

THE TRADITIONS GATHERED 2



BLOOD AND DREAMS™

A Sourcebook for Mage: The Ascension®

www.roliste.com

CULT OF Ecstasy™

LEARNING TO FLY



"Is everybody in?"

"The ceremony is about to begin."

Jim Morrison, "Celebration of the Lizard"

By PHIL BRUCHTO

CREDITS

Written and Developed by: Phil Brucato

Edited by: Jennifer Hartshorn

Vice President in Charge of Production: Richard Thomas

Art Directors: Aileen E. Miles & Lawrence Snelly

Layout and Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles

Art: Daryll Elliott, Mark Jackson, Leif Jones, Heather J. McKinney, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook

Front Cover Art: Michael William Kaluta

Front and Back Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles

WRITER DEDICATIONS

To Jennifer Starling, for Burning Man.

To Heather & Laz, for sharing mad dances.

To Stefani Olsen, whose footprints showed me the path.

To Beth Fischl, for her own journey.

And to Wendy Blacksin, for everything.

Much Love to you All.

SPECIAL (BELATED) THANKS TO:

Rich "Machine God" Dansky, for playing sysop for Phil and Wendy's monster Mac.

Diane "Festive Feet" Zamojski, for inducing seizures with her flashing holiday cheer.

Mike and Staley "Home Wrecker" Krause, for hosting C-Day in their new house.

Erin "Saint Brigit" Kelly and Scott "Homeless Helper" Cohen, for robbing the rich and giving to the poor.

Jane "Culprit of Ecstasy" Palmer, for keeping the bag shut.

Aileen "Oh Fudge (Only I Didn't Say 'Fudge')" Miles, whose chocolate almost beat Godzilla.

Mike "God Damn Us Every One" Tinney, for his crippled Christmas spirit.

Todd "E-Mail Saturation God" Mayville, for what we'll all be missing when he leaves. :-(

Phil "Banquet-o-Crow" Brucato, for the big fat bird he found sitting on his desk on Black Wednesday.

The whole cast of White Wolf's Holiday on Ice, for having the freezing waterfall to empty out Phil's office.

And "Santa Stu" Wieck, for giving up the goodies again. It's not elves that make those cheeks glow rosy red!



735 PALM NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30001
USA

© 1999 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, World of Darkness, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages and Mage the Ascension are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wrath the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Verbena Tradition Book, Cult of Ecstasy Tradition Book, Dreamspeakers Tradition Book, Book of Shadows, Ascension's Right Hand, Vampire Players Guide, Axis Mundi the Book of Spirits, Book of the World, Book of Mirrors, Book of the Wyrms and Book of Madness are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

Order of Hermes is a trademark of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. and is used with permission. Bjornaer, Criamon, Dfedne, Flambeau, Jerbiton, Merinita, Quaesitor, Tylalus and Verdinius are trademarks of Atlas Games, are from the Ars Magica game, and are used with permission. Ars Magica is a trademark of Atlas Games.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. Reader discretion is advised.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.trp.storyteller

PRINTED IN THE USA.

CULT OF ECSTASY™

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: BEAR TO TOUCH	4
FIRST VERSE: FREEFALL	10
SECOND VERSE: PACES IN THE SMOKE	24
THIRD VERSE: FIREDANCE	40
FOURTH VERSE: ... FROM THE ANCIENT GALLERY	46
APPENDIX: ECSTATIC ARTS	58

STOP!!!

This book contains controversial subjects. It's a work of fiction, but it draws upon real-life practices. Some of these practices are pretty damned dangerous. Before continuing, you have two choices:

- 1: Close this book right now and put it away.
- 2: Deal with it like an adult.

This is fiction. You are not. And real life doesn't give soak rolls.
Thank you. The book will now continue. Have fun!



INTRODUCTION: FEAR TO TOUCH

I stood before a black cave, wanting to go in, and I shuddered at the thought that I might not be able to find my way back.

— Anonymous patient of Dr. Wilhelm Stekel, quoted in Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*



I am afraid.

Every day, I drive with windows closed. Pollution's bad for you. The wind might muss my hair, and then I'd look like a freak. I clutch my purse tight and hold the strap to foil would-be thieves. I listen to the news and think of all the bastards across the world who get away with murder. And I wonder when they'll choose to murder me. I keep my voice down, my eyes straight ahead. And I watch for the hammer from the sky, the butcher's mallet that will finally justify my fear.

Was I always this way? It's hard to tell. We grow up rightfully afraid; of strangers, of robbers, of mockery, of being left alone. We're afraid of pain and there's too much of that to go around. I think I was even afraid as a child. It's hard to remember why, but there are all too many reasons.

I'm not a coward. At least I don't think that I am. Later I will find that I am wrong, but for now I think I'm normal. I guess fear is normal. It's our natural coping skill. Like I said, there are reasons to be afraid. The world's too full of catastrophes.

Catastrophes like her.

She calls herself Aria. That's a song, I think. Her hair, unlike mine, is dark red. Long and tangled. The angles of her face are softly chiseled from freckled sunburned skin, but it's her eyes that scare me. Blue and bright and wide, as if she were ready to cry and laugh simultaneously. When I look into them, the world goes askew. Things tilt slightly, my fingers tingle, my palms itch. This familiar cafe pales behind Aria's presence. Suddenly, she's all that seems real. The music from the speakers (Bon Jovi, I think, but I could never tell) rises and engulfs her words. I strain to hear Aria but the music is too loud. She makes me feel in love, but better. Please God, tell me I'm not gay.

She walked up to me a few minutes ago and sat down like an old friend. "This seat's not taken, is it?" she asked as she slid it from the table and plopped down, spread-legged. Rude. My soda jiggled in the glass as she landed heavily. When I looked up, annoyed, a bit afraid, she stared at me and my little world went crack.

"Cassie," she said, "You look pathetic."

I don't know until later how she knows my name.

"Excuse me!" I asked, my tone just sharp enough to show that yes, I was insulted but too polite to tell her to go

fuck herself. My fingers slip in condensation on my soda glass. I'd been picking at my food and it'd gotten cold too. I lifted the glass casually, like I was used to hippie freaks accosting me at lunch break: "Were you looking for a chair?"

"I've found what I'm looking for. The question is, have you? Obviously not."

"Do you mind?" The tone grew a deeper edge, the fighting knife edge girls cultivate at a young age. "I was eating lunch. If you want the chair, take it and go. Otherwise, please get lost." Finished, I look away.

"Cassie," she snapped. Her voice had the same sharp tone. "Wake up."

I examined my meal. "Go away."

She reached down, took my chin, and lifted my face to hers. "Make me."

At her touch, my heart leaps into sudden overdrive. Would we fight? Here in the cafe? I panic, then notice she's smiling. And those eyes are all I want to see. The world tips on its axis, skews, and here we are.

"What do you want?" My voice is quiet now, even to me.

"Your attention."

She's nothing special, really. Not by the look of her. Let's call her mode of dress "generic bohemian": a loose black top, belly-bare. Denim jacket with the sleeves torn off. Gypsy skirt, amber, with wears and patches. You'd expect her to be dripping with jewelry—little crosses, Deadhead beads—but all she wears is a single nose ring that catches the light from the cafe window. As she talks, her fingers steeple and rest beneath her nose. Her nails are short, her fingers callused. Despite the glass-strewn street outside, Aria goes barefooted. Later I'll learn that she always does. No one stops her. And if she fears the glass, it doesn't show. She looks like a thousand trappy Deadhead chicks, the kind that sat and smoked while I took classes at GSU. She's nothing special. Except for her eyes—bright and alive. Crackling, almost, like she's seen the heart of the sun. I can't guess what this burnout wants with me, but when I met her gaze I suddenly didn't care.

"Go away," I repeat. Weak. Soft.

She lets go, trails her fingers across my chin. My face burns where they touch. "Trust me, you won't want me to."

Is my cheek twitching? Later I'll discover that I've got a nervous tic. It goes away in time, but for the moment I'm only vaguely aware of it. I felt stupid about it, though, and the fear shifted gears, freezing my face in what I hoped was a pleasant grin. Not a smirk, not a nervous smile. Just a friendly grin.

"So. Who are you? And why is my attention so important?"

"I'm Aria, and it's time to wake up. There's a part of you that's been sleepwalking for most of your life, and that part's gotten hungry. I can see it." She locks her fingers, leans back and cradles her head behind her. If she wears a bra, it doesn't show. She has bigger breasts than me, and spends more time outdoors.



This woman frightens me. She seems too awake to be harmless.

I'm rattled, off-guard. She can tell. "Cassie." Her voice is a soft command. "Listen to me. Let me explain, and then you can get up and leave if you want to."

"Explain, already."

She leans back and wraps her toes around the tabletop. Red tangles tumble across her face, but her eyes blaze through. Vaguely mocking.

"Who are you?"

"A friend. I've been watching you for a long time. You may not recognize me, but I know you've felt me watching."

"You're full of shit." I pull back, despite her magnetic gaze. "I've never seen you before. If you've been spying on me, I never noticed." The thought freaks me out a bit. How long has she been watching me? "Who the hell are you?" I repeat, "and why are you pestering me?"

"I'm opportunity, Cassie, a walking crisis. I'm a door that's just opened for you, but I won't stay open for long. I've been in love with you for years, but we've never met. You've never heard my voice, but you know me." Her voice drops as she shifts in her seat and leans in close. Her breath smells like mint. "and I know you."

Against my will, my heartbeat and breathing start to race. I swallow, but it takes forever. Like a cobra, she pins me to the chair with her eyes alone. "You don't know me," I protest, half-heartedly.

"I know you very well. Better than you know yourself, I think. I know your secrets. Every man you've laid, I've met. Every girl you've dreamed of kissing, I've seen. All the risks and dares you've taken, I've known about. The time you got drunk and went skinny dipping with Marcie in the fountain, the time you took that lipstick from WalMart, those first few off-campus parties you went to, that time you screwed around with Danny MacAllister at Sarah's, Jeff's birthday party, when you ate those hash brownies. I may not have been there, exactly, but when you fucked George in your bathtub while your parents slept in the room next door, I heard about it. I know you better than any of your so-called 'friends' do, and Cassie, I approve."

"So-called" friends is right. Marcie can't keep her mouth shut to save her life, apparently. Why'd she talk to this tramp? Aria knows way more than I'm comfortable with.

She pushes herself away from me suddenly. "But now you've grown chickenshit, Cassie. You're too worried about what so-and-so will think. You worry about AIDS, about pollution, about health insurance and bank balances and rent and a thousand other things. And it stifles you, Cassie. It's fucking killing you. The fear is like cement and you're drowning in it. In a year, you'll be just like all the other drones."

The shot hits too close to home. To hell with this chick. I shove my chair away from the table. "Go away. Just leave me alone." I try to sound cool, growling the words, but it doesn't work.

"If that's what you want." She stands. My belly freezes from the look she gives me and a sudden ringing in my ears drowns out everything but her voice. "But if I walk away now, you will never see me again. And you'll be left wondering for the rest of your life what you just gave up."

"What do you want?" My voice sounds tiny and strained. Aria grins: "A kiss."

"Here?"

"Here. Now. To hell with what anyone thinks but you and me."

I inhale. The breath trembles all the way to my lungs and shudders there, waiting. I swear I can feel sweat creeping out of my pores. All I can see are Aria's flashing eyes, so I close my own. In darkness, it's so much easier to decide. Without a word, I push myself out of my chair. It takes an eternity to rise to my feet, and I can feel each muscle shift, each joint flow then lock into place as I step into her arms. I keep my eyes closed as we press together. If others are staring, I don't want to know.

God, she kisses well. Too well. I'm lost.

Everyone avoids our eyes as the two lesbians pay the check and leave. Jesus, what have I just done?

.....

A FRIENDLY INTRODUCTION

Hello! It's your author. Since this is a game book, many things need to be spelled out in Plain English. Rather than wrap the narrative around some convoluted subjects, I'm just going to stick my nose in every now and then to tell you helpful stuff. Unusual subjects demand an odd approach.

This is the first of many intrusions. Some will be facts, others editorials. All of them will be helpful hints for understanding the Ecstasies, especially from a Storyteller's viewpoint. This isn't to say that the rest of the text isn't important. If anything, the story will tell you more about playing a Cultist than these sidebars could. But some things just have to be said in a straightforward fashion, so why screw around?

Call this the happy box. I do.

Before we continue, I want to clarify the following points:

- **Past/present/future tense shifts:** Yes, they're intentional. No, they're not mistakes. Ecstasies have a warped sense of time.
- **The Story itself:** Consider it a script of sorts. Although each Ecstasie's experiences will be different, the aspects of their common journey are often similar. Look for what is shown, not told.

And a few more things...

