knowledge and discipline. As *Kali,* she is Death, who devours all things but is also the destroyer of illusion.

Varuna, the Vedic god of oaths and the sea, also declined in importance. Varuna is a god of magic, though: he enforces oaths and the divine law through curses and the workings of fate.

Yama was the first man, and the first man to die. He became the god of death.

Every god has a *Vahana,* an animal steed, who may receive its own worship. Vishnu's steed, for example, is Garuda, a divine eagle-man, while Shiva rides the bull Nandi. Elephant-headed Ganesha rides a mouse, while Varuna's steed is the Makara, a sea-monster.

Hinduism also includes the *Rishis,* divine sages who in some ways surpass the gods. Rishis such as Bhrigu, Kasyapa, and Pulastya revealed the *Vedas* to the gods. They also became ancestors to gods and demons: Indra was the son of Kasyapa and the primal goddess Aditi ("Boundless"), while Pulastya was an ancestor of the rakshasas.

Norse Gods

The gods of northern Europe's Germanic peoples are chiefly known through the Norse culture of Scandinavia and Iceland, where the myths were remembered late enough in history to be written down.

The Norse believed in two groups of gods, the Aesir and Vanir, who fought at first but merged by treaty. The *Aesir* were gods of war and power. The *Vanir* were gods of nature, agriculture, and fertility, though some were quite skilled warriors too. And there was *Loki,* born from neither group, the trickster and troublemaker of the gods.

The gods face constant threat from the Giants. These primeval powers of chaos come in two tribes, the Fire-Giants and the Frost-Giants. Each tribe lives in its own realm of Muspelheim or Jotunheim, respectively. Some frost giants, or *Jotnar,* wield tremendous powers of illusion. On the other hand, several gods have children by giants, or receive help from a giant on occasion. Loki is the son of the giant Farbauti, and spawns various monsters such as the *Fenris Wolf* and *Jormungandr,* the Midgard Serpent, a snake that lives in the sea and is so enormous it encircled the world. Loki is also the father of *Hel,* the goddess of those who die dishonored by crime or cowardice.

Odin, or Wotan, rules the gods. He chooses victory or defeat for mortals, and collects the souls of heroes for the final battle against the giants. Odin is also the master of magic. He found the mystical runes by hanging from the World-Tree for nine days, and sacrificed his eye for further magical wisdom. Loki is his sworn brother, and they often collaborate in tricky schemes.

Freyja, a goddess of the Vanir, is the other great patron of magic. Her priestesses practice *seidhr,* a form of shamanic soothsaying. Seidhr is mostly used to foretell the community's fortunes for the coming year, the success of marriages, and the destiny of children. The art can also be used to bless and curse, and practitioners can take the form of a horse. Freyja herself takes the form of a falcon when she wants to travel quickly. Like her brother Freyr, she can grant fertility and prosperity. Freyja is also the goddess of love, and is said to have taken most of the gods as her lovers at one time or another.

The Norse honored their gods through sacrifice, sometimes including human sacrifice. Victims dedicated to Odin are stabbed with a spear and hung from a tree. Wagons carry images of Freyr at midwinter, as a promise of light and life to come.

The gods are doomed, like the world itself. First comes a winter three years long, in which time all bonds of kinship and honor dissolve. Then the fire giants march from Muspelheim, Fenris Wolf breaks free, the Midgard Serpent rises from the sea, and the frost giants set sail for Asgard in a ship made from dead men's nails. The gods, giants, and monsters kill each other until only Surtr, king of the fire giants, is left to throw fire over the universe before the sea swallows whatever's left. A new world will arise, however, and a few gods and mortals survive to repopulate it.

OTHER NOTABLE NORSE GODS

Thor, god of thunder and Odin's son by Jord the earth-goddess, has a personality opposite his father's. This god of the common man solves problems by hitting them with his hammer Mjolnir. It usually works. In contrast to Odin, whose own worshippers didn't trust him, Thor was called the "Friend of Man."

Freyr, the most famous of the Vanir, is a god of fertility and prosperity. He owns the magical golden boar Gullinbursti and Skidbladnir, a magical ship large enough to carry all the gods but that folds down to fit in a pocket.

The war-god **Tyr** proved himself the bravest of all gods. The terrible Fenris Wolf suspected a trick when the gods challenged him to let them tie him with a fragile-looking cord. The wolf demanded a god place his hand in his mouth as a pledge of good faith. Tyr did so, and lost the hand when the monster failed to break the magical cord.



THERIANTHROPES

People around the world have myths about *therianthropes,* or people who turn into animals. The werewolf is the best-known example (thanks to the movies), but there are also legends of people turning into bears, coyotes, crocodiles, hyenas, jaguars, leopards, lions, snakes, swans, tigers, sharks, and other animals, too.

Legend also speaks of magical animals that turn into humans, such as the fairy foxes and magical badgers of Japan. In a few cases, it's not clear which is the "real" form: the selkies of Gaelic myth are human on land, seals in the sea. Transforming animals and ambiguous cases tend to have more in common with faerie-folk than with human shape-shifters. As always, however, it pays to remember the fuzzy edges of supernatural categories.

Causes Of Therianthropy

Just about everyone knows the rules for movie werewolves. A person suffers this curse from surviving an attack by another werewolf. On the next full moon, he gets all hairy and runs around looking for more victims. Nothing but a silver bullet can kill him. The movies only touch on a fraction of the available folklore, though. For example, the movies invented the part about the werewolf's contagious bite. In legend, people become were-creatures in other ways.

THERIANTHROPY BY MAGIC

Many were-creatures use magic to change shape. One of the most common techniques is to wear an enchanted animal-skin. In the *Volsunga Saga,* for example, the hero Sigmund and his son Sinfjotli steal some magic wolf-skins so they can escape pursuit for outlawry. The Navajo and other southwest Native American tribes have tales of shamans using skins to travel long distances at wolf-speed, while their witches take coyote form to work mischief. The fairy tale of the Swan Princess presents a variation, in which the enchanted princesses are bound to take swan-shape using feathered garments.

Mythology also describes spells for becoming a were-creature. One of the simplest rituals involves stripping naked except for a wolf-skin belt, then urinating in a circle around one's clothing. One of the most elaborate involves a magic circle, a pot of herbal potion, an unguent made of animal fat and herbal drugs, and a wolf-skin. The Khond people of eastern Bengal are reported to summon a spirit, appearing in the form of a column of crimson light, which grants the transformation into a tiger. The leopard men cultists of West Africa seek the shape-shifting power through leopard skins, cannibalism, and a potion brewed from their victim's intestines.

Medieval and Renaissance witch-hunters believed lycanthropy was one of the gifts obtained through a pact with the Devil. Sometimes the Devil granted this power through a magical strap a witch could buckle on; other times, a Satanic werewolf needed no such aid. Before Christianity, the Norse berserkers were credited with the power to become bears or wolves, as a gift from Odin.

THERIANTHROPY BY BIRTH

Some were-creatures are born that way. Anyone born on Christmas Eve is prone to lycanthropy, but can avoid his fate through a pious life. Throughout much of Europe, being born with a caul over your head indicates a variety of mystic gifts and curses, such as lycanthropy or the Second Sight. People can also inherit lycanthropy from an ancestor, whether he was a deliberate werewolf or cursed by a witch.

THERIANTHROPY BY POSSESSION

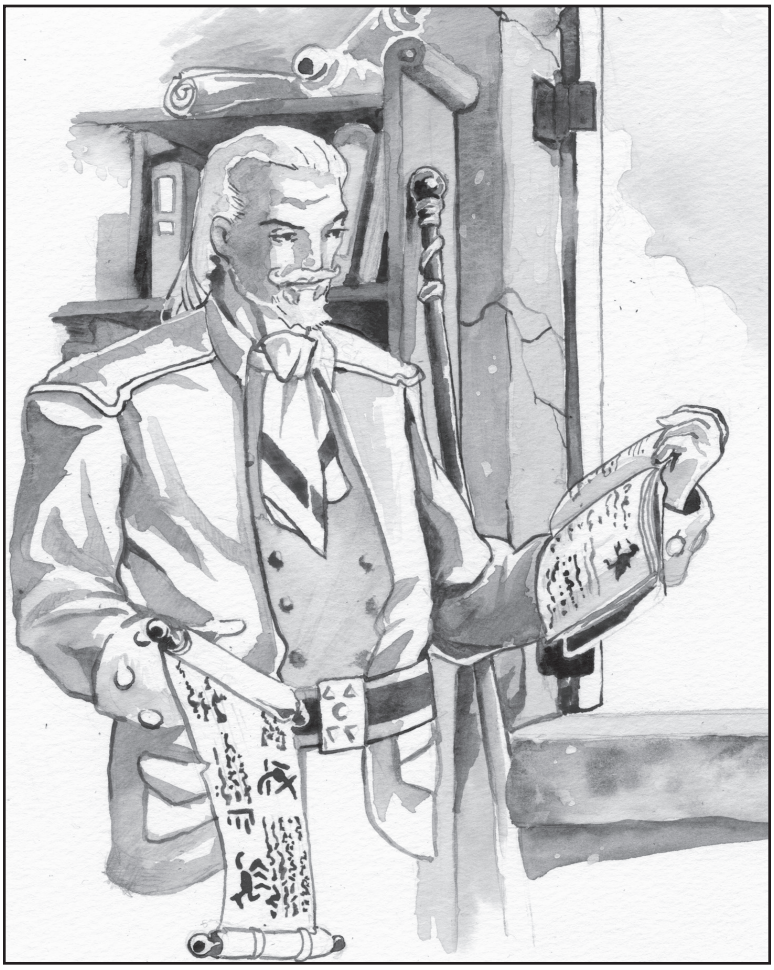
Instead of a person physically transforming into a beast, some legends say a person's soul can take possession of an animal to act out its savage desires. (Such soul transference is technically called *metempsychosis* or *transmigration.*) Some Inquisitors thought the Devil couldn't have power over the physical world, so witches achieved their lycanthropy in this way.

Ghosts can become therianthropes, too. In Africa, several tribes believe the souls of the dead can possess animals. When two man-eating lions almost halted work on a railroad through the Tsavo region of Kenya, the terrified native workers said their dead chiefs objected to the railroad passing through the tribe's territory. Other tribes say the souls of murder victims can possess crocodiles to take revenge, and even assume human or half-human form to do so. Crocodiles may also carry ancestral spirits: these reptiles become guides and guardians of the tribe if their descendants show them proper honor.