STEREOTYPES: TRUE AND FALSE

- Many stupid things have been said about the Cult. Some are true, most are not.
- **Cultists of Ecstasy are all a bunch of worthless hippies:** Totally false. The Ecstatics are visionaries, shamans, adventurers of the senses. Their Arts are as old as time, and Time itself is their toy. While they might appear stoned and irresponsible, it's because so few outsiders see things their way.
 - **All Cultists are addicts:** False. Some do get addicted to their own sensations, but they don't last long.
 - **Ecstatics are sex maniacs, dopeheads and dropouts:** False. While Cultists pursue sex, drugs, meditation, holistic living and visionquests as focusing tools, serious Ecstatics consider these to be sacraments, not hobbies.
 - **Cultists are irresponsible:** Quite false. While they regard "society's" rules with a take-it-or-leave-it abandon, many can foresee the consequences of their own actions. Those who don't know this have the lesson pounded into their thick heads by their mentors: *No mage operates in a vacuum.*
- Early Cultists realized how important structure was; no group built on total hedonism could survive for long. As societies became more repressed, Ecstatics rebelled and threw all the rules, including their own, out the window. In the '60s, a great revolution took place, and the Ecstatics led the charge. Sadly, the greatest of their kind fell to drugs, and following generations learned all the wrong lessons from their example. The Cult, and the world at large, lost a lot of ground because people lost sight of the consequences of their actions. Modern Ecstatics are trying to learn from their mistakes and have resurrected the old ways. The Code of Ananda is but one example of the way in which Cultists recognize the responsibilities their awesome powers confer.
- **Tantrik magick is the Cult's foundation:** False. Tantra, a system of balance between polarities, is one part of a larger whole. The Tradition's actual foundation, the Lakashim, is both simpler and more complex than Tantrik ritual.
 - **Cultists crave sensuality:** Very true.
 - **Cultists hate authority:** Also true. Given most authority figures' tendency to quash nonconformity, Ecstatics throughout time have been leery of rulers and governments — even their own.
 - **The Cult has no formal system of magical beliefs:** Untrue. Read on and learn...

At home, the fear hits me again. Solid, like a punch in the chest. My shoes clatter too loudly on the stairs. My keys jangle like tubular bells. Aria's bare feet make no sound. Her breathing, slightly husky, whistles softly through her nostrils.

What am I about to do with this woman? I've never done it before, but I can't deny I want to. Has anyone seen us come in together? Do we look like lesbians preparing for a tryst? If so, how can I ever face Shelly next door, and Jack and Ursul and Marcie? Can I stand it when they whisper behind my back? My key scrabbles for the lock I've opened a million times before, and the words to dismiss this woman form inside my throat.

"Look," I say, turning. The words are soft, more clicks than speech. I could end this now. Aria's spirit still lingers on my tongue. I fight the urge to spew it on the floor. Maybe we can do this later... It's not a good time...

Aria's hand reassures me. Warm and callused fingers brush my cold ones and the touch travels deep inside me. She lifts one finger to my lips, stops the words, and freezes me with those endless eyes. "No," she whispers, "You're ready now. Surrender your fear, Freefall." Leaning forward, she kisses me softly, lingering. The key meets the lock and clicks. The apartment door opens. The hinges cry out.

It's dark inside my apartment, but a bit of moonlight filters in past the shades. They're drawn, of course. I wouldn't want anyone to see inside my home.

"Come on in." The words are out. The door is open. Aria smiles. I step aside as she glides across the threshold.

Freefall. That sums up my feelings as I step inside and close the door.

AN ECSTATIC LEXICON

A fair amount of Tradition terminology comes from its roots. Two of the five founders of the original Seers of Chronos were Tantrik Divyas, so they used Sanskrit to define many of the early concepts. Other terms have been added over time.

Ananda — The sacred state of bliss and transcendence. Not Ascension, but a step toward it.

Blockhead — An outsider who doesn't get it and never will.

Chakra — Energy centers along the spine, through which mystick power flows. Various Eastern practices define either four or seven chakras; the latter correspond well with the locations of endocrine glands. Tantrik exercises (among others) stimulate energy flows through these centers. See *ojas*.

Code of Ananda — The ethic most Cultists live by, compiled during the Tradition's founding and taught as gospel by Ecstatic mentors.

Congrex — A mystick communion, sometimes sexual, sometimes not, which raises power and/or awareness through a shared bond.

Daemon — A common term for the Avatar. A Daemon, as opposed to "demon," is the inner inspiration, the muse, the Sacred Self.

Dakini — A Tantrik holy woman whose magickal powers flow from her sexual energies.

Diksham — The bond between mentor and student.

Divya — A Master mage, one who has accomplished the highest understandings (i.e., someone who has five dots in one or more Spheres).

Dreamline — A mystick communication which calls Ecstatics together during emergencies.

Jambo — A "formal" Cult gathering, often called to discuss some serious matter but enhanced with wild parties and affectionate greetings.

Kamamarga — The Paths of Ecstasy, aka foci; various means of reaching an ecstatic state, such as tripping, dancing, fasting, etc.

Lakashim — The Divine Pulse, or World Heartbeat, which resonates in all things. Ecstasy helps attune a person to the Lakashim, and magick flows from it.

Ojas — "Life force"; the inner power that Ecstatics refine through altered consciousness. One's personal Quintessence reserve, channeled through magicks like the Rush Prime Effect.

Okox — Communion with spirits, usually through trances and possession. This usually involves sex between mage and spirit, channeling and exchanges of perceptions on both sides.

"Running Away" Drugs — Depressants, narcotics and other chemical inhabitants most Cultists disdain.

"Running Toward" Drugs — Hallucinogens, stimulants and other chemicals which block inhibitions and open a person to new perceptions.

Sahajiya — One of many former names for the Cult. Others include the Seers of Chronos and the Cult of Bacchus.

Sects — Small orders within the Tradition. Most predate the Cult itself.

Shakti — "Creative power"; Prime energy, usually embodied as a goddess. Also a common name for True Magick among Cultists. Real access to Shakti involves bliss, will, knowledge, wisdom and action.

Shakta — The male focus energy which gives form to the raw power of Shakti. Wedding the two into a greater whole is the Tantrik ideal.

Siddhu — An Indian mystic; a wandering holy man.

Tantra — A system of balancing polarities through exercises, meditations, postures and congrex. Contrary to popular belief, many Tantrik exercises have nothing to do with sex, although most of the popular ones do. *Dakshinacara*, the "right-hand way," concentrates on spiritual devotion to a higher power rather than on mortal sensations. *Vamacara*, the "left-hand path" of Tantrik magick, invokes inner Divinity through focused sensual stimulation — that is, ritual sex, drugs, dance and meditation. Three guesses which path most Ecstatics prefer.

"Tantra" also refers to spiritual scriptures and poetry involving the Tantrik arts.

Zeitgeist — "Time spirit"; a personification of a time period that carries such emotional Resonance that it takes on a life of its own. Some time shaman Cultists can contact or even summon zeitgeists.



LEIF
JONES
1976

FIRST VERSE: FREEFALL

Everyone is familiar with the phenomenon of feeling more or less alive on different days. Everyone knows on any given day that there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of the day do not call forth, but which he might display if these were greater. Most of us feel as if a sort of cloud weighed upon us, keeping us below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake.

— William James, *The Energies of Man*



It's raining when I awaken. Cold hard sheets of water roar across the parking lot like angry soldiers. My warm bed is empty. Aria is gone. For a moment, my heart feels like the pavement outside. Then I sigh and roll over. Some things aren't meant to last, I guess.

My sheets feel like raw burlap against my skin. Restless, I finally decide to rise. The light filtering past the blinds looks like old coffee as I pad to the shower. Strange; beneath my feet, the hardwood floor seems rough, unfinished. Not unpleasant, just... more textured than before. Curious, I stop and sweep my toes across the surface. The resulting thrill surges into my fifth orgasm of the night. When I stop trembling, the room feels colder. What's happening to me?

Bathroom tiles hold a different feeling. Their cool smoothness soothes my jangled nerves. As if in slow motion, I glide across the floor, brushing my soles against a rug fluffier than it seemed before. Luxurious. I step onto it and dig my toes into its fibers. Strange, the things you take for granted. As thunder echoes from far away, I shove the curtain aside and summon hissing water from the tap. Harnessed rain. I shift the setting from bath to shower and test the water with my hand.

Seconds blend to hours. The storm in my own bathtub tickles my palm, and the sensations race across my whole body until my will gives way and yet another orgasm surges outward. Finally, I step into the steamy tub and caress myself with the water's flow. Outside, thunder rolls again, nearer his time. Suddenly even this ecstasy is not enough.

Sudden impulse. Dare I follow it? The back door isn't far away. It's dark. No one will see me. Trembling, I suddenly ache to feel the storm itself across my skin, my feet in puddles, my hair in tangles. After seeming hours of hesitation, I turn off the water and head toward the door. *What am I doing?* Again, a sudden surge of panic. What will Jim and Marcie think? Surely they're awake by now. The image almost stops me: dancing naked in the rain while the whole complex watches, laughing. The fear freezes me halfway to the door. I can't go out there.

The back door opens. It's Aria, of course, nude and dripping with a wild grin across her face. A blast of cold wind hits me from outside. "Come on out, Cassie," she whispers. "It feels like heaven."

I follow her, of course, and a flood of new sensations hits me as I step across the threshold. Chill iron, wet with

rain. Bright flickers from the clouds, a purr of creeping thunder. Icy water-lash and warm skin beneath my fingers. Aria leads me through the doorway and into the rain like a new parent showing off her offspring. It's glorious. With patient hands, she peels my arms from across my breasts, spreads my hands, pushes me forward and blocks the doorway. I am naked to the storm and I worship it.

Why was I afraid?

Eyes closed, I let shudder after shudder ride through me. The touch of warm fingers, palms, arms, breasts, stirs me from my meditation. Aria wraps herself across my body, presses close, squeezes me to her, turns me slowly around to face her. It's like before: I'm helpless, her puppet. She kisses me slowly, deeply, forever.

Dawn lightened the clouds at last and the rain subsided to drizzle. I don't know when we left the balcony and wandered back inside. But if anyone had seen us, I never heard about it. And frankly, I never cared.

THE LESSONS BEGIN

*I am the fountain of affection — the instrument of joy
To keep the good times rolling, I'm the boy, I'm the boy
I say the world will be our oyster — you can put your trust in me
We'll keep the good times rolling
Wait and see, wait and see
Wait and see...*

— Oysterband, "When I'm Up I Can't Get Down"

Aria calls him "Wolf"; corny as it is, the name fits him: tall, rangy-lean and bearded, he prowls behind the counter like a restless animal staring into space. Brown hair brushes his back and frames a face both sweet and sinister. Brown eyes watch some enigma beyond the shop walls, and I wonder what he sees to make him smile that way. Yesterday, would've ignored this long-haired burnout. Now he seems compelling.

Inside the shop, a techno-tribal beat throbs from hidden speakers. I've heard it before and never liked the stuff, but this morning it sounds fresh, like the thunder of the dawn. I called in sick when Aria and I arose from bed, and she brought me here to find, as she put it, a mentor for my "new life."

"I can't teach you everything you need to know," she had assured me, tousling my hair. "I know the dance but can't tell you the steps. I know someone who can, though. Wolf." Over my objections, she'd dressed me in her own clothes and rummaged through my closet for some new ones. On her insistence, we left barefooted. My feet are sore now, but I'm not sorry. I've never walked around this way before.

I'm in a daze, a trance, a dreamwalk. Everything seems surreal. The buzz from our dawn shower lingers and the spring breeze rustles my skirt — Aria's skirt. It's not something I would wear myself, so tissue-light it feels like nothing, but it brushes my legs so softly I accept. I feel like a fool. I feel like an outlaw. I feel like an agent in disguise. For now, I'll play this game. I kinda like it.

THAT GLAZED LOOK

Cultists walk around in an endless state of hyper-awareness. They look stoned to others but sense many things more acutely than any Sleeper could. Assume that an Ecstatic mage keeps his first-rank Spheres in operation most of the time. While other mysticks need to consciously turn their magickal senses on, most Cultists must turn them off.

When he awakens in the morning, the average Cultist focuses himself through some preferred ritual (see Appendix). This stimulates mystickal senses as well as mundane ones, helping him enjoy the day for all it's worth. Unless he really wants to be attuned to all things, he'll choose a single Sphere sense to concentrate on. More often than not, the Sphere with the highest rating (or his affinity, if he has one. See *Mage Second Edition*.) becomes that "default" sense. Is he attuned to Matter? He'll notice every detail of the objects around him, especially the quality of workmanship. Is he a Life Adept? No one will catch him completely by surprise unless they come literally from nowhere. A Prime or Forces specialist will feel the surge of elemental energies, while a Cultist versed in Correspondence would never run into things unless they moved in front of him. Mind-seers are highly empathic, and if an Entropy-minded Cultist seems preoccupied, it's because he's trying to see past random events. To a mage familiar with the Spirit Sphere, the Penumbra is as real (if not moreso) than the material world, and a Time-friendly Ecstatic views things as if they were happening, remembered and foreseen simultaneously. No wonder he looks spaced out!

An Ecstatic character will usually employ a single focus for sensory magick, often something he can do easily, like humming, dropping acid or smoking. Naturally, this focus can still impede the mage's normal perceptions (hallucinations have been known to do that), and the hyper-awareness state often does the same. It's hard to concentrate when you can see Banes in the corner.

As the character grows out of his foci, the sensory Effects for the Spheres he uses "free" now come naturally to him. He'll have to make an effort to tune them out. This won't usually affect his Perception, Awareness or Alertness rolls (though something attuned to the sense, like an incoming electric shock, might lower the difficulty), but he may get a roll to notice something he would otherwise miss. No one else, of course, will notice what the Cultist sees unless he extends his perceptions to them (a separate Effect). Thus, even Tradition mages view the Cult as an ever-tripping bunch of misfits. Their loss. (The Appendix covers this subject in more detail.)



Back in the shop, Wolf stares oblivious as we wander to the counter, passing black T-shirts, fetish gear and Indian imports in a thousand pastel colors. Who wears this shit? Aria's friend is furry, bare-chested beneath a buckskin vest. A black tattoo of his namesake graces his right arm. "Wolf!" says Aria. "Wolf!"

He shakes himself from his reverie and stares straight at me. "Sorry... can I help you?"

"Wolf, meet Cassie." Aria's voice draws him suddenly to meet her eyes, not mine. "She's the one I told you about."

"I didn't see you there for a minute, Aria." He laughs, a purring chuckle. "Nice to meet you, Cassie."

He extends his hand, his eyes appraising me. I offer my own hand; when both meet, I feel a spark, like a static jump between hand and doorknob. Wolf feels it too. He purrs again. "Damn, Aria. She could be your sister, except for the hair."

I'm surprised. I didn't think we looked alike at all.

"She just woke up this morning, Wolf. Treat her gentle."

Treat me? Gentle? I cover the sudden surge of panic with a laugh. "We all woke up this morning."

"Not like this," Aria assures me. "Today is something different."

.....

Against my better judgment, I let Aria leave me with Wolf.

Behind the shop, there is a corridor. We followed Wolf as he led us down into a candle-lit room thick with incense and Persian rugs. As we descended, my terror rose. I would be handcuffed, branded, raped, sold... the list of horrors went on until we reached the chamber. My sore feet welcomed the carpet. Frightened as I was, the room seemed comforting. "Please, sit down," Wolf asks, indicating a pile of pillows. I sank down gratefully while Aria made her good-byes.

When she leaves, the fear returns. Cold. Crackling across my skin like electric spiders. I'm alone underground with a stranger, a bearded burnout with a devil's smile and faraway eyes. He says nothing, only watches me as he takes a thick glass goblet from a shelf, pours some wine and sets the glass between us. It's my move, I guess. I take my cue from the ring he wears, a cloudy blue stone with an inner glow, set in braided gold. "Nice ring," I say at last. "What is it?"

He cocks his head to look at it. Shyly, like a kid on his first date. "Thanks. It's sort of an heirloom."

"From who?"

"That," he answers, "is a long story..." And so began my initiation.

HISTORY PART I: THE BEGINNINGS



*If the doors of perception were cleansed,
every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.*
— William Blake

This world, he says, is neither the first world nor the last, merely a moment frozen in time. That's all time is: a succession of frozen moments, an endless "now," not a "then" or "when." It sounds confusing, but it's vital to understanding where the ring came from.

When it was made, no one counted time in minutes or days, but in seasons when the crops grew or the winters came. Time was longer then, and the people, poor as they may have been, were happier. Life was experienced, not observed.

Our people know what the ancient ones knew. There's a pulse behind the seasons. If you listen carefully, away from the modern noise and pressure, you can hear it. It weaves itself through music, throbs under lovers' words and in the veins beneath your skin. The Divine Pulse. *Lakashim*. The World's Heartbeat. When the seasons were as days, we all felt that pulse, and we were so much more alive. Some felt the pulse more than others, and those few could become one with the *Lakashim*, bending creation to their purposes. Others feared them, or worshipped them and called them *shaman* or *artist* or *madman* — they were all one and the same. They were the ones who made the rings, out of embers and stone and the blood of Mother Earth, and the rings sealed a pact, a memory of *Lakashim*.

As I listen, Wolf tells me of the origins of art and insight. According to some theories, he claims, human consciousness — the ability to grasp this "*Lakashim*" — began when primates ate hallucinogenic fungi and plants. The sensations blew open the doors of abstract reasoning and mystic insight, and this paved the way for a host of other talents. As we grew more sophisticated, those doors shut until only a select few could comprehend that they existed at all. And those few made the rings, and left them to their descendants. That's us.

You could call us a cult — a Cult of Ecstasy. People have called us Seers of Chronos, New Romantics, BÖN-PO, Sahajiya, Los Sabios Locos, Timelost, and a host of other names, not all of them terribly polite. We're the masters of crazy wisdom, the dancers to the Divine Pulse, the perverts and wildmen who act out, from enlightenment, what others suppress out of fear. We're the inheritors of the ring, the artisans of reality.

.....

When I express my disbelief, he hands me a *bhong*. Old, a relic from the '60s from the look, and well-used from

the smell. I shake my head. I haven't smoked since college. "Don't smoke anything; just close your eyes and feel it." Intrigued but skeptical, I do.

Suddenly I'm on a table, a sunlit room spreads before me in a 360° panorama. That shock is bad enough, but the wash of sensations knocks me dizzy. Sea salt. Old pot. Unwashed bodies. Groggy voices. The light has a fuzzy quality, and the birds outside sound raucous, almost jeering. Bottles, mirrors and magazines litter my resting place, and I discover that I can't move. All I can do is feel. All proportion is gone — everything looks so much larger than before. I try to look down and discover that I can't.

"Hey, Cleo, where's the *bhong*?" a craggy, accented voice inquires. From one side, a man enters, naked and swaying. "It's on the table," comes the reply. Cleo, I assume. The man's eyes widen slightly. "Oh, yeah, I see it." He reaches for me. Oh shit! This isn't funny! His fingers, gritty with sand, wrap around me as he lifts me high in the air, flicks a lighter to life and enfolds me with his lips...

"Aagghhhh!" I shake myself from the vision, spitting. "What the fuck was that?"

"That," Wolf replies, "is magick. And it's real."

So I discovered the truth behind the veil. I listen much better after that. We're all magicians, you see. It's our birthright. Most people never realize it. I have. So has Wolf, and Aria. There's a whole pack of us, loosely organized into something he calls "the tradition." I guess he means that "Cult of Ecstasy."

.....

According to him, this Cult began with the first sorcerers but really came together in the late medieval period. Prior to that, our kind had practiced as they would, and shared their visions with their people. Music, theatre, wine-making and drug-taking all began as ways to reach the *Lakashim*. Vision quests, which might involve starvation, ordeals or tattooing, became rites of passage in most cultures. Life was short in those days, and so every pain or pleasure brought one closer to the Divine.

The shamans understood the link between our emotions — the sacred passions — and the *Lakashim*. In time, they became masters of creation, guides, healers, always seeking those things that would lead to greater insights or powers. To focus himself, a shaman would dance, eat peyote, drink soma or make love to spirits. Not everyone had the courage to see things that way, or to live with such intensity. Other forms of magick began, easier ways to reach the World-Pulse. Priests created gods to worship, then begged them for favors. Scholars compiled facts and artisans built devices to help them understand the *Lakashim*. Everyone has





insight, so all these methods worked. Despite their differences, these seekers all understood that reaching their goal involved breaking through mortal blinders and seeing things as they are.

• • • • •

I ask Wolf what he meant by that. He pauses a moment, then hands me the goblet. "Before you can alter reality," he says, "you have to perceive it as it really is." He lifted the goblet and took my hand. The glass tingled my fingertips. "This is solid glass, right? Filled with liquid and held in your own flesh and blood. Solid masses, right?" I nodded out of habit. He smiled and closed his eyes. I felt a crackling in the air, as if it had been electrified.

I screamed at what I saw, and dropped the glass. Wolf's hand flashes. I've never seen anyone move so fast. Before the goblet fell halfway, he caught it, spilling only a few drops to the table. Before they land, I see them splatter, slowly spreading out, becoming droplets, floating free... then they fell.

I know my surprise shows. "That's a trick I'll teach you sometime." Wolf chuckles: "For now, please don't drop the glass again. Just look at it."

I did. Where the glass once was, particles dance, a lattice-work of dull blue sparkles. Inside this matrix, blinding bright flashes swirl like glitter tea. Our hands twist together like rattan, labyrinthine networks of cells and tendrils, millions of them, pulsating with light in a spectrum of colors. As I watch, a shuddering halo of burnt orange and shimmering violet washes around my hand and wrist. A similar aura of bright, flashing pink surrounds Wolf's own. Everywhere I look, patterns stand in place

of solid objects, all of them moving, shifting, pulsating softly. Shivers ripple through me. My matrix fingers slip slowly from around the goblet-pattern, and Wolf takes it from me in what resembles an exquisitely shot slow-motion film. Before he does it, I remember it happening.

"Get the picture?" he asks as the world returns to normal. I nod, silent. How could I not?

• • • • •

Eventually, religions grew up around the sacred passions — the temples of Astarte and Aphrodite, the more spontaneous rites of Dionysus and Freyja, the drug-dreams of Taloc the Vision Serpent and Ga-Oh the Wind-Borne, and the eternal replication of the dance of Shakti and Shiva. The dance that makes the world go 'round. Other people, less enlightened but still searching for a moment of bliss, joined that dance with lesser results — and, as Wolf points out, less wisdom or discipline. Sacred rites became reckless screwing. Irresponsibility led to uncontrolled magick, to disease, addiction, unwanted children and jealous partners — sort of like the modern world. The chaos led to crackdowns from priests and kings. The temples were demolished, the phallic monuments smashed, the rites forbidden. Sacred or not, the passions were outlawed. Except, of course, in war. "All's fair..." after all.

THE COMING OF THE SEER

By the Dark Ages, our people were scattered. In India and China, they formed underground sects, passing Tantrik arts to their disciples. Islamic seers used hashish and

hours to bind assassins to their service. In the Americas and Africa, Ecstasies still gave sacraments to the people, but were avoided by those with less insight than they. In the cold north, Odin's priests hung from trees awaiting visions while Christian fanatics wandered the countryside naked, flogging themselves or fasting. Ecstasy remained a universal path to enlightenment, but then, as now, most people were afraid of it. By the time the Christians, Muslims and Buddhists had settled their kingdoms, our kind were banished to the shadows, working their Arts alone.

A conspiracy began, Wolf says, in the 1200s. A conspiracy of reason that denied ecstasy and replaced it with science. When these philosopher-scientists pooled their efforts, they began a worldwide reality shift that he claims blinds us all to this day. The sorcerers didn't notice until the 1400s, when a Seer came forth with a troubling prophecy: Magick, he said, would die unless all magicians banded together to counter the threat. Everyone dismissed him until his words began to come true. This Seer, Wolf told me, was called Sh'zar, and he founded our modern Tradition.

.....

This is all too much for me. The last 24 hours seem like a trip and I begin to crash. I can't keep my eyes open; the pillows are too soft and Wolf's voice too low. After a while it becomes a buzz and I call a halt. "Look," I begin, "This is all really cool and everything, but I'm not sure I want to know it. If there's some conspiracy, I'm not sure I should know it."

"Tomorrow, then. At least, relatively speaking." He laughs at his joke, but it flies past me.

"I don't know. Maybe not. I don't feel like a magician, least of all an 'Ecstatic' one. I've got a life to get back to. Thanks, though."

"You can't go back. Not now. You can leave here, but you're a different person than you were this time yesterday. Aren't you at least intrigued?" I agree that perhaps I am. "Then here," he says, holding out the goblet, "I'll keep this until you decide. I can't tell you more until we make a promise to each other — a diksham bond — but I won't force you to do something you're not sure about. Being one of us is fun, but it's dangerous fun, Cassie, and I'm letting you know that up front. You're standing on the cusp of something more important than you'll ever know, but you have to make the decision. I'm not here to sell you anything." He takes the goblet away. "When you're ready, I'll be here. But don't take too long deciding. I won't be here forever. Nor will Aria."

She's not there when I return home. Her scent lingers in my bed, on her clothing, but there's no sign of her. I'm relieved. And terrified. What if she won't come back? In a moment of madness, I throw all my shoes away, then cry for hours. That night, I talk with God. At least, I think it's God. I'm not sure anymore. His voice carries all the doubt and indecision I've ever known:

"Do Not. Thou Shalt Not." I can't sleep again. I'm afraid. So damned afraid that I hate myself.