THERIANTHROPY BY ASTRAL PROJECTION

Instead of taking over an animal's body, a projected soul might take animal form itself. Shamans do this a lot, in their journeys through the spirit world. Native Mexican mythology speaks of *naguals,* people who project their souls in animal form. Originally, naguals (or nawals, or several other variant spellings) could be good or evil. In modern, Christian Mexico, naguals are witches or sorcerers who send their spirits out to work evil. Naguals have vampiric aspects, since they feed upon the life-force of mortals to cause sickness or death. Other legends from around the world have the vampire-witch project her soul as a vulture or some other bird. These astral shape-shifters may become visible and solid, but they can disappear like any other spirit.

The legendary Danish warrior Bothvar Biarki supposedly fought in the form of a bear while his human body lay asleep and at home. The *Benandanti* of sixteenth-century Friulia provide an example of astral shape-shifters as genuine heroes. According to what they told Inquisitors, the Benandanti were men and women born with a caul. On the solstices and equinoxes, they left their bodies to take the shape of wolves. The men fought the



Devil's army of witches, while the women went to the Land of the Dead to beg good harvests from the Queen of Ghosts. Similar stories are told in eastern Europe, from the Balkans to the Baltic.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERIANTHROPES

When the reaction against witch-hunting began in the Renaissance, some savants cast doubt on werewolves as well. Johann Weyer may have been the first writer to suggest lycanthropy was a mental illness, though he thought the Devil could exploit such illness by inducing hallucinations of turning into a wolf. Some of the better-documented werewolf trials of this period describe perpetrators who killed and ate victims, or dug up graves, while growling and acting like wolves; this did not prevent their execution.

More recent physicians suggest other possible explanations for the werewolf legend. Rarely, people are born with a mutation that causes hair to grow over their bodies and faces. Porphyria, a rare genetic blood disease, has also been nominated as inspiration for both werewolf and vampire legends.

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde,* however, pointed toward a psycho-symbolic theory of werewolves. Dr. Jekyll releases his evil side through a drug; and though Hyde is visibly bestial (making Jekyll a quasi-scientific shape-shifter), his personality is even more obviously vicious and brutal. Combine a Freudian eruption of suppressed rage (or however you explain a serial killer) with a mythology of Satanic shape-shifters, and you've got "werewolf psychosis." Many people point out that alcohol is drug enough to unlock the beast within a man: many a battered woman pleads that her husband or boyfriend is *really nice...* when he's sober.

SCIENCE-FICTIONAL THERIANTHROPES

Stevenson's story also opened the way for non-supernatural shapeshifters. In H. G. Wells's *The Island Of Doctor Moreau,* vivisection, hypnosis, and Moreau's quasi-religious "Law" change animals into an approximation of humanity... for a while. More recent Science Fiction explores the possibility of humans transformed into animal form through genetic engineering or nanotechnology. In virtual reality, of course, a person can present whatever image he wants, and perceive himself accordingly. A person could even control an android animal through a VR link, perceiving the world through its artificial senses, for a high-tech version of possession. And in another body, another identity, who knows what dark desires might bubble up from the id?

Coping With Therianthropes

The beast that ravaged the Gevaudan region of France in the 1760s, which the common folk believed was a werewolf, was finally slain with silver bullets. Werewolves caught and executed by witch-hunters were burned, which suggests that fire is also effective if a therianthrope resists normal weapons. In folklore, however, most were-creatures do not possess any special invulnerability.

The great problem lies in detecting a therianthrope. European werewolf lore says a lycanthrope's human form is marked by an index finger as long as the middle finger, hair on the palms, and sometimes eyebrows that meet over the nose. In many cultures, however, only a witch-doctor or sorcerer can identify an evil shapeshifter — unless someone gets lucky and sees the therianthrope change form, or discovers his magical skin, ointment, or other paraphernalia.

As the Benandanti show, however, not all were-creatures are evil. Not a few werewolf legends say a person turned into a wolf can regain human form after a certain period, if only he refrains from tasting human flesh. Transylvanian werewolf stories often concern a traveler who sets free a trapped wolf, or feeds a hungry wolf, only to receive a rich reward when the werewolf regains his human form.

NOT A REASONABLE CREATURE

I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls; and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that... And even it seemed that I, too, was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain...

—H. G. Wells, *The Island Of Doctor Moreau*

A French tale features a drunken abbot rescued from a pack of wildcats by a wolf, who turns out to be high-ranking church official.

Therianthropes In The Campaign

Fiction and folklore offer many approaches to therianthropes. In general, though, the easier it is to become a shapeshifter, the fewer benefits it should offer, or the more drawbacks it should impose. In the standard movie version (which most Fantasy games follow), were-creatures are powerful and nigh-unkillable, but uncontrollably savage; therianthropes are either accursed, or villains. The curse is automatically transmitted to anyone who survives a were's bite, but that doesn't happen very often because weres usually kill their prey. This version works well in campaigns where therianthropes appear only as enemies, though it's not the only approach. For example, an evil Fantasy empire might use squads of more self-controlled (or magically controlled), magically-created were-creatures as elite commandos or death squads.

Neutral or heroic therianthropes should be less powerful, or becoming a shapeshifter should be rare and difficult to achieve. For example, Greco-Roman authors sometimes mention barbarian tribes whose warriors are all werewolves; that's not unreasonable if werewolves have no greater abilities than normal wolves, or a well-trained soldier with a sword or spear. For a Heroic-level character, the advantages of turning into an animal are well balanced by the disadvantages of lacking hands and not being able to wear armor.

In a Superheroic-level setting, were-creatures can be as powerful as any other character. If they're not villains, comic book therianthropes are "monster heroes" who don't like their condition. If therianthropy isn't contagious, then becoming a were-creature is just another magical origin. It's even possible to build an entire campaign around Superheroic-level were-creatures who band together to use their powers to fight a common enemy (hostile tribes of other were-beings or magical creatures, evil corporations and governments, or even ordinary criminal groups).

VAMPIRES

The average gamer knows all about vampires. When people get bite-marks on their necks, it's time to sharpen the wooden stakes and stock up on crosses, holy water, garlic, and mirrors.

Actually, the average gamer knows about the vampires invented by gothic fiction, especially *Dracula.* Most books, movies, and TV shows follow Bram Stoker's famous Count — and so most games do, too. Even most "alternative" vampires only make small changes — this vampire has some new power, that vampire ignores one of the standard weaknesses, this other one has a scientific explanation for his much more limited abilities. For example, the vampires in *The Lost Boys* were young punks who could fly instead of East European aristocrats who turned into bats, but they still had fangs, couldn't stand daylight, and turned other people into vampires.

The "gothic" vampire takes its inspiration from actual East European folklore, but it represents just a tiny fraction of vampire legends. Folklore describes an incredible variety of bloodsucking supernatural predators.

Undead From Folklore

The vampires from actual European legends are never quite like the vampires from fiction. For one thing, while vampires from Slavic and Balkan legends do turn their victims into more vampires, the curse can also appear spontaneously. An animal jumping over a corpse may be enough to make it rise as a vampire. Someone born with teeth is predisposed to become a vampire. So is someone born with a caul: he may become a werewolf first, but some legends say dead werewolves always come back as vampires to spread terror again. Some Balkan cultures use the same word for both monsters. A suicide, a heretic, or a sorcerer are all likely to rise again as a bloodsucking fiend. So may the illegitimate child of illegitimate parents, or someone who died with unrequited love. That first vampire often has the power to make more — and the vampire's relatives are usually its first victims. Vampirism spreads like a plague... literally, as victims sicken, die, and spread the curse to more people. Only a few of the colorful vampire species of eastern Europe can be described here.

The Romanian *strigoii* (female*, strigoica*) closely resembles the gothic vampire. They cannot withstand sunlight and must drink blood. Along with the usual reasons for becoming a vampire, perjurers, criminals, and seventh sons may become strigoii*,* as will those killed by one of these vampires or who are stared at by one while in the womb. Strigoii stand out, however, because they always have red hair and blue eyes. The monster also has two hearts.

You can tell a corpse will become a strigoii because the body's left eye stays open. To prevent reanimation, stab the corpse in the heart with a sickle, or stick nine spindles into the ground above

the grave. Strigoii also have a fear or hatred of wine. Sometimes Romanians bury a bottle of wine with a suspected strigoii; six weeks later, they dig it up. Any who drink the wine are immune to the attacks of the strigoii.

The *murony,* from the Wallachian region of Romania, can assume the form of a cat, dog, flea, or spider, in addition to its human form. In any of its shapes, it has the power to paralyze people. The murony then drains all the paralyzed victim's blood, but it does not leave puncture marks like the gothic vampire. Anyone slain by a murony inevitably rises from the grave as one himself. The only ways to slay a murony are to stake it, or to drive a long nail through its forehead.

The Slovenian and Istrian *kudlak,* or *vukodlak,* is an even greater shape-shifter. It can take the shape of any animal, though it resembles gothic vampires in most other ways. An ordinary stake through the heart does not suffice to destroy a kudlak: you must use a stake of hawthorn-wood. (Some other Balkan vampires are only destroyed by stakes of blackthorn-wood.)

The Polish *upior* or *upier* (female *upierzyca*) stands out because of its enormous appetite for blood. It drinks its victim dry, and then seeks another victim to quench its never-ending thirst. Slaying the upior requires staking or decapitation — but literally, gallons of putrid blood burst from its body. Upiors even sleep in a coffin full of blood!

Upiors also differ from gothic vampires in having barbed tongues, and they are only active between noon and midnight; at all other times they must sleep in their coffins. Sunlight doesn't bother them at all. Finally, a nascent upior eats its burial-shroud before first arising from its grave. To keep someone from becoming an upior, bury him face down and place a willow cross under his armpits, chin, and chest, or bury the body so deeply it cannot dig out. The living can make themselves immune to attacks by upiors by mixing vampire blood with flour, making "blood bread," and eating it.

Eastern Europe doesn't have a monopoly on undead bloodsuckers. The Irish, for example, have the *dearg-due* ("Red Blood Sucker"), which has existed on the island since pre-Celtic times. Those slain by a dearg-due's thirst become vampires themselves. Some dearg-due have wizardly powers as well. Dearg-due lack the tremendous strength of the gothic vampire, so you can trap it by piling heavy stones on its grave. In Ireland, road crews and other builders are advised to leave stone caerns strictly alone.

The Chinese vampire is known as *ch'ing-shih,* meaning "corpse-specter." A corpse may be animated by its *p'o,* the brutal "inferior soul," because the body did not receive proper funeral rites, had an animal jump over it, or was exposed to sunlight or moonlight. An evil man may deliberately separate and hide his superior soul and turn himself into a ch'ing-shih so he can work greater harm.

A ch'ing-shih has long, claw-like nails, fangs, and red eyes, plus whitish or greenish hair all over its body. Like gothic vampires, the ch'ing-shih must sleep in a coffin, cannot stand the light of day, cannot cross threshholds without invitation, is extremely strong, and must drink the blood of the living to survive. Some ch'ing-shih (typically the older, more experienced ones) can fly, turn into mist, or become invisible. The ch'ing-shih can also slay the living with its terrible, icy breath. Ch'ing-shih are prone to going berserk when fighting or injured.

To kill a normal ch'ing-shih, dig it up and burn it (they cannot withstand fire). To kill one that hid its superior soul, you must find the soul and free it. Lightning can destroy both types. Garlic, incense, or other strong odors provide protection against either type of ch'ing-shih; so do Buddhist sutras. A ch'ing-shih can be trapped in its grave by sprinkling rice, iron, and red peas on the ground above it.

India has many sorts of vampires. For example, angry or insane ghosts called *bhuta* sometimes animate corpses to wreak their vengeance on the living and the dead alike. Bhuta don't just drink blood, they chew their victims' guts. One particularly strong and cruel form of bhuta, the *brahmaparush* of northern India, tears off its victim's head, drinks blood from his skull, gnaws the flesh off the skull, and wears the victim's viscera as a turban.

Africa has relatively few bloodsucking undead, but several regions have legends of the *loango.* A loango is an undead sorcerer who must drink the blood of the living. Like the gothic vampire, it can assume the form of a bat and is destroyed by sunlight. The loango's immense strength varies with the phase of the moon (ten times normal human strength during a full moon; eight times during a gibbous moon; five times during a half moon; and twice normal human strength during a crescent moon or new moon).

Demon Brides

The European plague-revenant is not the only archetype for vampires. Another common pattern is the "demon bride," a vampire who appears human by day but stalks the living by night to suck their blood. Sometimes the demon bride is a woman who comes back from death because she died a suicide, or in childbirth. Other vampires seem to be true demons, with no explanation for why they exist. The demon bride marries an unsuspecting man, and may even bear him children — but sooner or later, people in or around the family die. Keen observation is needed to detect a demon bride in the community.

This archetype is particularly common among the Malay people, from Malaysia to the Philippines. The *langsuir,* for example, is a woman who died in childbirth or heard that her children were stillborn; she becomes a monster forty days later. Langsuirs wear green robes and have long nails and ankle-length black hair. A langsuir sucks the blood of children through a hole in the back of her neck. These vampires also enjoy eating fish. They can fly and assume the form of an owl. They can also emit a terrible shriek — the *ngilai* — that causes terror

in anyone who hears it. (The langsuir's stillborn child also becomes a blood-drinking monster called a *pontianak,* unless you take the same steps as for a langsuir, or simple spells are cast.) The Javanese *sundal bolong* ("hollowed bitch") resembles the langsuir, but this vampire is created when a woman commits suicide after being raped and impregnated by evil men. A sundal bolong looks like a woman dressed in white. She lures young men into isolated places and drains their blood.

To destroy a langsuir, cut off her nails and hair and stuff them into the hole in her neck. Some say this will not destroy her, but instead tame her so that she can again marry and raise children (though she reverts to her fiendish state if she dances or has fun). To prevent a recently deceased woman from becoming a langsuir, fill the corpse's mouth with glass beads or put a hen's egg under each arm and needles in the palms of the hand.

Like the langsuir, the undead *pěnanggalan* has the form of an ordinary woman during the day. At night, the monster's head, with inner organs and viscera dangling from it, detaches from its body and flies in search of human blood. This fiend prefers childrens' blood and the blood of pregnant women. The sight of a pěnanggalan, particularly one in the process of detaching from its body, can stun onlookers through sheer horror.

The blood and fluids that drip from the pěnanggalan's "body" cause sores and diseases if they touch human flesh. A pěnanggalan must return to its body before dawn, lest sunlight kill it, and must soak its inner organs in vinegar to make them shrink and fit back inside the body. Thus, someone who often smells of vinegar or who owns a lot of vinegar might be a pěnanggalan. A pěnanggalan can be kept away with the leaves of the jenyu plant, which it fears (similar to the traditional vampire's fear of garlic). Also, the sharp thorns of the jeruju plant may snag its intestines, catching it and causing it to die in the sunlight, so the houses of pregnant women or women in childbirth are protected with them.

The Arabian *algul,* better known in English as a ghoul, shows the Malays aren't the only people with demon-bride vampires. The algul can look like a human woman — in fact, alguls often marry mortal men and bear them children. Alguls won't eat normal food, however, preferring instead the taste of human flesh and blood. (Their refusal to eat food sometimes gives them away. Since the Arabic custom is to leave food on your plate as a way of indicating you don't want any more to eat, however, you can't detect an algul just by seeing who didn't finish their meal). At night, they sneak out of their houses to dig up corpses and eat them, or to waylay travelers and drink their blood.

The *baobhan sith* (*bavan shee*) haunts the Scottish Highlands. This deadly faerie-vampire appears as a beautiful woman. She uses her good looks to persuade men to dance, converse, or otherwise dally (though she cannot marry, for this creature cannot abide sunlight). However, the baobhan sith's touch drains the man's blood. The victim cannot feel this attack, but an onlooker may notice blood dripping from him. Iron or salt keep the baobhan sith away.

Demon "brides" are occasionally male. The Brazilian *lobishomen* looks like a normal, even handsome, man most of the time, but sometimes changes into a bestial, monkey-like dwarf. In this form, it attacks human women to drink their blood; the victims become nymphomaniacs. Lobishomens come about because of witchcraft or incestuous parents, but can be cured by cutting them with steel.

Transforming Witches

Some vampires deliberately choose their cursed state. Through a pact with the Devil or some other blasphemous rite, the person gains the power to destroy the living by stealthily sucking their blood. As with other vampires, the victim's symptoms often look like disease. The vampire's attack may leave no physical mark, or can look like a common insect bite; the lack of physical evidence shows the attack is really a form of black magic. Anthropologists might call these vampires witches instead.

These living vampires often change their form when they engage in their vampiric activities. Like the demon bride, a transforming witch can be difficult to detect without magic, if you cannot catch the fiend during its depredations.

Portugal is home to a feared witch-vampire creature called a *bruxsa* (*broo-zha*). She uses witchcraft to transform into a large bird and flies in search of prey. The bruxsa torments and often kills travelers, but does not drink their blood; instead, she subsists on the blood of her own children! Traditional methods of slaying vampires don't work on a bruxsa; in fact, there is no known way to destroy a bruxsa short of obliterating its whole body with enchanted weapons or magic — and even that is hard to do.

The *loogaroo* (also known as a *sucoyan*), from the West Indies, is a witch or old hag who made a pact with the Devil. Each night the loogaroo takes off her skin, folds it up neatly and hides it, then flies off in the form of a ball of fire. In this form, a loogaroo can pass through doors and walls unhindered to drain the blood of its victims. However, potential victims can protect themselves by scattering rice or sand before their doors: the loogaroo must stop and count each grain before coming inside. If caught without her skin when the sun comes up, the loogaroo is exposed as a monster and must flee. If someone finds a loogaroo's skin and sprinkles it with salt, the hag cannot wear it anymore, and shrivels and dies.

Some vampire-witches can project their souls to drink blood or suck life-force while their body stays at home. For example, members of the Bebarlang tribe of the Philippines supposedly have the power to project their astral bodies to feed on the life-force of other people. The *obayifo* of West Africa resembles the loogaroo, but can be male or female, and leaves its whole body behind when it stalks its victims. Indeed, many African witches

project their spirits in the form of some small animal to suck their neighbors' blood and life-force.

Demonic Vampires

The *baobhan sith* are not the only examples of vampires who seem demonic, in that they were never mortal (so far as anyone knows). Several other species of vampires have much in common with demons or faerie-folk. They look human, but they do not mingle in mortal society.

The *danag,* for example, is said to have lived in the Philippines for millennia. According to legend, danags first planted taro root there. Once they were friendly toward mankind. One day, however, a woman cut her finger while working with a danag. The danag sucked the cut and became enamored of the taste of human blood. Ever since then, danags have hunted men for their blood. Because of their age, they are clever and wise; it would not be implausible for a danag to know magic.

Several eastern Africa tribes know of a vampire called an *ishologu.* This creature, which resembles a handsome young man, lives only to slay and torment people and cattle, whose blood it drinks and flesh it eats. It spreads wasting diseases, coughs, and *iphika* (sterility). Its greatest power, called "bird of heaven," is the ability to cause sudden death in anyone. Because they are so powerful and useful for attacking one's enemies, witches often have ishologus as familiars and servants, in which case they are called *impundulus.* The impundulu is also the witch's lover. When the witch is about to die, she passes this "asset" on to her daughter.

The impundulu isn't the only sort of vampiric familiar, either. Malaysian sorcerers sometimes employ the demonic *polong* and its minion, the *pelesit.* These tiny imps are kept in bottles when they aren't out drinking blood, driving victims ill or insane (raving about cats is a sure sign of pelesit possession), or killing them outright. A polong looks like a tiny woman no larger than the top joint of your little finger. Only magic can stop the attacks of these vicious little imps.

Coping With Vampires

Every species of vampire has its own strengths and weaknesses. As described above, some vampires don't mind sunlight, garlic, or even stakes through the heart (and that usually kills *anything*, not just vampires). Some vampires have no weakness at all: either you must incinerate the body and scatter the ashes, or use magic to destroy them, or they eventually come back. On the other hand, the "gothic" vampire omits some of the authentic, legendary weaknesses: for example, many European vampires are compelled to count collections of small objects such as scattered grain, or to untie every knot in a net. Any would-be vampire hunter had better learn the rules for whatever bloodsucker he faces, or he won't last long.

SUPERNATURAL FOES OF VAMPIRES

Fortunately for the world, vampire legends give these creatures special foes. In *Dracula,* the Count commanded wolves, but some East European legends say that wolves hate vampires and watch over graves to destroy them as soon as they rise. Without them, vampires would swiftly overrun the world. White wolves bear a special hatred for the undead. Some legends say a stallion can sense if a grave contains a bloodsucker, and will attack any vampire it meets.