To spite that fear, I return to Wolf the next morning. He doesn't seem surprised to see me. "Come on back, Cassie," he says heartily. On whispering feet, I follow.

INITIATION

The Five Steps to Ecstasy

- 1: Surrender Your Fear.
- 2: Focus Your Intentions.
- 3: Open Yourself.
- 4: Attune Yourself to the Lakashim.
- 5: Repeat Step One.

It scared the shit out of me when Wolf shucked his jacket. Inside Aria's skirt pocket, I'd hidden a steak knife. If I don't like this, I'm not staying. I'd thought. As he takes out the goblet and swirls the wine, I wonder if I'll have to use the knife. From some hidden speaker, hypnotic chanting begins. Wolf sets the goblet between us, shuts his eyes, and begins to chant himself. After a moment, music rises, a winding, pulsating rhythm. Soon the air itself begins to throb; I sway, in spite of myself, like a charmed serpent and I'd swear that even the candles flicker in time. After what seems a liquid eternity, Wolf opens his eyes and stares into my own:

"I swear, by all I hold sacred and fine, to instruct you, to guide you, to respect you. Never shall I harm thee, never shall I betray thee, for your trust is my own. This do I promise you."

He holds the goblet before him, drinks deeply, and passes it to me. I accept. The wine smells faintly of cinnamon and burns a bit going down. Some lingers on my lips. Slowly I lick them clean.

Wolf extends his hands to mine. Trembling, we touch.

The sex goes beyond just sex. The sweaty trysts I've shared so many times, even the soft intensity of Aria, are nothing compared to this melding fire of mingled spirits. It's a communion beyond words, a telepathic tidal wave washing through us both. Wolf is a stranger to me, yet we become partners as we bleed into each other. The twilight thunder rides us for eternities, then subsides finally into a shared pulse, a steady dying roar rumbling into the rhythms of hidden music. The dance of Shakti and Shiva ends.

"Jesus," I mutter as the fire dies down. "What's in that wine?"

"Cinnamon, cloves and sugar. It wasn't the wine, Cassie. It was us."

I laugh shakily as he holds me close. "I think I may like this Cult."

DIKSHAM — THE MENTOR/STUDENT BOND

Informal as the Cult may be, one relationship stands firm: diksham, the covenant between a mentor and his student.

Most Ecstatic mentors and pupils become lovers. Their sex is more than an initiation, recreation or affection. It is not, except in the very worst partnerships, a form of payment, whatever most blockheads may think. Rather, their intercourse seals an apprenticeship pact, the diksham, which exchanges both mages' essences and bonds the two into one. Cultists take it very seriously; those who abuse or betray their teachers or initiates are shunned or punished (see Chapter Two).

The best thing a student sworn to diksham can do is pay attention. An Ecstatic novice often goes up in a puff of Paradox unless he's smart and careful; by the time that Cultist takes a pupil, he usually knows what he's talking about. The beginner isn't under any obligation to follow his lead, but if she's smart, she will. Her obligations do include respect for the mentor's wisdom, safety and position. In her part of the oath, the initiate promises not to endanger her teacher.

Unlike most Traditions, an Ecstatic initiate has no obligation to service. The rigorous apprenticeships of the Order of Hermes or Akashic Brotherhood rarely exist outside of a few ancient sects. It's assumed, though, that the initiate wants to learn. If she chooses to walk away, it's her prerogative — and her funeral. The diksham assumes she'll at least listen for a while.

The mentor has graver duties: as a host of enlightenment, he's considered her guide through hostile territory. It's his responsibility to make sure his student understands what she's getting herself into. Teaching her to use her Arts is secondary to teaching her to survive. If he has any concept of the diksham, he'll take the job seriously. Betraying the bond is akin to tossing a baby up in the air and refusing to catch it.

Abusing, tricking or demanding payment from an apprentice is considered bad form. In fact, most modern Cultists scorn the term "apprentice." The Tradition's best way of enforcing the diksham is peer pressure. A mentor who raises a lousy student, or a student who pays no attention to her teacher, are both considered screw-ups by other Cultists, and word does get around. Really severe cases are called out by other Ecstatics, who may challenge the offender to certamen. Take his student away, or banish him from their gatherings and Chantries. The worst punishment, however, is fairly Darwinian: Cultists betrayed in a diksham bond often seek revenge. And an angry mage makes a rotten enemy.

HISTORY PART II: THE COUNCIL GATHERS



Sometimes in life situations develop that only the half-crazy can get out of.

— La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims* 310

Sometime later, we wrap ourselves in blankets and return to the history lesson. We're closer, now, and our touch stirs electric shivers. Now that the pact is sealed, Wolf tells me secrets. His lessons continue for hours. Although he relates the events in a bewildering stream of impressions, as if he himself had lived them, I prefer to remember them in the past tense. He picks back up with the Seer, Sh'zar, and his prophecies of disaster.

Sh'zar, they say, spoke to 23 Masters of the Arts. Three Divyas, or divine initiates, followed him, and preached his gospel to those they met — Akrites Salonikas, Tali Eos and Kalas Jnana. Three other Masters listened, then returned to their own orders and convinced them to gather — Nightshade, Valoran and Baldrick. These three Masters belonged to warring factions with centuries of bad blood spilled between them. The words and visions Sh'zar imparted changed their minds. It took time, but by 1440 arrangements had been made to meet.

Sh'zar and his friends had already been busy. While the Seer conferred with Baldrick, Nightshade and Valoran, the other Divyas journeyed across the world, greeting others of their kind. They traveled through dreams and across time to places no European had explored: the Americas, the Far East and deep into Africa. When a second meeting was arranged, they gathered their friends together and pooled their talents. At the second meeting, over 500 Ecstatics and their servants arrived, including the Mayan Master Xiootin Iox. The factions raged and debated for nine years and finally formed a Council; during that time, Sh'zar and the others conceived of a way to meld different sects into a coherent whole, a single Tradition.

Time was one key. Each Tradition needed a specialty. Since most of Sh'zar's bunch were masters of prophecy, Time seemed the obvious choice for them. The others dubbed the Ecstatics "Seers of Chronos," and the name became official. Of all the magi, they understood time best. Sh'zar and the other Divyas realized that when you dive into the Lakashim wholeheartedly, time reveals itself as just another illusion — albeit a powerful one, with its own laws. So time was one answer to the dilemma; respect was the other.

Remember that we're talking about the 1400s; kings ruled by divine right throughout the world, soldiers killed whomever they pleased and bandits roamed the countryside. Divinity, in whatever form you chose to view it, promised hardship in life and judgment after death. Sh'zar saw a better way. In the early days, he said, the strong protected the weak and helped them to grow. The abuse of power was a perversion, a blasphemy to the Divine Gift, life. He felt, as did the other Divyas, that if people could just see what a miracle they lived in, they would at least respect that miracle and live in harmony, if not peace.

.....
"That's optimistic." My voice is dry and I wonder if I've been as rude as I think I was.

"Consider," Wolf replies, unruffled; "You are composed of an infinity of cells, tiny organisms working together to obey commands implanted decades before they existed. Thousands, millions, of them die every day, and yet each cell that replaces them not only follows those old commands but reacts to each new stimulus you provide — millions of new events every day. Consider that cells like that help you to even *comprehend* that thought, then add to that fact that I, too, have untold millions of cells in my body doing the same thing. Multiply that by every thing, living and unliving, on the planet, consider how we all interact, millions of times a day, from answering a phone to making love to getting out of bed in the morning to even having a morning to awaken to! Imagine all those billions of simultaneous miracles occurring within our vicinity every fucking day, then add the ecosystem which keeps the whole mess running through an endless complex dance of cause and effect. Sh'zar may not have defined things in those terms, but he saw the whole world from that perspective. When you add it all together and just consider it for a moment, it seems pretty insulting to think creation is anything but miraculous!"

What can I say to that?

.....
Obviously, the real world doesn't work that way. Even the other Divyas disagreed, but Sh'zar stood firm, to the point of showing everyone what he was talking about the same way Wolf showed me. After long debates, the Divyas drafted the Code of Ananda, a list of proverbs that illustrated the wisdom

a Seer should have and the responsibilities he or she should live by. If the world would not listen to reason, said Sh'zar, then he and his companions would exemplify it — not the power-politics of the so-called Order of Reason, but a reason born of respect for one's own Divinity.

Like many of us who attain high levels in our Arts, Sh'zar saw many futures and pasts, especially his own. His beliefs would be tested, rejected and finally compromised upon. So he preached the Code of Ananda with a frantic fervor, spreading the ideal of self-accountability throughout the Council. Other sorcerers, particularly Nightshade, picked up Sh'zar's message and spread it their own way. *As ye harm none*, goes one variation, *do what you will*. Sh'zar's emphasis was on the "As ye harm none" part; other magi favored the second saying — including many of our own.

Naturally, many Ecstasies refused to follow the Code. Sh'zar, in a rare moment of fury, took a Dionysian Seer named Thales and bonded him empathically to a boy he had raped. The shock (now called a punishment wheel) unhinged Thales and proved two points for Sh'zar: One, he could — and would — enforce his Code if he desired; and two, that a person's actions did not occur without consequence. If those consequences could be shared, the Seer reasoned, people would stop hurting one another. He brought forth many old rituals which bonded people together (a specialty of our kind, as I was to realize), and showed how pleasure was better shared than pain. Those that did share pain, the Seers soon proved, made very effective weapons.

To the majority of the other Traditions, the Seers of Chronos were a bunch of irresponsible hashheads whose main talents included music, sex and an uncanny foresight. The eloquence of the Divya Akrites proved them wrong; he supposedly debated Christian scripture with priests and the words of the Prophet with mullahs — and won. Through it all, he maintained a humor and lust for life that impressed many sorcerers. The ferocious Tali Eos was said to have bested Teutonic knights in drinking contests and samurai in swordsmanship. Xiootin Iox puzzled Hermetic magi with his mastery of astronomy, and Kalas Jnana impressed Chinese wizards with her knowledge of the Buddhist sutras and elemental Arts. Through force of personality and arcane power, the Seers gained the respect of their fellow Traditions.

Until the Great Betrayal.



THE CODE OF ANANDA

Called by some "The Ten Commandments of Ecstasy," these proverbs were collected by Sh'zar and his companion Divyas. No one knows which mages originated or collected the sayings, but Ecstatics agree that the observations are, if nothing else, good advice for an anarchistic sect like theirs.

Ananda refers to bliss, joy and sacred transcendence. The Code also carries a strong connotation of righteousness. The founding Seers knew all too well the dark side of freedom, and didn't want to found a Tradition of psychopaths. In the early days, those who violated the Code were punished severely. Though he loathed the duty, Sh'zar often administered judgment himself. He knew that a certain responsibility was essential if the Seers were to avoid becoming the dangerous mob others mistook them for. Respect for others, awareness of consequences, and continual wonder at Earth's living miracle are central to the Code. A good Ecstatic, it assumes, does not make his joy others' problem.

To this day, most Pleasuredomes demand that members and visitors alike adhere to the Code's tenets, and most mentors teach it as well. The Code is not a law per se — it's a declaration of ethics that most modern Cultists subscribe to. Only the fierce Aghoris, Acharne and Hagalaz reject the Code outright, and few Ecstatics want anything to do with them. (See "Sects.")

The initial proverbs were written in Greek and Sanskrit. Even translated, the Code seems formal to the modern ear; some modern Cultists simply sum all 10 proverbs up in two simple words: "Be cool."

I: THOU ART MIRACULOUS: SO ARE WE ALL.

II: HE WHO SPITS UPON HIS GOOD RIGHT HAND SHALL FIND THE LEFT ONE FAILS HIM IN NEED.

III: EACH GOLD COIN YIELDS TWO LIKE IT: EACH STALY GIVEN CREATES A BUNDLE. YET, EACH COIN TAKEN TURNS THE REST TO DROSS, AND ONE BUNDLE GONE CREATES A FAMINE. THUS SHALL A SEER ACCOUNT HIS DEEDS.

IV: SOME MINDS REST BEST ASLEEP. STIR NOT THOSE WHO WOULD NOT WAKEN OTHERWISE.

V: TRUTHS FORESEEN ARE NOT ALWAYS TRUTHS.

VI: IF A MAN (OR A WOMAN) WOULD REND ANOTHER'S PASSIONS, LET HIM BE AS ONE TORN BY WILD DOGS. FOR PASSIONS ARE THE SEAT OF THE SELF, AND IF THEY BLEED, SO TOO DOES THE SOUL.

VII: LET EACH SEER ACCOUNT HIS OWN DEEDS, AND IF THOSE DEEDS SHOULD WANT FOR WISDOM OR KINDNESS, LET HIM BE PUT FORTH TO WEEP ALONE.