The Slavs of Istria (Dalmatia) and Slovenia tell stories of a special type of wizard or vampire-hunter called a *kresnik.* These magical hunters can assume any animal form and are special enemies of the kudlak. The two try to destroy each other in fantastic shape-shifting duels. Kresniks dress in white (and have white fur or feathers when shape-changed). Hungarians have their own form of kresnik, called the *talbos.*

The Gypsies of eastern Europe also tell of the *dhampir,* the offspring of a vampire and a mortal woman. East European vampires often return to their wives or girlfriends, and these unions may produce children. Dhampirs can see vampires that can turn invisible (as many Slavic and Serbian vampires do), know special rituals to render them powerless, and have special techniques for wrestling with and dispatching them. "Without them," the Gypsies say, "there would be much evil." Dhampirs are also known as *vampir* (for males), *vampueira* (for females), *vampijerovic, kresnik,* or *lampijerovic.* In fact, these may be given names for dhampirs.



Vampires In The Campaign

Most vampires are completely evil. Only some of the modern, "gothic" vampires can try to restrain their bloodlust and treat mortals as people rather than food. The most evil breeds are perhaps the vampire-witches, since they chose to become monsters and are best at hiding their implacable malice. But perhaps legends paint too black a picture of the various undead, demon brides, and other sorts of vampires, and some of them can develop a conscience. Such rare individuals might appear in a campaign as something other than villains... or heroes may feel bad about destroying them, since they can't help their cursed state. At most, a vampire with a conscience might become a hero himself, albeit quite a dark one. This is probably feasible only in Superheroic-level campaigns.

Gamemasters who want to use vampires from folklore (or use the legends to invent their own) must decide which vampires they want. In campaigns set on Earth, you might stick to the vampires from a particular culture: langsuirs and pĕnanggalan in Indonesia, asanbosam and impundulus in Africa, and so on. Then again, modern Western cities have immigrants from around the world. Why wouldn't vampires travel with their prey? A vampire-hunter might get a nasty surprise when he follows a bloodsucker into an ethnic ghetto.... And considering how many people from Southeast Asia go to the Middle East in search of work, Kuwait City or Riyadh could easily have a few demon brides masquerading as nannies or housekeepers.

In an invented world, you might assign vampires from similar Earthly cultures. The typical, quasi-Medieval European Fantasy society, for example, would feature Slavic or Balkan vampires, or maybe dearg-due and baobhan sith for a "Celtic Twilight" setting. Or you might pick any vampires that suit the "feel" of your campaign. Demon brides would fit into any game that emphasizes romance and mystery along with horror, while vampire-witches could bring their terrifying, secret evil to an intrigue-laden noble court as effectively as to a peasant village.

One recent notion is that gothic vampires have a hidden society with its own factions, conflicts, myth, and customs. You could do this with folklore vampires, too. Do vampire-witches think they're better than spontaneous undead, because they worked for their powers? Do other vampires fear and envy the ancient, powerful danag? Do other vampires cull the contagious varieties, so they don't grow too numerous and disrupt the balance of power? A creative GM can find no end of possibili-

MYSTICISM IN WORLD HISTORY



ties.

The Mystic World isn't entirely a fictional thing. Earth has a rich history of mystics, occult organizations, and arcane goings-on. Describing the world's mystic history would take a thick book in and of itself, but here are descriptions of a few of them to inspire players and GMs.

HISTORICAL MYSTICS

History gives no shortage of people who either claimed they were wizards, or whom later legend turned into wizards. Gamers can use these legendary masters of magic in the backgrounds of invented characters, artifacts, or books of magic. All these people really existed, though in some cases the facts of their lives are now difficult to discover.

Abeno Seimei (921-1005 AD): According to legend, this practitioner of Onmyodo (the Japanese version of Taoist theurgy) was the son of a fairy fox, and so destined from birth to be a great mystic. Seimei of Abe won great fame as an exorcist. Kyoto holds a shrine to Abeno Seimei, and he has recently become the hero of a series of Fantasy novels and movies.

Agrippa, Henry Cornelius (1486-1535 AD): The author of *The Occult Philosophy* tried to harmonize occult lore with the natural science of his day (which meant Aristotle, filtered through the Catholic Church), and in so doing established the framework for Hermetic magic that would persist over 300 years. Even in his own life, Agrippa was reputed a great Magus.

Albertus Magnus, Saint (1206?-1280): Albert, Bishop of Ratisbon, was one of the greatest scholars of his day. His contemporaries called him *Doctor Universalis* — master of all knowledge. He worked to reconcile Christian theology with Greek logic, a task completed by his pupil Thomas Aquinas. As an alchemist, Albertus was the first person to isolate and describe metallic arsenic. The Catholic Church declared him a Doctor of the Church after his death, and canonized him in the twentieth century.

Albertus also recorded contemporary beliefs about the properties of herbs, charms, and talismans; his book on the subject became a standard grimoire. Legend painted him as a true Archmage. He possessed the Philosopher's Stone and could change the weather or even the seasons. He even made an oracular android or golem... which Thomas Aquinas smashed because it wouldn't shut up and let him study.

Apollonius of Tyana (flourished first century AD): This Greek archmage traveled as far as India, which he said was the original home of Pythagorean doctrine. His biographer claimed Apollonius ended plagues, exorcised demons, and did many other good works with his magic, all the while exhorting people to follow the teachings of Pythagoras. In Rome, his enemies falsely accused Apollonius of black magic. He refuted the charges in a stirring speech, then vanished from his prison cell. He briefly reappeared to one of his disciples, but his death is not known.

Bacon, Roger (1214-1294): This English Franciscan friar, philosopher, and scientist was the first European to make and describe gunpowder. Bacon did not deny the possibility of real magic, but he considered it weak and unreliable compared to natural science. Despite his skepticism, Bacon was later mythologized as a great wizard. Through his secret science he created illusions, summoned spirits, transported people hundreds of miles, built a bridge of "solid air" across the English Channel and witnessed events far away. He once made an oracular head of brass, but a careless assistant spoiled the experiment and the head exploded.

After a well-meant use of his far-seeing device led to tragedy, Bacon renounced magic and lived his last years in a monastic cell built into the wall of a church, where he was later buried. Admiring contemporaries called Bacon *Doctor Mirabilis* — the Miraculous Doctor.

Cagliostro, Count Alessandro (1745-1795): In the eighteenth century, occult pretensions were simply part of the act for roguish courtier-adventurers, but Cagliostro outdid them all. In his years of promoting Egyptian Rite Freemasonry, he gave vast amounts of money to the poor despite no visible income; people said he could make diamonds by alchemy. Cagliostro also evoked the spirits of Voltaire and other famous men at a banquet, healed thousands by the laying on of hands — and charmed the socks off European high society.

Then a jealous rival produced a sleazy journalist and part-time blackmailer who said Count Cagliostro was really Giuseppe Balsamo, a cheap thug from Sicily. Cagliostro could not refute the claims. His brilliant career ended in disgrace and he died a prisoner of the Inquisition.

Chang Dao-Ling (flourished first century AD): The greatest wizard of Chinese history is sometimes called "the Taoist Pope." He gave Taoism an organized church and turned its priests into hucksters



of magic charms.

Chang Dao-Ling built his reputation as an exorcist. His magic sword could kill demons or trap them in pottery jars. Then Chang set his sights on immortality. To finance the project, Chang set up a town and taxed the inhabitants. He also charged nine bushels of rice for magical healings. Eventually he made the magical Pill of Immortality and shared it with the one disciple who had the faith — or stupidity — to jump off a cliff with him. Both of them took the Pill and flew up to Heaven, where Lao Tzu, the legendary founder of Taoism, made Chang Dao-Ling the master of all spirits.

Chang's descendants inherited his stature as the patriarchs of Taoism. They ruled a section of western China as a semi-independent, semi-theocratic state for many centuries. The patriarchy moved to Taiwan after the Communist Revolution. Chang's heirs still own his magic sword and guard hundreds of trapped demons. Ordinary Chinese employ the charms designed by Chang Dao-Ling. A picture of Master Chang riding through the sky on his pet tiger is said to keep evil spirits away from a home.

Crowley, Aleister (1875-1947): The twentieth century's most notorious and influential self-proclaimed sorcerer was the child of psychotically strict Fundamentalist parents. At a young age, he decided his mother was right: he was a child of the Devil. Crowley loved scandal, billing himself as "the Beast 666." The press responded by dubbing him "the Wickedest Man in the World."

As protegé and later rival of S. L. "MacGregor" Mathers in the Golden Dawn, Crowley virtually rewrote Western ceremonial magic. He also gave it an ideology and metaphysics of his own invention, complete with a short gospel channelled from a spirit called Aiwass: *The Book Of The Law,* in which Crowley proclaimed the end of the Judeo-Christian "Aeon of Osiris" and the dawning of a new "Aeon of Horus." At the heart of Crowley's doctrine lay the Motto of Thelema: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."

Believers credit Crowley with feats such as letting the arch-demon Choronzon possess him and turning the poet Victor Neuberg into a donkey. His non-occult achievements include translating Baudelaire, writing poetry and a pretty good occult novel called *Moonchild,* world-class mountaineering, and heroin addiction. He died peacefully, in genteel poverty. His funeral was bizarre.

Dee, Dr. John (1527-1608): This physician, mathematician, and general genius devoted his life to seeking knowledge of the spirit world through scrying. For his troubles, a mob burned his house down.

Dee himself was no good as a seer, despite receiving a magic crystal from an angel. His most successful scryer was a part-time alchemist and full-time rogue named Edward Kelley. Through a long and stormy partnership, Dee recorded many volumes of Kelley's conversations with spirits. The spirits had a great deal to say: invocations in Enochian, the alleged language of angels; strange cures for minor ailments; and much windy occult lore about the Astral Plane. Unfortunately, the spirits never told where the two men could find some much-needed money. Despite occasional appointments as astrologer, alchemist, and spymaster to Queen Elizabeth and other monarchs and nobles, Dee often lived in poverty.

Flamel, Nicholas (1330-1418?): This Parisian scribe and bookseller found a book of alchemy and followed its instructions. He soon became immensely rich and endowed numerous hospitals and churches. Legend says he and his wife Perennella actually faked their deaths, for Flamel made the Elixir of Life as well as the Philosopher's Stone. His house in Paris remains a place of pilgrimage for would-be alchemists and Hermetics.

Levi, Eliphas (1810?-1870): Pseudonym of Alphonse Louis Constant, a defrocked French priest and artist who became the most famous occultist of the nineteenth century. His books, such as *Dogma And Ritual Of High Magic, The Key To The Mysteries,* and *History Of Magic,* popularized both kabbalism and the notion of the Astral Plane among European occultists. Indeed, Levi coined the term "occultism."

Although Levi gave lessons in occultism, he did not say he was a practicing sorcerer. He did say an admirer once talked him into summoning the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana. The experiment gave ambiguous results: a spirit briefly appeared and knocked Levi unconscious, but Levi didn't know if it was the ghost of the famous mage.

Nostradamus (1503-1566): Pseudonym of Michel de Notre-Dame, a physician and astrologer who became Europe's most famous seer. He produced a series of four-line poems (the "Centuries" — 100 per collection) whose remarkably opaque imagery is supposed to contain prophecies of world events far into the future, including the End of the World. Nostradamus also wrote a book of recipes for jams, cosmetics, and cough drops.

Paracelsus (1490?-1541): Pseudonym of Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, a German physician and alchemist. On the one hand, Paracelsus introduced the medical use of opium and zinc oxide to Europe, argued that alchemists should seek medicines instead of gold, and chided his fellow doctors for blindly following Classical authorities instead of looking to see what really worked. On the other hand, he wrote about elementals and produced symbolic gibberish no different from other alchemists of his day.

Paracelsus's aggressive contempt for his fellow doctors made him extremely unpopular with them (and led to the coining of the word "bombastic"). They used their wealth and influence to hound him from town to town. Despite winning international fame as Europe's most successful healer, Paracelsus died in poverty.

In legend, Paracelsus owned a magic sword whose crystal pommel held a bound spirit and the Elixir of Life (see below). He's also the purported author of a manuscript telling how to make a magic mirror.

Pythagoras (flourished sixth century BC): This philosopher brought Egyptian and Babylonian mathematics to Greece, discovered the dodecahedron, and found the mathematical basis of musical harmony. He also established a cult-like school of philosophy that used the pentagram as its symbol. Pythagoras argued the Universe operates by numbers and ratios. He also taught pacifism, vegetarianism, and reincarnation. The Roman Republic suppressed the school. His later followers ascribed the usual miracles to Pythagoras, such as stopping plagues, and said he was the son of the god Apollo.

Solomon (flourished tenth century BC): In real life, King Solomon briefly turned Israel into a major regional power. He is credited with writing the Biblical books of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon. Legend expanded on his wisdom and splendor to make him the ultimate Magus, whom God himself gave mastery over all the spirits and powers of nature. Some famous Renaissance grimoires were attributed to Solomon himself. More legends center on Solomon's seal and ring, with which he bound demons to serve in building the Jerusalem Temple and imprisoned rebellious djinns in brass bottles.

Solomon had a weakness for women, though. Like any Middle Eastern monarch, he had many wives from many lands. His foreign wives led him into idolatry, and God punished him by taking away his magic powers.

ITEMS OF WONDER

Fantasy roleplaying games don't have a monopoly on strange and magical items — often they draw their inspiration from the mystical objects of Earth. The ones listed here are all real, or at least plausibly documented (as opposed to entirely legendary items like the Aegis, the Tarnkappe, or Excalibur). Mystics might hunt some of these Foci as ingredients or tools for special spells or rituals to make magic items; others might be magic items themselves.

Aztec Mosaic Skull. This is a real human skull encrusted with turquoise, with eyes of shell and wood. It might represent Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec god of night and black magic, in his role as the Lord of Misfortune.

The Angelic Crystal. The Elizabethan magus Dr. John Dee recorded that during one of his magical experiments, an angel gave him a magical crystal to help him contact the spirits more easily. Dee's assistant and medium, Edward Kelley, frequently warned they spoke to evil and deceptive spirits; Dee had more confidence. The Angelic Crystal is now in the British Museum.

The Crystal Skull of Lubaantun. This life-size human skull carved of rock crystal was allegedly discovered in a ruined Mayan city in 1927. Archaeologists still don't know if it's a real antiquity or a clever fake, since it's impossible to date. Other crystal skull models have been found in Maya country, but none display such skilled workmanship. If a light is applied at the "neck" of the Crystal Skull, the eyesockets glow.

Devil-Trap Bowls. For a while in some parts of Mesopotamia, people buried these pottery bowls under their thresholds or at the corners of their homes. The incantation written in a spiral around the inside of the bowl are meant to fix the attention of any evil spirit that comes near, and so prevent it from entering the house.

Holy Blood. More than one church in Europe claims to possess an actual sample of the blood of Jesus, caught in a crystal vial. The Holy Blood forms the centerpiece of a yearly parade (usually Good Friday), on which occasion the blood miraculously re-liquefies. Skeptics say that the "Holy Blood" is really a faked-up glop that liquefies when shaken; science magazines publish recipes. But what if one of these relics is real? It would be *the* most powerful Christian magical artifact *ever* — surpassing even the Holy Grail. (And at least one Science Fiction story is based on fetching DNA from Holy Blood for cloning, like *Jurassic Park!*)

The Hope Diamond. This jewel is unique: a steel-blue diamond that fluoresces deep, bloody red in ultraviolet light. Legend says the diamond is cursed. The story goes that the Hope was cut from the diamond eye of an Indian idol, and the goddess Sita destroys every owner of the diamond. In fact, a remarkable number of the Hope's owners died from murder, suicide, or violent accident, and one went

mad. The Smithsonian Museum now displays the Hope diamond, so its current owner is the United States Government. 'Nuff said?

Madame Blavatsky's Apport Teasets. Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy, never worried about being short a teacup, saucer, or set of sugar tongs; depending on the story, she either materialized them by psychic power, or her immortal Tibetan teacher teleported the needed item to her. The Theosophical Society owns and reveres many items of her magically-produced tableware.

Sword Of Paracelsus. The great doctor and alchemist owned a sword with a crystal pommel engraved with the word AZOTH, Paracelsus' word for the life principle. Legend says the pommel was also the stopper for the hollow hilt of the sword, in which Paracelsus kept the Elixir of Life. Modern scholars say Paracelsus' great magical medicine was laudanum — tincture of opium — but then, modern scholars don't know everything.

"Venus" Figures. Paleontologists find hundreds of these little stone statues in European and Middle Eastern caves where Stone Age humans once lived. The figurines depict women with huge breats and hips. No one knows exactly what they were used for, but they certainly had something to do with fertility.

Vintrasian Host. The nineteenth century cult leader Pierre Vintras claimed he miraculously produced Communion wafers stained with the blood of Christ. The occultist Eliphas Levi inspected three of these Hosts, however, and claimed the alleged blood formed Satanic symbols.

MYSTIC EVENTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

At the start of the twentieth century, European mysticism gathered in two main groups. The Golden Dawn was a single occult society. It collected the older traditions of Hermetic magic and re-cast them for a new age. For all its impact on Western mysticism, though, the Golden Dawn had no impact on world politics... as far as anyone knows. Darker, wilder strains of myth and magic coalesced in Germany. Few people now remember the loose collection of occult societies and crackpot cults that appeared and disappeared between 1900 and 1938, but they helped spawn Nazism, a force that would shake the world.

The end of the Golden Dawn and the Nazi regime didn't end magic, or the fear of magic. In the 1980s, fears of an international Satanist conspiracy swept the United States. The hysteria sent people to jail. Modern skepticism, hah. Mysticism is forever.

Hermetic Order Of The Golden Dawn

The most famous mystic order of the last century began with a mystery. In 1880, an Anglican clergyman bought a coded manuscript from a London bookseller's stall. An accompanying letter in German said to contact one "Sapiens Donabitur Astris" (S. D. A.) for the code, by way of a Fraulein Anna Sprengel in Germany. The clergyman passed the manuscript to two Masonic friends, the doctors Woodman and Wynn Westcott. They contacted S. D. A. and received the code. The deciphered manuscript outlined the rituals for a mystic order and gave basic kabbalistic and Hermetic lore.

S. D. A. advised Westcott and Woodman to expand on the rituals. They brought in a fellow Freemason, S. L. "MacGregor" Mathers, who in turn recruited the poet W. B. Yeats. These became the founders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1888.

The Order grew quickly and attracted many of the British Isles's leading mystics and writers. Notable members of the Order included the occultist A. E. Waite; the scholar of Buddhism, Allan Bennett; supernatural horror writers Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood; and Mathers' protegé, Aleister Crowley. Mathers emerged as leader of the Order by 1900.

The Golden Dawn's system of magic fused several Western traditions of ceremonial magic: the demonology of the *Key Of Solomon* and *Lemegeton;* the kabbalism of A. E. Waite and the *Sacred Magic Of Abra-Melin The Mage;* the Enochian angel magic of Dr. John Dee; and material channeled by Mrs. Mathers. Astrology, geomancy, scrying, and astral travel further seasoned the mix. Members consecrated their own rod, dagger, sword, cup, pentacle, and a Rosy Cross sigil. The Order's rituals included both practical magic and purely theurgic, spiritual rites to contact one's "higher self." Different cere-

monies might require differently-colored robes.

Mathers's increasing interest in black magic and autocratic style sparked conflict within the Order. In 1903, A. E. Waite and his followers left the Order to establish their own Golden Dawn group, which eschewed practical magic for a strict Christian Kabbalism. A power struggle between Crowley and Mathers led to Crowley founding his own group, the Argenteum Astrum, in 1905. Yeats, Machen, and Westcott resigned in 1905, too, and a Dr. Felkin renamed the shrunken London branch the Stella Matutina. Mathers remained the leader of a rump Golden Dawn in Paris until his death in 1917.

The Golden Dawn was dead, but various spinoff groups lasted decades longer. The Argenteum Astrum became particularly important because of Crowley's own work to synthesize and expand the Hermetic tradition. More controversially, Crowley introduced sexual rites into the Argenteum Astrum's practices, connecting that group to the *Ordo Templi Orientalis* (or O. T. O.), which specialized in sexual magic. Occult writer Dion Fortune, another Golden Dawn member, created her own Society of the Inner Light, which promoted another version of the Order's magic and doctrines.

Most Western ceremonial magic still follows Golden Dawn models. For example, when Gerald Gardner revealed or invented the religion of Wicca (take your pick), its sacred and magical rituals drew heavily on Golden Dawn models. (Appropriately, W. B. Yeats was an important figure in the revival of interest in folklore and "Old Religion" that helped prepare the way for Wicca, as well as a founder of the Golden Dawn.) From Gardner and Wicca, Golden Dawn rites have spread into the entire Neopagan movement, and the magic promoted by New Age mystics.

Occult Nazis

Nazism's roots lie deep in German Romanticism. Philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche exalted Will as the essence of reality. Artists like Wagner were fascinated with legends of ancient Germanic heroes, from Sigurd of the Volsungs to knights questing for the Holy Grail. German ethnologists such as Max Müller translated Hindu epics and philosophical texts, unwittingly introducing the idea of racial purity: the Brahmins of India justified their privileges through their supposedly pure "Aryan" blood. Romanticism itself was an attack on reason — a demand for a mythic, magical world of grand passions and epic struggles.