VIII: HUMOR COOLETH BLOOD: WRATH SPILLETH IT.

IX: EVEN TREES RENT BY LIGHTNING MAY GROW NEW FRUIT.

X: A FOOL FEELS NO FEAR: A SLEEPER REMAINS SHACKLED BY IT. A MASTER TRANSCENDS IT, YET RECALLS ITS WISDOM. IT IS GOOD TO BE AFRAID: IT IS POLLY TO BOW TO TERROR.

In 1466 the First Cabal, a group of hand-picked magi including Akrites Salonikas, journeyed out from the meeting site on a mission of goodwill. In 1470 they were betrayed from within. The Betrayer wasn't one of the Seers, but many outsiders viewed Akrites as an accessory. The prophet, they claimed, had fallen down on the job and let one of his best friends (and, they gossiped, his lover) destroy their Cabal. Although he, Tali Eos and Sh'zar himself went out to rescue mages who had ended up in an Inquisitor's dungeon, the Seers were disgraced. Dispirited, Akrites left the Tradition and disappeared. Soon after, Sh'zar went looking for him and

perished. The whole Council was in ruins, and the Seers seemed buried at the bottom of them.

The remaining Divyas refused to let the legacy collapse. Although Xootin Iox had died by this time, Eos and Jnana remained Masters to be reckoned with. Fortified with scholarship and backed up by formidable allies from the Verbena and Dreamspeakers, these Seers struggled to continue Sh'zar's dream. Eos' masterpiece, *The Nine Sacred Passions*, remains a hallmark for serious Ecstatic magi (called mages by this time). This eloquent document argued that the seat of all magick is the soul; emotion wedded with

intellect propels that soul to higher things — an ideal often called Ascension. A soul with crippled passions could never achieve that exalted state, she argued, at least not without more sacrifices than most people would be willing or able to make. Eos, who had been raped prior to her Awakening, knew what she was talking about. *The Nine Sacred Passions* solidified the Seers' place amid the Council and converted many of their critics.

Then the Burning Times began, and Christian Europe went berserk, torturing and killing millions in an endless round-robin genocide of religious wars, Inquisitions, persecutions, reformations, witch-hunts and finally, plague. Worse, they brought their wars across the seas, and native cultures (like those of our Dreamspeaker colleagues) were decimated. All mages went underground during this gruesome time: even Masters weren't safe from the fire. The Order of Reason fanned the flames for a while, but even its conspiratorial eyes wept at the carnage.

During this time, our Seers, now renamed the Sahajiya, concentrated in India and the Middle East to avoid the bloodshed in Europe. Many small sects broke off to pursue their own beliefs. Those few who remained in Europe wandered like mad beggars, protected somewhat by the superstitions about insanity. In the Council chambers, intrigues between the fellowship table (located in a place called Horizon) and another stronghold named Doissetep stalled many efforts to make the Code of Ananda an official protocol. The last great Divya, Eos, died in 1562 (which I guess was understandable, given her age), and Jnana's second son, Siddhu Asva, struggled against a plot by a renegade sect called the Aghoris, who thought there should be no limits in the search for ecstasy. He defeated their greatest Divya in a

combat called certámen. The sect retreated in 1573, but the Aghoris still remain on the fringe.

Another splinter group, the Fellowship of Pan, had a more productive idea. According to Wolf, faeries really did exist once, and our group dealt with them regularly. When witch-hunts threatened these fae, the Fellowship helped them into hidden worlds which Wolf called Horizon Realms (I remind him to tell me more about them when we have more time; he reminds me that time is relative. I tell him never mind). Supposedly, these faeries were, and remain, very grateful for the help. Finally, by 1800, the religious madness wore itself out and a new era of possibilities began.

THE CULT OF BACCHUS

*Ah me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
Few earthly things found favour in his sight
Save concubines and carnal company,
And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.*

— Lord Byron, *Childe Harold*

300 years of religious warfare, 200 of colonialism and a succession of revolutions had shaken the old kingdoms to their knees. The Council of Traditions had been shaken severely as well. When masses of Dreamspeakers defected from the Council, they left the Sahajiya without allies. As "enlightenment" spread, first across Europe then inexorably across the rest of the world, the mages found themselves in separate corners. When the colonial powers wound their way into the Sahajiya strongholds in India and the Americas, most Ecstatics declared war, found niches, and exploited them.

In India, the Kalika Rajas sect lashed out at the British authorities. (Kali, Wolf tells me, is the destructive aspect of the goddess Shakti. He reminds me that the Hindu gods had many faces; I just nod and follow along.) While their followers strangled travelers and soldiers, the mages among them sent

THE NINE SACRED PASSIONS

The expression "Feelings are not good or bad, they just are" fits the Ecstatic viewpoint well. To Cultists, all emotions have their positive and negative aspects. The only really bad passion is the lack of passion. Emotion is the vital link to Divinity; insensitivity is best left to the Technocracy.

Not that all feelings should be worn on one's sleeve. Ecstatics know how much damage unbridled passions can cause. The trick, as always, is self-discipline. There's nothing wrong with what you feel; you *should* feel. It's what you do with those feelings that makes things right or wrong.

In her book of the same name, Tali Eos defined Nine Sacred Passions that she felt lie at the root of all other emotions. These are: Joy (or Wonder); Love; Empathy (or Sympathy); Lust (or Ambition); Grief (or Sadness); Fear; Jealousy (or Envy); Hate; and Rage. The concept wasn't new, but her book defined their meaning in Ecstatic lore. To Eos, each passion has a constructive and a destructive side. Joy can blind you as you stumble over a cliff, while Envy can drive you to achieve something that you might not have bothered with otherwise. Even Hate is necessary — some enemies deserve no quarter.

Eos' list has never been considered infallible; Cultists have debated her concepts since the founding of their Tradition. Still, most mentors pass the idea on to their students. Although the Cult believes in breaking down barriers, it helps to know where those limits are before setting out.



madness and plagues into the cities, incited uprisings, turned themselves into animals, and generally made things miserable for the English. Although the sect was demolished in the 1840s, some Kalika Rajas supposedly survive today.

In the Americas, many Sahajiya found new and fascinating experiences among the Native Americans of the Southwest and the plains. Although they often traveled alone, these mages put up a vicious fight against settlers. Some fought with guns, or tribal weapons. Others used magick and caused whole cavalry units to disappear. When the Civil War began, some American Ecstasies (renamed *Los Sabios Locos*, or "The Crazy Wise Ones") picked off soldiers with whiskey, seductions and insanity.

In Europe, some mages fed the disillusionment of artists and dreamers, encouraging Hellfire Clubs and Romantic poets to throw society on its ear. Society reacted with shock and secret admiration. The drawing rooms of Byron, Shelley, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and de Sade saw stylish debaucheries. Someone changed the Tradition's name to the Cult of Bacchus. And suddenly the joke wasn't funny anymore.

This sudden violent shift after years of near-pacifism shocked many Council mages. The Divyas in Horizon called a *jambo*, an important meeting, in 1867 to discuss the problem. Sh'zar's dream was a mess; the new Cult was exactly what the Code of Ananda had been created to discourage — a pack of self-serving rebels causing trouble because they could. Although the Cult itself had little structure, over 150 Ecstasies came together to debate a return to the Code. Older mages agreed that the new blood had gone too far; younger mages, in turn, accused the Divyas of cowardice. This was war, they said, and ecstasy was not always kind.

A cloud of hashish, some say, heralded a miracle. Sh'zar himself appeared above the crowd, rippling with power and Paradox. (I make a note to ask Wolf what "Paradox" is later.) The legend says he spoke for several hours, sweeping the assembly with potent smoke, then vanished. Supposedly, he reminded his descendants that the highest passion was Joy, not Hate. Joy rebuilds what Hate destroys. So saying, he performed his greatest and final miracle: he poured the accumulated misery of all the renegades' victims onto the assembled crowd in a monumental punishment wheel. After recommending that the Tradition change its name and remember its lesson, he vanished, probably for good.

After that, the Tradition re-embraced the Code. Although individual Ecstasies still follow their own conscience (or lack of one), the Cult of Bacchus became, at least for the moment, the Cult of Ecstasy.

(I'm not sure if Wolf believes this story or not. Though he tells it with the same conviction that he's shown throughout the history, he doesn't seem to be the sort who accepts a *deus ex machina* without scoffing. When I press him, he says it's the best explanation he's heard for the Cult's sudden reversal. Who am I to argue?)

THE REVOLUTION

*If we cannot wake you, then we'll have to shake you
Though some say you'll only understand a gun
Got to prove them wrong or we will lose the battle
Don't you know you'll start a war which will be won by none*
— Steppenwolf, "Move Over"

The Cult appears to be a Tradition forever stumbling over its own feet. By the turn of the century, they seemed more interested in sharing pleasure than pain once again. Maybe the shift came from Sh'zar, or maybe just from the fact that most Bacchanalians died young and badly. A few exceptions, like Aleister Crowley, still "did what they would." Most Cultists, though, preferred examples like Isadora Duncan or Sir Richard Burton — rebels eating at Victorian conventions from the inside — to assailants like Crowley. The 20th century gave both types plenty to work with.

The misery of World War I unleashed a frenzy of rebellion across the Western World. The roaring '20s, with their grand excesses and revolutionary tone, set the ball in motion. World War II, with the largest body count in history, demolished whatever conventions were

left standing. Cultists rushed in, first tentatively, then excitedly, and helped themselves to the confusion. The ashes of the two wars — and the succession of wars that followed — left our Tradition a new world to work with. People were scared — of dying, of technology, of each

other. A few Cultists and a host of mortals went in to take that fear in hand.

It began in coffee shops, in civil rights marches, in writers' colonies and average homes. It began when soldiers came home with new ideas and scientists scrapped what was left of the old ones. It began with electric guitars, TV, radio and drugs, and it rose up to change the world: The revolution of the senses. The C of E heyday.

Morrison, Joplin, Hendrix, Hoffman, Dick, Leary, Shankar, Slick, Lennon, Goddard, Warhol, Moog... an endless list. Some were Awakened, many were not.

Most had no idea what they were doing but were doing their best at it anyway. Some outsiders give the Cult credit (or blame) for inventing rock-n-roll, the drug culture and pornography; according to Wolf, we simply took what already existed and gave it a hard push. Anything that was dangerous, wicked and sensual was up for grabs, and the Cultists recognized the reason: We want the forbidden. We crave ritual. We need our passions, and passion is never safe. Heaven is dull; we humans crave a taste of hell to let us know what we're missing.

And then we blew it.

• • • • •

"Like the Beatles," Wolf says, "Sh'zar was both wrong and right. He was wrong when he thought all we needed was love; he was right when he insisted that irresponsibility would destroy us. Maybe it already has."

"The world was waking up. Slowly, for sure, but it's coming out of a long and fitful

slumber. It was waking up with a big hard-on and a rumble in its belly, ready to go. And then, in the '70s, we threw water in its face."

"Now imagine," he continues, his eyes wild by candlelight, his hands dancing like tripping spiders, "that you were in bed. Your clock radio has just gone off. It's time to wake up and



you're doing it. And then some asshole dumps a big bucket of ice water right in your face."

"I'd be pissed," I reply.

"Exactly. And that's the world we're in now: groggy, dripping, half-awake and angry as hell. And the worst thing is, no one knows who threw the water. So some folks blame each other, some blame God, and some are looking at anyone who seems guilty. Everyone's paranoid and the status-quo merchants, who I'll tell you about later, hand the world a big fuzzy towel and say "Go back to bed. I'll deal with this." Enter the '90s. Does the world stay up, stay angry, or stay in bed? Who knows? It's a toss-up. But damn some of the careless bastards who threw that water."

"Didn't you say that was our job?"

"Yeah," he says at last. "I guess it is."

It's really late when Wolf finishes the lesson. A knock at the door heralds the entrance of a spiky-haired blonde introduced as Vivianne: "I'm locking up, Wolf. You sticking around?" After introductions, I realize how starved I am. Wolf offers to walk me home, and I agree.

"Hey, Wolf," I finally ask, "So where did you get the ring, anyway?"

"Oh, that," he says, glancing at the glowing stone. "I made it."

We don't intend to stop at the bar, but it's here and so are we, so we enter and order. No one comments on my bare feet; I take that as a good sign. We laugh, eat and drink until the place is spinning giddily. It's way past midnight when we reach my building. I'm tempted to let Wolf crash for the night, but he demurs: "I think you've seen enough of me for one day." Deep inside, I'm relieved. I need time to sort this all out.

Aria greets me with a hug and a warm kiss. "You're looking better already," she notes.

"I'm looking tired already," I sigh, wandering into my bedroom and collapsing on the newly-made bed. She joins me there, all questions, and begins to massage my back and shoulders. She's got wonderful hands.

What the hell. I'll sort this out tomorrow.