One of the first Germans to build a mystic order around these notions was Guido von List. Obsessed with German paganism and folklore, von List invented an ancient, secret line of German priests, the Armanen, of which he was the last survivor... but other people could now join his "Armanen Society." Von List may have been the first to use the swastika as a symbol of German racial purity. The Armanen Order dissolved after von List's death in 1919.



The Viennese occultist Doctor Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (or Adolf Lanz; he invented his own doctorate and connection to the Baron de Liebenfels) started his own lodge, the New Templars. Lanz was obsessed with Grail legendry and medieval knighthood. His occult system of "Ariosophy" incorporated bits of every occult or pseudo-scientific doctrine available, from astrology to diet reform, and likewise used a swastika flag. The New Templars wanted to restore the "Ario-heroic" master race and protect it from contamination by lesser races. The Jews were, of course, one of the lowest races and most deserving of extermination. Lanz claimed Hitler was his disciple, though they only met once, in 1909.

The Germanen Order drew most of its inspiration from von List and Freemasonry, though the group was violently anti-Masonic: Germanen doctrine held that Freemasonry was a tool of international Jewry. Initiation rites featured white robes, horned helmets, spears, swords, Wagner music, and a sacred flame. A splinter group became active in right-wing politics, with ties to the group that Hitler turned into the Nazi Party.

Many other mystic societies flourished as well, devoted to Germanic mythology, runes, and other "Aryan" subjects. Perhaps the strangest was the Vril Society, or Luminous Lodge, which flourished in Berlin in the 1930s (see page 164).

Although Hitler exploited these groups in his rise to power, and certainly drew ideas from them, he never joined any mystical order. When the Nazi

Party came to power, he suppressed groups like the Vril Society and New Templars. Hitler dismissed men like Lanz as "politically ineffective," but still he didn't want any competing sources of doctrine.

Heinrich Himmler was by far the most explicitly mystical member of the Nazi high command. He ran the SS like a cult. His commanders met in a castle, in a round chamber full of Grail and astrological symbolism. SS soldiers performed mystical exercises to develop their strength of will, a force itself considered magical. The SS eugenics program — breeding the "purest" Aryans available like cattle, to eliminate "contamination" from other races — was meant to concentrate and revive ancestral, long-suppressed magical powers as well as blonde hair and blue eyes. Himmler also recommended that his Aryans conceive children in cemeteries, to reincarnate long-dead Nordic heroes. The *Ahnenerbe* or SS "Ancestral Research Unit" conducted archaeological expeditions in hopes of finding traces of the primal German master race; mystical theories sent them looking in Tibet as well as Europe. When the SS failed to find mystical Aryan supermen in Tibet, pure Aryan soldiers were beheaded and their heads used in attempts to contact mystic masters in the spirit world.

The revolt against reason failed. The SS meditations and breeding programs didn't give them magic powers. The Ahnenerbe never found the mystic relic to make Germany invincible. Deputy Führer Rudolph Hess flew to Britain because an alignment of planets said he could negotiate a truce; he became a prisoner of war instead. Force of will and heroic struggle couldn't defeat the cold logic of supply lines, manpower, American industrial might, and the Russian winter. The most ambitious magical experiment in history ended with Germany in ruins.

The Nazis stayed loyal to myth and magic to the end. Hitler killed himself on April 30 — *Walpurgisnacht,* the Witch's Sabbath. And as the Third Reich crumbled, Nazi leaders organized cells of terrorists and saboteurs to harass the Allied occupiers, a plan they named Operation Werewolf. This final attempt also failed, slain with silver — the money of the Marshall Plan that rebuilt West Germany as a prosperous democracy.

But America isn't immune to magical hopes and fears either....

The Satanic Cult Conspiracy

They sacrifice babies. They corrupt teenagers through heavy metal music. They infiltrate society at every level. They're the Satanists and they're out to (drum roll please) *rule the world!*

In the 1980s and 90s, many people (including some police and psychiatrists) believed in a network of Satanic cults secretly operating throughout America and perhaps the world. The "Satanic Cult Crime" model went like this:

Satanic cults continue for generations. Members use atrocious physical and psychological abuse to brainwash their children into becoming loyal cult members in turn. Female members become "breeders," bearing infants for the cult to sacrifice. Cult members try to become social leaders — doctors, lawyers, politicians, even clergymen — both to protect the cult's secrecy and to twist society toward greater evil.

Outside the supersecret inner cults are haloes of Satan-worshipping criminals, non-criminal public cults such as San Francisco's Church of Satan, and soft-core promotional/recruitment devices such as rock music and (of course) a certain well-known Fantasy role playing game — all to lure the unsuspecting away from Christian virtue and into occultism and immorality, making them more receptive to the promise of power from Satan.

Cult crime theorists also frequently tied the cults to Nazis and Neo-Nazis, serial killers and mass murderers, drug cartels, terrorism, cattle mutilation, alleged sexual abuse in preschools, and in fact anything else they didn't like.

Rumors of Satanists are nothing new, but they gained new respectability in 1980. A woman suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) told her therapist about rituals in which hooded figures, including her parents, sacrificed infants and ate their flesh, raped her, beat her, made her eat excrement, and other revolting acts. The psychiatrist wrote a bestselling book. Numerous other therapists soon reported similar stories from other MPD patients. The patients' accounts agreed in virtually every detail — proof of a nation-wide network of cults.

Skeptics saw problems with the cult model. Where were the remains? Many police insisted that the cults' thousands of victims couldn't vanish without a trace. No murder victim was ever conclusively tied to a cult. Police also investigated families of "cult survivors" and never found evidence of Satanism or criminal activity. No disaffected cult members ever blew the whistle in hopes of getting rich off the movie rights.

The MPD patients' accounts were suspect as well. People with MPD have a knack for saying what people want to hear. That first psychotherapist to produce a "cult survivor" story was an extremely conservative Catholic who baptised his patient a Catholic as part of her therapy, and later married her. He could be presumed to take special interest in anything a patient said that smacked of Satanism.

The first "survivor" stories were widely spread through newspapers and talk shows. Some psychologists openly accused their colleagues of prompting their MPD patients to tell cult stories. The lurid details were readily available through previous accounts and the movies. At the very least, these psychologists suggested you should take what a psychotic patient says with a grain of salt.

Some skeptics added that the Satanic cult crime model used exactly the same story elements as "subversion myths" of the past. Blaming social problems and insecurity on shadowy Enemies Among Us is nothing new. Stories of human sacrifice, rape, sexual perversion, ritual degradation, diabolical brainwashing, and secret plots were also told back in the nineteenth century — but the evil conspirators were Catholics or Jews. Promoters

even had "survivors" telling their stories in pamphlets and the public lecture circuit.

In short, most psychologists and police officers decided the cult crime model told more about popular fears than about the causes of MPD. The fad faded. Few Americans now believe in the Satanic Cult Conspiracy.

In a game world, of course, the Satanic cult crime model can be real in every detail. The uses are obvious. A cult is taking over a town/summoning a demon lord to father a child/trying to kill a local paragon of virtue/and so on. DNPC is kidnapped for sacrifice. Perhaps the DNPC is a brainwashed cult survivor, living a normal life — except when the phone call comes with the code word to trigger the cultist personality. Movies provide a wealth of lurid ideas. Dennis Wheatley's "Black Magic" novels, such as *Gateway To Hell* and *To The Devil — A Daughter* virtually invented the World Satanic Underground. The TV series *Friday The Thirteenth* presented a milieu of secret Satanists, as well as many intriguing items of evil magic.

With real magic and demons, all the skeptical objections to the cult crime model go away. Bodies? Demons take them. Brainwashing more effective than any known to science? It's mind control magic. And of course if the Satanists really infiltrated the police, naturally investigations would go nowhere.

On the other hand, there are interesting story possibilities if the Satanic Underground isn't real — but people think it is. A town full of hysterical people convinced that *someone* among their neighbors is a murderous, all-corrupting Satanist is a powder keg waiting to explode. Heroes must either discover any genuine sinister goings-on, (which may or may not be the work of Satanists), or calm the townsfolk before somebody gets hurt. It should be an unusual challenge.

If you decide to use the Satanic Cult Conspiracy, play up the self-degradation of the cultists and how completely they oppose basic standards of decency and civilized behavior. The cultists cannot simply be people who like grotesque church decorations and the occasional orgy. In modern America, where Christianity — of whatever denomination — no longer has a monopoly and many people are secular, Satanism won't inspire much horror simply from being "the opposing team."



GLOSSARY



The Ultimate Mystic uses many terms borrowed from real occult beliefs, or invented to translate mystical concepts into a form gamers can use. Most are defined at some point in the text, but the reader may find this quick guide useful.

Abrahamic Traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and smaller religions spun off from them. Also, their associated mythologies, which often have very little to do with actual religious doctrines.

Alchemy: A system of *Natural Magic* based on chemical manipulations of substances, in hopes of giving them magical powers. The Philosopher's Stone, a catalyst that magically turns lead into gold, is the best-known goal of alchemy.

Amulet: A magical object intended to protect its owner from harm. Amulets take many forms, but most can be worn.

Angels: The spirits who serve God in the *Abrahamic* religious complex. Officially angels are all good, but the Abrahamic traditions include angels responsible for death and destruction. The Bible even describes God as sending "lying angels" to deliver false prophecies. Other religions, such as Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, include spirits pretty much the same as angels.

Arcanum: A style of magic. Arcana are distinguished from each other by their theories about how magic works, the tools and techniques they use to cast spells, and (often) their cultural background. In Fantasy games, arcana often specialize in particular applications of magic, such as *Divination* or *Necromancy.*

Astral Body: An invisible, intangible "spirit body" a mage can detach from his physical body and use as a vehicle for his consciousness. Astral bodies travel at near infinite speed and are virtually undetectable and unstoppable except by magic, but they cannot affect the physical world.

Occult lore says astral bodies are made of *Ectoplasm.* Everyone has one, and people wander in their astral bodies when they dream. A silver cord connects the astral and physical bodies; it breaks at the physical body's death. Souls may hang around in their astral bodies after the physical body's death as a ghost. Eventually the soul sheds the astral body, which either evaporates or becomes a mindless haunt.

Astral Plane: A dimension made of a kind of "spiritual matter," or else of pure thought. People who know how can use the Astral Plane to reach other dimensions. Dreams happen on the Astral Plane, whose substance is extremely susceptible to influence by thought.

Astrology: The doctrine that arrangements of the Sun, Moon, and planets in the signs of the Zodiac influences events on Earth. Astrology is a major sources of Western Mainstream Occultism and Hermetic Theurgy.

Atavism: Spirits associated with raw emotion and unconscious drives, often imagined in totem-like animal forms. Pain, violence, hate, and fear create hideous, twisted atavisms. Black magicians may deliberately create such atavisms and use them to attack their enemies.

Cosmic Entity: Creatures more powerful, but more abstract, than the gods found in mythology. Cosmic entities embody fundamental aspects of reality, such as Time or Entropy. Although cosmic entities may become the principle deities of religions, they do not require worship and are older than the world.

Demon: Any evil spirit.

Devil: Often a synonym for demon. This work restricts the term to evil spirits of the *Abrahamic* traditions.

Dimension: A "dimension" is really just some quantity that can be measured, such as length, duration, temperature, or Gross National Product. Thanks to generations of comic books and occultists who thought that ghosts operated in "the Fourth Dimension," the term is also used for other universes or realities. Also called a Cosmos, World, or Plane.

Divination: Magic used to gain information. Divination includes mystical techniques of detection and location (such as dowsing for water), extrasensory perception (such as crystal-gazing), *Occult Sciences,* and rites to contact the gods or at least learn their will.

Ectoplasm: A form of spiritualized matter or materialized spirit, more "subtle" and "finely divided" than regular matter. Ghosts, astral bodies and demons, among other things, are made of ectoplasm.

Elemental: A spirit embodying a state of matter or natural condition, such as fire elementals, earth elementals, and so on. Confusingly, some occultists use "elemental" to mean a spirit created by strong emotion, pain, or violence. (This book calls such spirits *Atavisms.*)

Schools of magic based on a particular kind of matter or energy, such as earth magic, air magic and light magic, are often called "elemental" styles.

Faerie: A catch-all category for supernatural creatures that seem too tied to the material world to be spirits, and/or too morally ambiguous to be angels

or demons.

God: A powerful spirit from a mythology, but not a truly supreme being like a *Cosmic Entity.* Mythological gods are tied to particular cultures; though their power is great, it remains finite.

Grimoire: A book that gives instructions for spells. Hardly any of the real grimoires were written by their claimed authors.

Hermetic Theurgy: Western ceremonial magic, as described in *Grimoires* such as the *Key Of Solomon* or Agrippa's *Three Books Of Occult Philosophy*. It combines Classical Theurgy, Kabbalism, Medieval demonology, and other forms of ritual magic.

High Magic: Magic that harnesses truly cosmic energies through pure force of will (perhaps with the cooperation of various dimension lords).

Kabbalism: Jewish mysticism combining esoteric theology and cosmology with magical beliefs about numbers, letters, words, and spirits; an important source of Western Mainstream occultism and Hermetic Theurgy. Also spelled "Cabalism" or "Qabalism," depending on how popular or pretentious the writer is.

Lycanthrope: A werewolf. People who change into other animal forms are *Therianthropes.*

-Mancy: A suffix indicating a fortune-telling method; thus, geomancy (telling fortunes through a handful of dirt) or pyromancy (throwing symbolic objects into a fire and seeing which ones burn first). By extension, -mancy is used in the names of magic specialties, such as "necromancy" for magic of death and the dead, or pyromancy for any magic dealing with fire, not just fortunetelling. (The proper suffix should be -turgy or -urgy, "working," but nobody's likely to change at this point.)

Mantra-vidya: An Indian term for sorcery: "Word Lore."

Natural Magic: Magic that relies upon the magical energies and properties of plants, animals, minerals, and other sorts of matter.

Necromancy: Magic of the dead. Originally it meant summoning spirits of the dead to ask them questions. Since most traditions held that calling up a ghost required exhuming the body and doing disrespectful things to it, necromancy came to include death spells, zombie animation, and other abominations. Necromancy in the old sense is still practiced, though: it's called "Channeling."

Occult Sciences: Techniques of *Divination* based on the premise that a cosmic plan reveals itself through easily-observed phenomena, such as the position of the planets (*Astrology*), the arrangement of Tarot cards, or the lines on a person's hand. Occult sciences can develop complicated systems of interpretation and classification that look like science, but they're justified by their inner logic rather than real observation and experimentation. Mystics use that inner logic in attempts to control destiny insteady of reveal it. *Ritual Magic* often uses occult sciences to explain why spells work.

Plane: A universe, cosmos or dimension.

Ritual Magic: Magic that uses complex rituals to command spirits or to augment the magician's own spirit to give it magical powers. Also called Astral Magic or Spirit Magic.

Sadhana: "Gaining," an Indian word for mystical powers acquired through meditation and ascetic practices.

Sanctum Sanctorum: Latin, "Holy of Holies." A wizard's headquarters — so called because of its inaccessibility by ordinary folk.

Sephiroth: Hebrew, "Emanations." The stations on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, each one representing an attribute of divine power.

Shamanism: An ancient style of magic and religion. A shaman places himself in a trance, during which his soul can visit other worlds and commune with spirits.

Talisman: An object that confers some magical power on its owner or user — usually an "active" power such as good luck, wealth or control of a spirit, to distinguish talismans from "passive" protective *Amulets.*

Taoist Theurgy: A system of ritual magic based on Taoist theories about the endless transformation of matter and energy. Core concepts are the Five Elements (Earth, Fire, Water, Metal, and Wood), the I Ching (a Chinese fortune-telling system), Yin and Yang (the fundamental, dual principles of existence), and the power of written words.

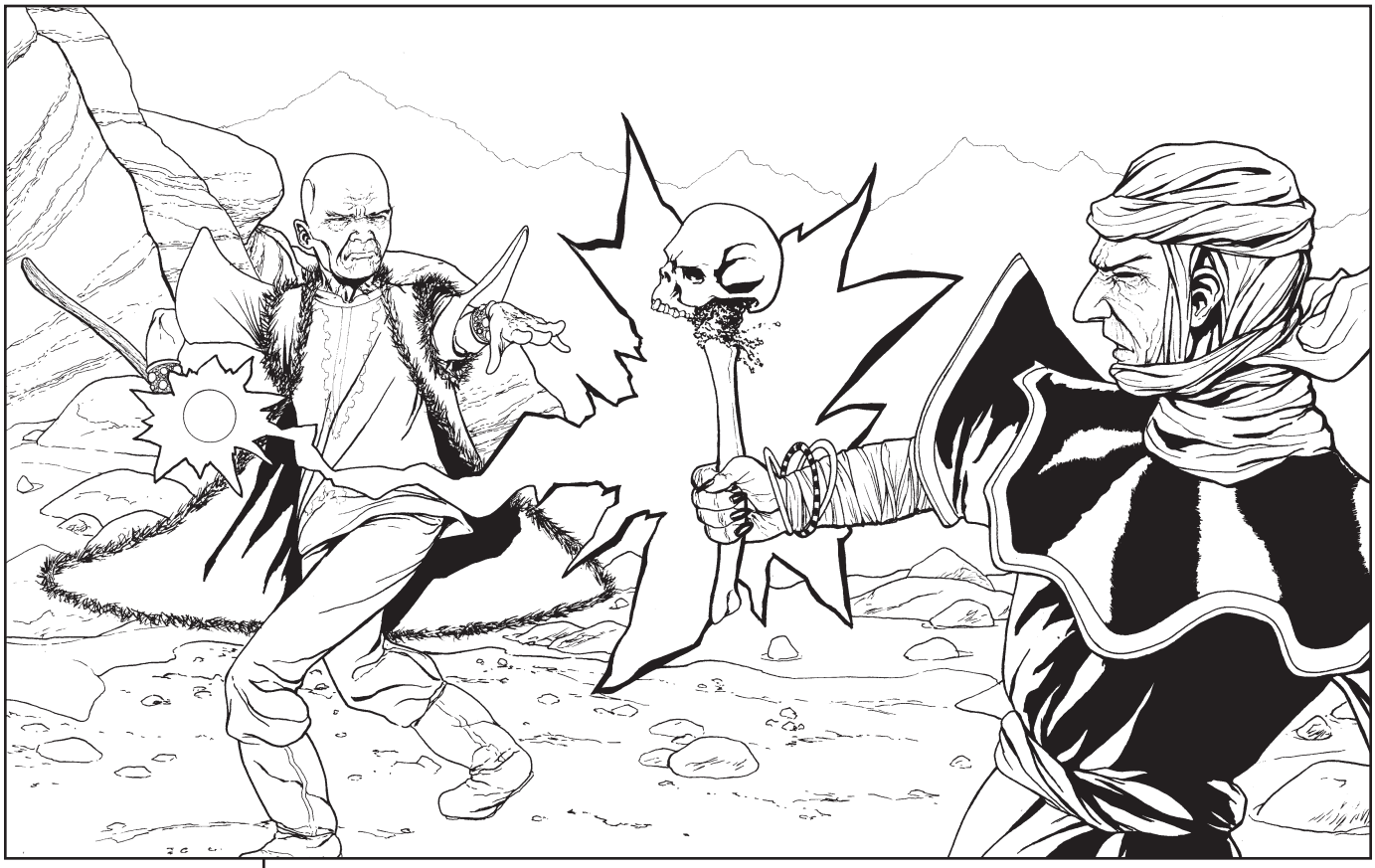
Thaumaturgy: Greek, "Wonder-Working." In general, magic that affects the physical world for practical goals. More specifically, the quick, combat-oriented style of High Magic most often seen in comic books. Thaumaturgy is characterized by waving your hands, calling on various dimension lords, and simple luminous forms as the perceivable effect of spells.

Therianthrope: General term for a curse that turns a human into a ravening animal or beast-man. "Lycanthropy" only refers to wolf-men. In folklore around the world, people also turn into many other sorts of animals, such as hyenas, foxes, tigers, leopards, bears, snakes, and sharks.

Theurgy: Greek, "God-Working." Classically, magic devoted to religious ends such as prophetic visions. More generally, Theurgy includes all magic that deals with spirits and the soul, such as astral travel and obtaining magic power from spirits. Most forms of ritual magic are theurgies.

Tree Of Life: An icon of kabbalism, showing the ten "emanations" of god from the primal, unmanifest Godhead to the material world. It is the chief filing system for symbols in Western Mainstream Occultism.

Tulpa: A synthetic person magically created out of pure thought. According to Tibetan occultism, someone skilled in the proper meditations can create a person just by imagining that person very strongly for a long time. Tulpa creation is one of the most advanced of magical arts.