Leif
JONES
1996

SECOND VERSE: PACES IN THE SMOKE

*Trust and its sister, surrender, are like a womb in which all
of consciousness can gestate and mature.*

— Richard Moss, *The I That is We*



The next few weeks rush by in a haze of transformation, a displaced time stream of sensation and desire. It's like being sick with love, but far more intense. Nothing fits. I can't concentrate. Every morning arrives with an ache in my stomach and a fleshwide tingle which will not be stilled. My sense of time scrambles. When I'm on my own, my senses wander. My hair grows back to its natural auburn tangles and my libido is totally out of control. Even looking at my own fingertips makes me horny. Even so, Wolf commands me not to masturbate. Restraint, he says, will focus my budding powers.

I'm slipping at work. When I complain to Wolf, he rummages through a drawer and comes out with a wad of bills. "Quit," he grins. "Here's your new job." I count the cash when I get home — \$30,000. I don't want to know where he got it.

I can't sleep. The sheets are too rough, my body too rebellious. Finally, when my frustration reaches an unendurable peak, I hear the creak of doors and a barefoot whisper.

Aria smiles in the darkness and greets me with kisses. Her skin feels like hot quicksilver against my own. With her fingers, tongue and hair, she helps me cum myself to sleep. When I crash, I crash hard. When I awaken, she is always gone.

Each day now, I visit the shop. When I arrive, Wolf gets Vivianne to mind the store, then brings me to his sanctum. I flow from summer into fall through an endless reel of dances, lessons, sex and miracles. Marcie, my best friend, doesn't seem to know what to make of me now. After a while, she stops trying.

Occasionally, the fear returns, a full-blast panic furnace; when it happens, Wolf shares my tears and holds me until the shakes subside. Sometimes, Aria is home before me, and we talk like schoolgirls until dark. Other times, I come back to an empty apartment, anxious that tonight will be the night she will not return.

These impressions of who and what we are pass through the next few weeks. While no solid thought holds, the memories linger.

THE ECSTATIC PATH



*You're all you've got
Consider it a gift*

— The Nails, "Mood Swing"

The first thing I learn is that my new "club" has no seatbelts or life insurance. From initiation onward, a Cultist is on her own. Mentors and friends show you the lay of the land, but the journey — and its missteps — are up to you.

We're more a rough confederation than an organization. Lessons are taught through examples and mistakes. Each mentor sees things a bit differently, and each student will interpret those insights as he will. Though we all share a similar vision, we view it from different angles.

As Wolf puts it, we learn to see with primal vision. By attuning ourselves with existence itself, we can step outside our mortal perceptions, seeing (and acting) like demigods. Our fellowship (only one of many, as I will soon learn) values individual freedom — and responsibility — above all else. The consequences, good and bad, of our actions belong to us alone.

Some customs do exist to keep our Cult together: the Code of Ananda is pretty important to most of our kind, and emotional bonds like the diksham keep us in touch and honest. When things get really bad, certain protocols help us resolve disputes or punish people who've gone too far. For the most part, though, we're on our own. Only personal wisdom, friends and sheer luck keep us from dancing into oblivion.

LAKASHIM: THE DIVINE PULSE

Creation has a heartbeat, a pulse that everyone can feel. Most Cultists call it the Lakashim, Dhambia, the Serpent Road, or other names. Our passions, senses and unconscious minds tap into this pulse; our intellect blocks our perceptions somewhat, but it focuses them, too. The ideal state of consciousness sends us past mere intellect or sensation into a communion, through both, with the Lakashim.

Anyone who achieves this state suspends herself in time and works reality with her will. Most people enter into it for fleeting moments. Our Arts depend on achieving that ideal whenever possible. Many kamamarga, or "paths of desire," focus your consciousness, enhancing sensations and passions past normal human limits. The Lakashim waits beyond those limitations.

ANANDA. OJAS AND ASCENSION

The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom... for we can never know what is enough until we know what is more than enough.

— William Blake

As H.P. Lovecraft said, the most merciful thing about human consciousness is that it remains blind to the im-

mensity of the cosmos. We need that blindness to a degree; without it, the vast scope of creation would drive people crazy. To stay sane and progress, we need to be able to put things in little boxes, give them names, and look at them in ways we choose to understand. Ecstasies want to get around that mortal blindfold, though, to sneak a peek at raw reality. It's a dangerous game; staring at the sun can blind you. Still, most Cultists would rather burn their eyes out than live their whole lives without ever having seen that sun in all its glory.

Catching sight of reality in all its splendor brings on indescribable moments of rapture. Cultists call such moments *ananda*, the bliss that stops time. That bliss allows us to sidestep reality — to work magick. More importantly, though, it helps us understand the immense miracle we exist in. That, more than any law or code, keeps us honest. It's hard to disrespect any aspect of creation when you can stare the whole thing in the face.

Ananda can't be described, only felt. Most arts, faiths and magicks are just ways to capture bliss. Most people go their whole lives knowing something is right around the corner of their perceptions, but never get more than a glimpse of it. I think that frustration drives people to despair, to fanaticism, even to war — all for another taste of creation's own blood. As I'm discovering, it's damned heady wine.

Ojas, our vital life force, is the grape for that wine. Distilled by wedding passions with perceptions, ojas carries us to a higher state and allows us that look behind the curtain. Everyone has this power. Most folks, though, only feel it during extreme stress or pleasure. Suddenly, everything seems so much more alive. Time crawls and perceptions go through the roof. That's an ojas rush. By attuning ourselves to that energy, Cultists can perform minor miracles — and not just magical ones. By cultivating our inner power, we can focus ourselves to any task we choose. Even people without heightened perceptions can tell there's something different about us. Best of all, it feels great.

Supposedly, really advanced mages can throw away the blindfold completely and achieve lasting *ananda*, comprehending everything in a vast endless moment. This wordless state could be called Ascension, Nirvana, Apotheosis, Oneness, Eon, whatever. There's no simple path to this transition; each person has to find her own way, I guess, and any description of it falls back into "mortal blinders" territory. How can you describe infinity? Or even map the road to witness it?

Infinity is terrifying. The anticipation I feel every morning now is never far from fear. Even so, many of us want to help others experience happiness. Much of the chaos in the modern world, I'm told, can be linked to an absence of respect and a desperate search for bliss. By sharing our vision, we may be able to share our joy, too. Maybe if we can do that, there won't be so much need for fear.

Perhaps this is the way the world has to be. I'm not sure a lot of people would want to find total Ascension, anyway. Where do you go from there? Maybe it's just my fear of something so incomprehensible, but I think ecstasy might be more powerful in brief flashes than in endless pleasure. Wolf tells me one night: "The concept of Heaven, even if it meant eternal bliss, never appealed much to me. I like to view life as a thrill-ride with endless variations. My ideal heaven would be to take a short break from this mortal merry-go-round, then get back on and go for another ride. Life's much more interesting than an eternity of anything." Many Cultists, including myself, would agree with him.

THE RISKS

As Wolf keeps reminding me, the Path of Ecstasy is dangerous. Passion is an abusive lover; on his good days, he'll take you so far up you'll never want to return, and on bad ones he'll leave you in a broken heap. It's a damned fine line between ecstasy and oblivion, and lots of people searching for one end up in the other. Aside from Paradox (a magical phenomena Wolf describes as slamming the doors of perception on your head), our fellow Cultists have a nasty tendency to become addicted to their own sensations. Or to forget that a tool is only a tool. "It's hard to build a staircase without a hammer," said Aria one night, "but it's impossible to build a staircase made out of hammers."

Ananda itself can be scary as hell. "Bad trip" doesn't sum it up halfway. Creation verges from light to darkness, and highs correspond to lows. Since entering this Cult, I've known depressions so intense that I seriously would've committed suicide if Wolf or Aria had let me. "It's the flip side," Aria told me once, holding me one night while I cried so hard my eyes bled. "Pleasure, pain, joy, sadness. They aren't separate things, just facets of the same jewel. Creation isn't all any one thing — it's many things. Not all of them are fun, but they all pass into new and better states." That ephemeral nature, I've found, helps me to appreciate things more. When I'm happy, the realization that the joy won't last helps me savor it that much more.

AVATARS, TOTEMS AND DAEMONS

Judgment, responsibility and good friends come in handy on the razor's edge. A smart Cultist watches her balance on the tightrope — she doesn't get fancy, she doesn't look down. Responsibility, according to Wolf, is a natural phenomenon: "You may not care what you do, but when you do something, it has an effect. Anticipating those effects will save you a lot of trouble in the long run." Most parts of the Code of Ananda deal with responsibility, and they're very true. As for friends, well, it's always good to have someone at your back.

According to some people, all mages carry a good friend with them. You can call it your Avatar, your muse, your Daemon, Uncle Knobby, whatever. The name's not important; this helpmate is an aspect of yourself that assists you along life's uncertain road, inspiring, teaching, occasionally even tempting or tormenting. Personally, I'd consider this "Avatar" my unconscious telling me what I already know but don't want to admit. Aria suggests that it may be a voice from my future-self passing my past-self a few notes. Wolf believes in spirit-totems; he's chosen his name from his own, and calls me "Orter" on occasion (which drives me batshit). Other Cultists prefer past lives, soulmates, Platonic ideals, guardian angels and demons, whatever. Most helpmates come to you in dreams or visions. Really powerful ones supposedly appear in solid form, or seem to; at least, I haven't seen an Avatar yet, so I can't say. It's all a bit metaphysical for me, but I guess I'll adjust.

VISIONQUESTS

At turning points of our lives, visions present themselves. Sometimes we go looking for them, but mostly they find us instead. Some people call these moments "Seekings," though I prefer "visionquests" myself.

During a visionquest, you find yourself alone with your fears. To move forward, you have to confront them and break through. A Cultist usually isolates herself from friends and familiar crutches, going off to some totally alien place. What happens there is a matter of opinion: Do spirits visit you? Do you confront God and the Devil in one? Or do the voices and visions come from within your own head? Some sects and mentors stage visionquests for their initiates, dosing them with drugs and sex until they believe they've entered, heaven, hell, or some other world entirely. Other Ecstasies go off alone, wandering deserts or mountains or putting themselves through some ordeal, like the Sioux sun dance or a siddhu trance, where the spirit leaves the physical body behind. Some just take some drugs and channel their concentration toward what they want to experience. In any case, the visionquest leads you to some higher insight; immersed in the World-Pulse, you confront your inner self. From there, you are tested. If you pass, you advance to a higher state of awareness. If not, you stay where you are, often remembering what you've just lost.

A visionquest is a trial by fire. Although I've passed through one already without knowing it, the thought of another one scares the crap out of me. Sometimes I wonder if this new life is worth its cost in fear.

.....

Once, I asked myself who wore fetish gear. One cold November night, Wolf shows me.





The night began with sex... almost. Setting a bond between us, Wolf sweeps me to a peak. As I writhe, sheets clenched in white-knuckle anticipation, his lips and licks advance up each thigh, slowly — God, so slowly! Where they meet, he kisses deeply, brings me to a seething edge, then pulls away. "Not yet," he purrs, rising. "We have plans tonight."

The burning between my legs never fades. Instead it hangs, buzzing, tingling, throbbing. *Bastard!* The bastard in question hands me a steaming glass of wine and... oh, right! Despite the snow outside, he gives me a black cloak and a high-cut skirt, no more. Trembling, I dress. Even these seem cumbersome. I protest anyway. "Concentrate on this," he murmurs and kisses me with cinnamon lips. The warmth lingers as we wander, black-clad vagabonds through frozen-crystal streets, to a thundering warehouse. Despite glassy flakes in wind-tossed hair, misty breath and crisp-crunch snow, the only shivers I feel come from inside.

Outside the club, pumping rhythms carry the Lakashim. "Here," my mentor whispers, drawing open my cloak. "One more touch." Quickly, sharply, a sudden needle lances cold-hard nipples. Pain collides with pleasure, and both with outrage. The tremors knock me dizzy, drag me higher. My lip goes salty-wet between my teeth. Wolf ignores my soft curses as he passes rings through each nipple and snaps a light chain between both. Finally, he kisses me. "Let's go in."

I'm of age, but no one asks. Wolf sweeps me into a black-draped parody of hell, littered with mock vampires, drag queens and shaved-headed toughs. The decay's electric pulse quivers my new rings, my eardrums, my blood, my clit. Beyond the antechamber, a smoke-filled inferno awaits. If the souls inside are damned, they dance with joyous pain. Wolf hands his biker jacket over to a waif with tattooed hands. On impulse, I pass her my cloak as well, baring my bloodied breasts to strangers. A few look my way, but no one fusses. Wolf's kiss adds to my flush. Silently, we enter hell — appalled, amused, afraid and hot beyond words.

After the anticipation, I'm disappointed. Despite a certain decadent glamour, the club and its denizens seem... pathetic. Some hustle with bad pick-up lines while others do the white-boy shuffle. A few appear dangerous, but most look like clowns. I have to shout above the dim: "Is this supposed to be ecstasy?"