Voodoo: Magic and religion of Afro-Caribbean cultures, based on a mixture of African religion and Catholic imagery. Possession by the gods is the most characteristic feature of "Voodoo" religions. Spellcasting is an integral part of all "Voodoo" faiths. Notable sects include Santería, Voudon, and Candomblé.

Witchcraft: This term has several meanings, depending on who you talk to. The most important are:

1) A mixture of traditional herb lore, midwifery, and simple folk charms, used by both rural and urban lower-class folk around the world.

2) Satanism. According to the witch-hunting churchmen and civic authorities of Renaissance Europe, the Devil gave his worshippers magical powers to work evil.

3) An innate magical power to cause harm to others, perhaps without knowing it; sometimes called "the Evil Eye." Folk cultures around the world know and fear this form of "witchcraft."

4) Wicca and its offshoots: neo-pagan cults inspired (sometimes very loosely) by fragments of ancient pagan lore. Many adherents of the "witch religions" now admit they are inventing a new religion based on old ideas, not literally reviving an old one. (The "scholarship" supporting claims for a unified "Old Religion" of Earth-Goddess worship pervading Europe is discredited, or at least controversial.)

5) In this book, any sort of magic based on a mixtures of folk religion, ritual magic, and natural magic. *Voodoo* is an example.

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The literature of magic, in comics, Fantasy fiction, nonfiction, and folklore is overwhelmingly vast. This is hardly an exhaustive listing.

OTHER GAMES

Dozens of role-playing games include magic, but few make magic a central part of a non-Fantasy setting. The games listed here are especially notable, mostly for their examples of secret occult subcultures.

Call Of Cthulhu (Chaosium). Spellcasting is only a minor part of this game, but the whole premise is that a horrific secret world of unearthly forces lurks just out of public view. If you want a strong horror element in a campaign's Occult World, you should definitely look at *Call Of Cthulhu* and its many supplements. It's the best game treatment of the Lovecraftian Slimy Unspeakables that inspired the Kings of Edom.

Kult (Metropolis Games). Another horror game of the "Reality is nothing like we believe" type. Some interesting notions, really creepy cults (in the supplements), and another take on the idea of an archetypal city dimension.

Mage: The Ascension (White Wolf Game Studio). This game not only presents magic in the modern world, it proposes a milieu in which mages powerfully influence the world yet stay utterly hidden from mundane humanity. Conflicts arise because different factions of mages hold incompatible views about how the world works. This game has many intriguing concepts despite flashes of New Age pretension. It and its many supplements are well worth reading. Gamemasters who want a powerful supernatural subculture for their campaign can mine other titles in White Wolf's "Storyteller" system for inspiration.

Nephilim (Chaosium). Chaosium's success with *Call Of Cthulhu* did not carry over to this new game. *Nephilim* works from the lightest elements of popular occultism — even an astrology chart to determine how the characters' powers wax and wane each day. Some of the spells might be worth cribbing, though.

Unknown Armies (Atlas Games). Another "mages battling for control of reality" game. Chiefly valuable for its creative styles of magic.

COMICS

Magic-oriented comics come in waves. Most of the titles listed are no longer published, but are available in compilation volumes. The titles listed here are simply some highlights; many comics feature magic to some degree.

Books Of Magic (DC Vertigo). Adventures of a very young wizard who has just discovered his powers and doesn't really know how to use them. Weird and wonderful.

Dr. Strange (Marvel). *The* definitive super-mage title. All the characteristic elements of super-mage adventures — lightshow spells with alliterative names, weird dimensions, cosmic entities, the works — come from this comic.

Ghost Rider (Marvel). The original Ghost Rider was about a man fused to a demon. The later Ghost Rider had a more complicated origin, which fortunately does not matter. A good example of a magic-based superhero operating in a grim and gritty Occult World — Super-Mage meets Dark Champions.

Hellblazer (DC Vertigo). Very grim title about John Constantine, a Heroic-level occult investigator who frequently needs new DNPCs.

Sandman (DC Vertigo). A look at Dream, a true cosmic entity, and how he and his fellows interact with humanity and each other. Sometimes enigmatic, always good.

Literally hundreds of Fantasy novels use wizards as protagonists or in their major supporting cast. The few listed here were included because GMs can draw specific material from their work.

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy (Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradisio*). "Inferno" is *the* classic guided tour of Hell. The other sections continue through Purgatory into Heaven, but are less interesting.

Bear, Greg. *The Infinity Concerto, The Serpent Mage.* Interesting version of Faerie and fairy folk.

Beckford, William. *Vathek.* If you're ready to go beyond Sinbad, Aladdin, and Ali Baba but the full *Thousand And One Nights* seems too intimidating, try this. It's the best Arabian fantasy ever written in English.

Blish, James. *Black Easter, The Day After Judgement* (also published in one volume as *The Devil's Day*). The only novels to present grimoire demonology, take it seriously, and push it to its logical, horrifying conclusion. Suggests what a Ritual Magician must do to get and keep his powers; also, a look at what might happen to the world if the heroes lose.

deLint, Charles. *Moonheart.* Celtic and Native American magic at work in contemporary Canada, interplanar conflict, and a great Sanctum Sanctorum.

Hodgson, William Hope. *The House On The Borderland.* An Irish house is the focus of creepy, enigmatic, cosmic forces. It would make a great Sanctum Sanctorum.

Hughart, Barry. *Bridge Of Birds, Story Of The Stone, Eight Skilled Gentlemen.* Very funny, and a wonderful introduction to Chinese myth and magic.

Lucan. *Pharsalia.* Mostly this is a satiric history of a Roman civil war, but Chapter Six includes Erichtho, a truly classic wicked witch and necromancer.

Niven, Larry and Pournelle, Jerry. *Inferno.* A science fiction writer goes through Hell in this updated version of Dante's classic. Good source material for Hell.

Weinberg, Robert. *A Logical Magician, A Calculated Magic.* Fluffy look at how supernatural creatures might adapt to the modern world — with a few deeper thoughts on where they come from and how they can be defeated.

Wheatley, Dennis. The "Black Magic" Novels. Dennis Wheatley's novels of noble heroes pitted against Satanism pretty much defined the Satanic Cult Conspiracy for the twentieth century. Wheatley was not a very good writer, but he was very popular in his day. His heroes often seem a little ridiculous, but his Satanists remain creepy — and a good model for incorporating a Black Magic Conspiracy into a campaign.

NONFICTION

Yes, this is the heavy stuff. One might even say ponderous. About a zillion books have been written about "real magic," but very few have anything worth a gamer's attention. Also look for books of mythology: this list includes only a few of the more widely useful sources.

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Cavendish, Richard (ed.) *Man, Myth And Magic: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Supernatural.* What it says.

—*Mythology: An Illustrated Encyclopedia.* What it says.

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Cummings, Richard. *The Alchemists: Fathers Of Modern Chemistry.* Light, popular introduction to European alchemy.

Davidson, Gustav. *A Dictionary Of Angels.* The definitive source for angels in literature, theology, and the occult. Nothing else even comes close.

Davis, Wade. *The Serpent And The Rainbow.* Good introduction to Voudon and its role in Haitian society. The movie inspired by the book is more lurid but a lot of fun too.

deCamp, L. Sprague. *Lost Continents.* Definitive survey of the Atlantis myth and its many Lost Civilization spinoffs. Describes some of the weirder people in nineteenth and twentieth century occultism.

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Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index Of Folk Literature.* Massive research guide to world mythology, organized by motifs such as "Dragons," "Magic Item Gained Through Test of Bravery," and the like.

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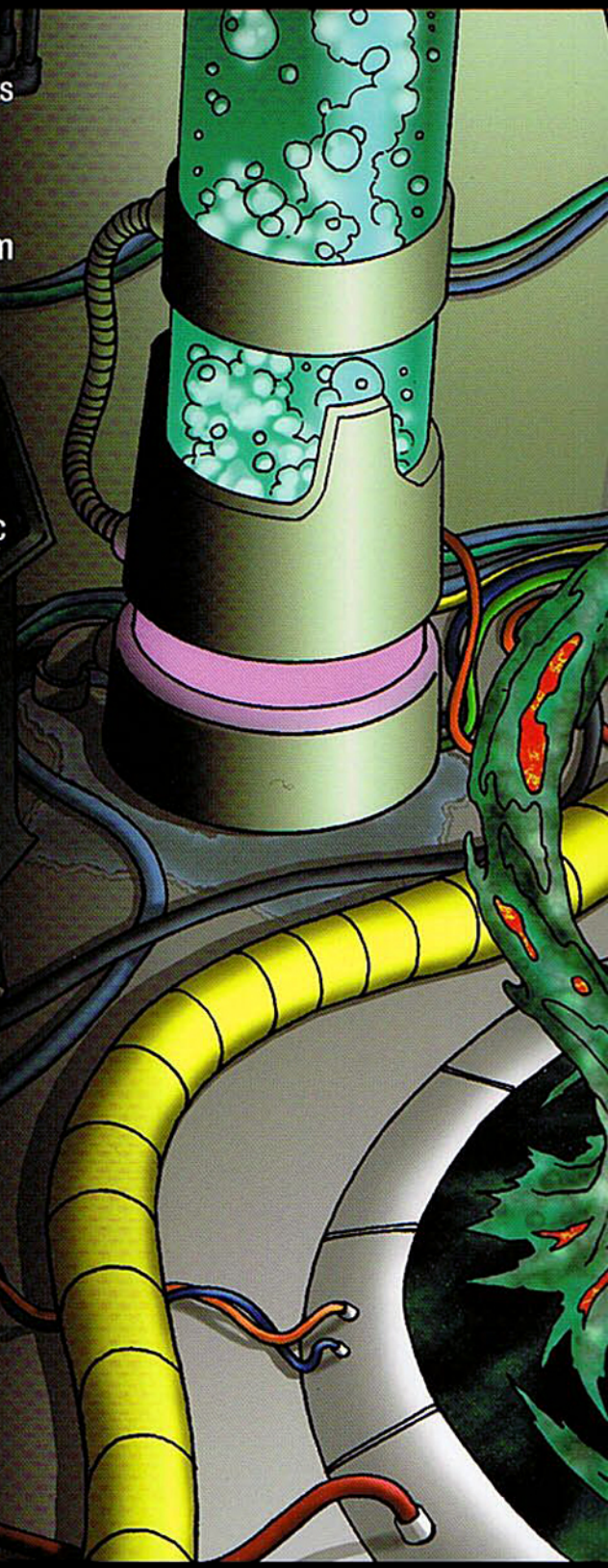
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