"No," Wolf replies, "but it's as close as most people get. Sad, huh?"

We dance barefooted across slick-sticky concrete, bathed in coronas of pulsating light. Smoke smears the air to a blur, now dark, now blasted with colors. Shutting out all others but Wolf, I focus on the beat, the breathing, the blood thumping in time. Ojas rises, rippling through me in waves. Soon I feel

their passions, hear their inner voices, touch them from a distance then spin away again. Wolf is radiant. Our auras expand, filling the space between us until there is no space and we wash across each other. We dance until our hair hangs damply, until breath comes ragged and sweat sheens flesh and soaking cloth. I'm so wired as we stagger from the dance floor that sex and collapse both sound heavenly.

Wolf has other ideas.

A gesture to a burly dude outside a plain black door opens that door to us. Inside, a silent crowd watches a candle-lit stage. Their excitement vibrates into my own. The naked woman hangs upside-down from ankle-chains, her wrists manacled to the floor. Her eyes stare past us, blissful. Another woman, caped and gloved, runs her whip tenderly across bruised, slightly bleeding flesh and coos to her lover in words I cannot hear.

"I don't know about this..."

"Ecstasy comes in all kinds of packages," my mentor whispers. "I'm not even going to pretend I understand the appeal of some, but I thought you should at least see some different paths."

"Is this ecstasy, or is it just perverted?"

"Would you like to find out?"

As the domina draws back her arm and cracks the leather across her lover's belly, I wonder.

KASHMIR

Should I paint my face
Should I pierce my skin
Does this make me a pagan
Sweating out my sins
We ate the sacred mushroom
And waded in the water
Howling like coyotes
At the naked moon

— Robbie Robertson, "Golden Feather"

As I learn later, there are plenty of those "different paths" to focused ecstasy. Few Cultists stay on one for long — the whole point of the matter is to break out of routines — although we all have favorites. In the past, mages cultivated one "path of desire" over all else. These days, we've become more... eclectic.

Some Cultists look to tribal cultures for inspiration. For them, tattooing, piercing, ordeals and other rites of passage focus their energies. Pain is important — through it, you let go of your physical self — and permanent marks preserve the experience. Techno-ecstasies design advanced gadgets to stimulate them in ways simple flesh never could. Some of these guys turn other people on in magickal chatrooms; others prefer to experiment with industrial media, meshing

music, video, virtual reality and cybernetics into wild new art forms. Daredevils prefer raw adrenaline over artificial stimulants; whether their thrills come from skyboarding, suicide-skiing or shark-surfing, these nuts love danger with a smile.

Simpler pleasures come from music, dance and drugs; though the latter's not my style, many Ecstasies still follow the old worship of peyote, drink soma nectar or eat opium and go dream-chasing. Some focus through sexuality, especially esoteric Tantrik and Taoist arts, outrageous sado-masochistic variations, or mass pleasure rites. In the old countries, holy siddhus and yogis follow the ancient disciplines, meditating without food or water or sending themselves into death-trances. Dissonants and Discordians wander through the modern world, using "crazy wisdom" to disrupt others' thoughts and undermine social orders by asking all the wrong questions or playing with people's expectations. Time shamans go even further, summoning up the actual spirits of the past — *zeitgeists* — to make people remember what those days were like. As Wolf shows me, spirits are everywhere if you know where (and how) to look for them. Spirits of the dead, spirits of the earth, even spirits of history itself. Jesus Christ!

We're a weird bunch, we Cultists of Ecstasy; some dedicate themselves to spreading pleasure across the world while others hunt pushers and rapists for turning passion into pain for profit. Traditionalists swear by primal methods while iconoclasts and tech-freaks tear everything down and start over. We're wise folk, lotus-eaters, hippie weirdo freaks and modern Bacchantes, but above all, we're independents. Our shared history and insight is the only real tie between us.

.....

"So what'd you think?"

It will be hard to give him an answer until later. The ripple in my belly and the thunder in my heart undermine any rational answer. I guess that's the idea. The night seems unreal, even by my new standards. Tomorrow maybe I'll have the good sense to be appalled, but now any touch, no matter how harsh, seems like a sacrament.

When we dance, I mark Wolf as mine, and he does the same. Our fingernails slide through each others' sweat. Our tongues taste one another's salt. Every touch jacks the sensations higher, pushes my perceptions further. When we leave, I dangle a new whip, hidden beneath the cloak, against my belly. When we reach home, the fun begins.

There's blood on the sheets by the time we finish. I've never been this way before. It scares me, more than a little, but the shattering orgasm rush blows those fears away like dust bunnies. Wrapped in sweaty-sticky sheets, I see myself from a distance, rolled in Wolf's arms, features reposed in candlelight as the Lakashim thunder fades into darkness.

SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK-N-ROLL

The Cult's affinity for this "unholy trinity" leaves most blockheads cold; outsiders can't see how such "vices" lead to any sort of insight beyond decadence. As usual, the blockheads are wrong. Music, drugs and sexuality share an unmistakable link to the World Pulse. People of all times and cultures crave that contact without knowing why. Ecstasies, of course, understand the value of the trance state (sometimes called *entocomatose lucidity*) which pitches a person through the barriers of reality and headfirst into the Lakshim.

The trip isn't particularly safe; many folks get addicted or burn out after too much stimulation, especially if they're not careful about how they bring it about. Most communities, afraid of the untapped power of trance-passions, suppress sexuality, drug use, and even some types of music, so Ecstasies risk more than just their minds when they indulge. The more intense the experience, the more dangerous that experience becomes — which, of course, is part of its appeal.

Most congrex, or sharing rituals, involve sexual, chemical or musical stimulation. Really intense congrex, sometimes called Tiger Rites or Dances with the Dragon, use two or all three *kamamarga* to bring about trances that even the most jaded Cultists succumb to. Really powerful magickal rites (i.e., extended rolls requiring 10 successes or more) might demand cross-stimulation. Naturally, this carries many risks (see Appendix). But, as they say, it's a hell of a ride.

SEX

As Ecstasies know, sex excites the body, mind and spirit in ways no other stimulus can match. Passion and energy build, flows and explodes into a momentary glimpse of the unknowable. It's a rush, a communion and a social activity in one. To the Hindus who influenced the Tradition, sex is the sacred interplay of Shakti and Shakta (female and male powers). Human sex drive leads to more than simple procreation; done properly, it's a form of worship. Done wrong, it can shatter a person's spirit.

The intimate bond between sexual partners — even unwilling ones — summons *ojas* and circulates that power throughout their bodies. Through touch, the *ojas* are exchanged. During rape, those energies are stolen; the rapist literally carries off a piece of his victim, scarring her in ways no physical injury can match (an unforgivable crime to most Ecstasies). Solitary sex, like masturbation or voyeurism, excites one's passions, but the sharing element is missing. Sexual denial can bring on altered states as well, but most Ecstasies prefer indulgence to restraint. No form of consensual sex is considered perverse within the Cult, and some sects don't even stop there. Most Cultists are omnisexual; simple orientations become just another barrier to break. Although they appear promiscuous to outsiders, most Ecstasies prefer to have some kind of emotional bond with their partners, even if they've just met. Anonymous sex isn't the act of its full potential.

Most Cultists divide sexual acts into high sex, lovemaking and low sex. These groups aren't exclusive — you can use high sex rites during an orgy — but they help distinguish what you're doing, why, and with whom.

- **High sex** raises *ojas* and channels it from one partner to another, sharing energy and expanding consciousness. By nature, it's ritualistic and disciplined, demanding training and concentration. High sex partners don't have to be friends, but it helps. Tantric magick is the obvious example, although some ecstatic SM communions qualify.

- **Lovemaking** shares energy and affection between friends. Although it's more spontaneous than high sex, lovemaking expresses the purest kind of emotion. Most mentors make love with their pupils; above all things, the *diksha* bond demands affection and respect.

- **Low sex** is flat-out screwing. Technique is nice but not essential, and partners can be total strangers. High-mindedness aside, this kind of sex can be as pleasurable and powerful as any other if it's done right. During such congrex, passions rise to a pitch that only orgasm can release. Though most Sleepers having low sex only glimpse the Lakshim for a moment, Ecstasies can prolong the contact for hours on end.

The intimacy and wild power of sexuality can be downright scary; even Cultists aren't blind to its downside: obsession, disease, unwanted pregnancy and emotional damage. Most take precautions against all of the above before they start anything, though some brutal sects like the Aghoris do as they will and leave the mess behind.

DRUGS

Some *kamamarga* are so risky that even Cultists discourage their use. Despite millennia of chemical consciousness, the modern miseries caused by drug abuse gives the Tradition pause. In the '50s and '60s, some Ecstasies thought they could rush worldwide Awakening by turning on the mundanes. The mess that resulted proved the Code of Ananda correct: "Some minds rest best asleep."

Some Cultists maintain that addiction is a Technocratic invention — people get hooked because they're told they will. Others point out that addicts usually come for the fix but don't stay for the visions. Drugs may be a quick road to the Lakshim, but as they say, the journey is the teacher, not the destination. Jumping headlong into bliss only leaves you wanting more; it doesn't show you how to get there on your own.

To Cultists, drugs are not simple chemicals. There's something almost magickal about something that can turn your perceptions inside-out. Some traditionalists argue that modern societies, with their emphasis on transient results, turn psychoactives from a help to

a hazard. Hence, Cultists treat their drugs as more than simple "kicks"; Shamans recognize the spirits inside the substance, and respect them. Religious Ecstasies consider their drugs vision-gifts from the gods. Even more conventional mages consider psychoactives to be tools with a nasty bite. Rather than snorting a line every time he works magick, a Cultist will perform a ritual, getting into a receptive state of mind where the focus will do the most good. (In game terms, this takes at least a turn, often longer.)

Modern Ecstasies divide drugs into "running toward" and "running away" substances. The former make you more receptive, the latter shut you down. Several drugs lie somewhere in between.

- **Running Toward:** Cannabis, hashish, XTC, mushrooms, mescaline and peyote, herbs (belladonna, wolfsbane, etc.), and drinks like soma, nepenthe and absinthe. All of these (except XTC) have long histories as divine voices, vision-bringers and gateways to the unconscious. Most Cultists have at least tried them at some point.

- **Running Away:** Morphine, crack, heroin, PCP, barbiturates, Quaaludes and various downers. These drugs, nearly all modern inventions, offer oblivion over transcendence. While some Ecstasies enjoy the sensation, most serious ones agree that these drugs are more dangerous than useful.

- **Controversial:** Cocaine and coca, smart drugs (piracetam, DHF, vincamine, etc.), venoms (spider, cobra, rattlesnake, etc.), amphetamines, LSD (and other synthetic hallucinogens), alcohol, tobacco and opium. Although these psychoactives have potential uses, Cultists disagree about whether or not those uses are worthwhile. Some drugs, like cocaine and tarantula venom, can be deadly, while others like alcohol and tobacco don't offer much beyond blurred inhibitions. Many modern Cultists disdain artificial drugs and prefer natural highs only. Each individual makes his own choices.

Obviously, Ecstasies and Technocrats have their own drugs in circulation, too. These include:

- **Kaltee:** A mysterious herb used in many custom-made drugs, kaltee works as a food substitute and mild hallucinogen. Popular among many Technocrats, this plant is addictive, highly illegal in the Technocracy, unknown to Sleepers, and a rumor among the Traditions.

- **Monkey Powder:** Refined by Discordian Cultists, this drug scrambles your mind so badly you can barely talk. It's often sprinkled on food (usually not your own). In game terms, it raises all difficulties by +2 for two to three hours if the character fails a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), one hour if he succeeds.

- **Scorpion:** A vicious poison used by some sects, scorpion sends bolts of pain blasting through the user, shorts out her inhibitions and mutilates her thought processes. In game terms, it adds +4 to all difficulties (pain and mind-scrambling) and makes the character act out whatever impulse she happens to feel on the spot. (This may send vampires or werewolves into frenzy.) The drug lasts for six hours. Aside from magickal cures, only a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) can resist scorpion's disruptive effects, and nothing can stop the pain.

- **Ghost Dance and Witch's Powder:** Two similar drugs, the first an herb concoction, the other a sparkling black dust, which allow glimpses into the Penumbra (like **Spirit Sight**). Even Sleepers can use them. Depending on how well aware the user is (and where he is), he may bliss out or freak out. Ghost dance is often used as part of a ritual, while witch's powder has been circulated by some black magicians and Nephandi. Spirit-vision lasts for two hours, or less if the character makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

- **STOP (Serotonin Terminator Option P-5601):** The ultimate weapon of conformity; this drug prevents the user from feeling any passion whatsoever. No matter what, she'll remain passive for the drug's duration (six hours or more); functional but numb. STOP even cancels out other drugs. Roleplaying, noc systems, reflect STOP's effects. If a dosed character fails a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), she remains calm until the drug wears off. No pain or pleasure will break that calm. STOP's long-term effects — irritability, nausea and brain damage — keep it as a last resort for now. Soon, however, the NWO hopes to add STOP to school lunches, prison food, soft drinks...

ROCK-N-ROLL

The safest karmamarga, music is slow but potent, and shares an experience like no other focus can. Although all kinds of music have magickal potential, rock music (including variations like rap and techno) has a primal resonance that only the most primitive drumming can match.

Rumors aside, Cultists did not begin rock-n-roll. It evolved out of a gestalt of the times, implacable and irresistible. Once they noticed it, however, Ecstasies joined the fun. A good many of them Awakened through its power, either through playing or listening. Pure rock music is the song of change, the soundtrack of rebellion, which explains the kick behind certain etas — the mid-'50s, late '60s and punk/rap revolution of the '70s and '80s in particular. The best artists express their passions for their own sake, not to sell records or get laid but because they have no choice but to scream. Rock is that scream set to music.

The secret behind potent music is passion. When the artist has something to say, the music itself carries the power. If the musicians are just performing, their music becomes crisply sterile. The truism applies to all variations of rock — a punk song can be banal, while a quiet ballad can call up the Serpent Road. Although many Cultists prefer basic instruments, some love to carve out sonic territory with new technology. As always, passion is the key.

OTHERS LIKE US



What limits people is that they don't have the fucking nerve or imagination to star in their own movie, let alone direct it.

— Tom Robbins, *Still Life with Woodpecker*

The problem with the Cult, Wolf says, is that everyone wants to fly — in different directions. Aside from a few modern Divyas who represent us, no one gives orders or determines policy. It's great, but kind of unsettling, too. Freefall all over again. No Mommy or Daddy, just you.

It's always good to have friends. Fortunately, I quickly find that a Cultist makes friends easily. There's a certain... aura... around people who take their lives into their own hands. It frightens outsiders, but it attracts people, too, especially like-minded ones. Wherever I go, strangers introduce themselves or skitter off into corners before I even say my name. Maybe it's arrogant of me, but as I get used to the effect, I realize that most of those who run aren't people I'd want to know anyway.

BONDS

As I soon learn, meeting a person goes a lot deeper than simply exchanging words. Every contact you ever have, especially the close ones, literally becomes part of you on a metaphysical level. Close bonds, like good friendships, set up a link which remains as long as you both stay friends. This, I've found, has a lot to do with the Cult's fondness for sex — it's not just a communion, it's communication. When there's trouble, you can always try to call upon that bond. If you know the right magicks, that friend will hear you.

More often than not, a Cultist prizes his friends — not just out of love, but out of self-preservation. The link tugs both ways. Really charismatic Ecstasies, like Aleister Crowley, might treat people like shit and make them love him for it, but most of us aren't so lucky. A lesser version of the diksham bond applies to one's friends or companions: you trust they won't hurt you, and you promise not to harm them. Of course, some mages ignore those kind of niceties. To them, causing pain is pleasure.

Generally, a Cultist knows another Cultist on sight. When we meet, we try to establish bonds — or avoid them — as quickly as possible. Nomadic as we are, you never know when you might see each other again. Or when you might need to.

Marcie never returns my phone calls anymore. When I visit, she won't answer. Christ. A 10-year friendship shot to hell. And I may never find out why.

As Wolf and I grow close, Aria pulls away. Not abruptly, but unmistakably. As Spring begins and my talents blossom, she grows pensive. One afternoon, I notice we do look like

sisters. I'd never seen it before. "Are you coming with us to Nevada?" I had asked. Wolf is planning a trip to a huge gathering in August, and he's been teaching me how not to act when we got there. He hadn't mentioned Aria in those plans.

"Yeah," she said with false enthusiasm. "I'll be there."

"Did you get your plane ticket yet?"

She smiled, for real this time: "Oh, that. I won't need one!"

I knew then that she wasn't sticking around. I cried, but hid my tears.

SECTS

Not all Cultists are loners. Some groups come together to pursue an organized path; for lack of a better word, we call them sects. Though they don't keep a roll-call and tend to be secretive, plenty of sects predate Sh'zar by a large margin. Some, like the Aghoris, cause trouble for more... respectful... mages. Others bond with the shadow-folk and pursue really arcane pleasures.

More often than not, I'm told you can recognize a sect member when you meet him. He often shares a mark of distinction (usually permanent, like a tattoo or other body modification), a loyalty oath, and common purpose with his fellows. It's generally hard to tell mages from mundanes in a sect: they tend to be a bit more, um... subtle... than wandering Ecstasies, and don't show off as often. Sects are more common in the old countries — India, Central America, etc. — than they are in the more individualistic modern world. At least, the obvious ones are. Who can tell? They don't tend to put up billboards to announce their presence.



FAMILIES, JAMBOS, THE DREAMLINE AND PUNISHMENTS

Liberty means responsibility, that is why most men dread it.

— George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*

When Sh'zar conceived of his Tradition, the Seer envisioned a loose fellowship of enlightened folk, joined by insight, not government. The reality has become slightly more pragmatic over the centuries, but the Cult remains an individualistic lot, with little internal structure, planning or consensus. Even so, they remain unified in the face of trouble. Word has a way of getting around.

Few Cultists settle anywhere for long; notoriously restless, they crave constant stimulation. Any partners they choose tend to be nomads as well. Children, Awakened or not, are raised on the go. Most of these folks are skilled in their own right, and might be accomplished hedge wizards or even full-fledged mages. Quite a few Ecstasies simply love in passing, leaving their partners behind and making new ones along the way. Such ephemeral ways are part of their romantic allure.

Cultists often meet on the road, and usually recognize each other by their auras' distinct glow (see Appendix). Really good festivals, concerts or protests provide common ground, too. Shows by Crash Worship, Ruined Root, the Indigo Girls and, until recently, the Grateful Dead are certain to bring the local Ecstasies out of the woodwork. Strangers greet each other like old friends, sharing a joint, a hug or a bed within moments of introduction. More traditional sects prefer elaborate greetings, peppered with enigmatic phrases or intricate formalities. One feature that confounds other Traditions is the almost total trust most Ecstasies share; the usual daggers are left outside, at least for a while, when Cultists meet.

Serious occasions, like an outside threat, warrant a jambo, a "hello" where Cultists and their companions gather. These come together within days of the decision to form one. Outsiders continue to be impressed at the Cult's communication abilities. "Spontaneous" jambos bring Ecstasies from all over the world to places no one else has ever heard of — a rave in downtown Chicago, a lifeless desert in Nevada or a mountain retreat in Nepal. There always seems to be enough food, water and drugs to go around, and everyone's up on the latest gossip. What gives?

Two things; the first is simply a really good "telephone" system. A Cultist tells two friends, and they tell two friends, and so on and so on... The more arcane and urgent form of communication, the dreamline, involves calling upon the bonds Cultists form with each other. These ritual exchanges make an empathic bond that passes between mages if they wish it to. Like the disham, this sets up an implied "contract" which Correspondence magick can trace if necessary (see the Correspondence Range chart in *Mage*). By sending forth a call, and twisting Time around it, a Divya can contact every Cultist he has ever met, calling them together in less perceived time than a phone call would require. These spells are serious business; anyone concerned about her Tradition will answer one ASAP.

Cultists rely on debate to decide important issues. Rank is seldom an issue, as only one formal title, Divya, exists. Initiates often defer to their mentors, however, and experienced Ecstasies are usually respected. A careless Ecstasis doesn't survive his lifestyle for long, so it's worth the time to listen to what a survivor has to say!

• Disputes and Punishments

In a society where each individual is sacred, she must be held accountable for her actions. Few Cultists care about Sleeper laws; violations of person, however, are taken seriously. More often than not, if you've been wronged, it's up to you to take care of it. Friends come in handy here, but it's almost a matter of honor to settle your own disputes. Certain duels or punishment wheels often do the trick.

Cult duels involve stimulation on a scale both parties induce mystick sensations until one of them is overwhelmed. In game terms, each combatant rolls her Arete each turn and describes what her opponent feels. The defender resists with a Willpower roll. Both rolls must exceed difficulty 5 on the first turn; this goes up +1 every turn until someone loses. Every time Arete beats Willpower, the defender loses one (temporary) Willpower point. This goes on until someone gives up or falls senseless (at zero Willpower).

Sh'zar excelled at the punishment wheel; basically, the Ecstasis sets up an empathic bond (through Mind 2/Time 3) between violator and victim. The worse the crime, the longer the "wheel" continues. While some sickies get off on the anguish they cause, few want to "ride the wheel" more than once.

As the Code of Ananda implies, Cult justice usually involves banishment or revenge. Some vigilantes — often scarred by rape or violence — actually hunt violators down. In extreme cases, a jury of Divyas meets to decide a case. Their verdicts are often harsh: exile, branding, mystick castration (which uses Mind 4/Life 3/Time 3 to numb all sensations permanently), or death.

SECTS

Hundreds of ecstatic cults, sects and religions exist across the world. Many simply consist of Sleepers searching for some contact with the Divine Pulse; they may attract an Ecstasy mage or two for a while, but operate mainly through mortal means. The sects below, however, have old ties to the Cult of Ecstasy and involve dozens of mages in active roles.

Unlike common Ecstasies, these sects each have particular initiations, apprenticeships and goals. All of these sects have Secret Code Languages (see "New Abilities" in *The Book of Shadows*), and many members acquire odd Merits and Flaws. Sleepers mingle freely with mages in almost all of these groups, though they may never attain the enlightenment of Awakened members.

AGHORIS, ACHARNE AND HESTILIC

Fierce sects known for pushing past all limits of morality, society or self-preservation, these three groups reject the Code of Ananda as weakness. Occasionally, they've tried to take over leadership of the Cult, a move that would probably cause a war with the other eight Traditions. At the moment, each sect exists in small, isolated bands. Most Ecstasies consider them *byabbi* and avoid or even attack known members.

The Indian Aghoris go back over 500 years. Their name means "unfrightened" in Sanskrit, and they reside in Assam, near the Bengali border. In their teachings, a person can become a god through constant destruction of his mortal self. As he tosses aside all human limitations—including empathy and civility—he transcends his humanity. Sadly, this "conversion" is often done at outsiders' expense: Aghoris are known for their wild cruelty. Aghora initiation includes near-death experiences, cemetery orgies and participation in forbidden acts (rape, murder, dissection, etc.). Ritual prohibition is common, and punishments usually involve torture and death.

The Acharne descend from the European Hellfire Clubs, where decadent gentlemen summoned devils and indulged in sadomasochistic blasphemy. The modern Acharne prefer Gothic-Industrial trappings and hang out in clubs, but play the same games. The scorpion drug is their invention. During initiation, new Cultists brand their own genitals and share blood with their web (caval). The Hestilic Umbroul (see *The Book of Madness*) take Acharne off to their Realms for funtime; their pleasures would sicken de Sade. New York, L.A., Berlin and London have several small clubs where Acharne webs gather. No outsider is safe in them.





Hagalaz reside in Norway, revering their Nordic forebears. Odin, Freyja and Loki are their patrons, though some claim to worship Satan instead. Violently anti-Christian, the small-but-growing sect wants to wipe the "creed of weakness" from their home. While most of the Hagalaz' un-Awakened followers are black-metal losers, their Awakened leaders are accomplished Norse sorcerers. Initiates carve runes into their skin and drink animal blood. One werewolf tribe, the Get of Fenris, sends its warriors to the sect's aid. Certain mages believe that some Verbena belong to this mysterious sect, but few outsiders know for sure.

BONGO'S RANGERS

A Discordian sect devoted to consciousness-unraveling, the Rangers use high-tech magicks to warp all forms of stimulation into overload. The stream of consciousness is seen as the only true road to the Lakshmi; to reach it, that stream must be diverted unexpectedly. Many Rangers stage raves, dispensing music, drugs and endless stimulation to mundanes in an effort to undermine society, and speak in an arcane gibberish even most of them don't understand. "Only when Blockheads and Grayfaces have wiggles cast upon them shall the waters be wrought with Cellfish and the chak-wigging praise" is common gospel.

Initiates have their senses scrambled six ways to Sunday; this usually lasts a week. If they can still function during this time (Willpower roll, difficulty 9 to perform a task), they're accepted. The Secret Code Language is only an option — many Rangers have no idea what the others are talking about, either. Incoherence is the general idea.

FELLOWSHIP OF PAN

In the Barring Times, this sect struck bargains with the satyr fae. In exchange for all the passion the two groups could stir, the Ecstasies would take refugee changelings away to Horizon Realms. Since satyrs were actively hunted during this time, many accepted the offer. Although many of these expatriates returned home during the 1960s, some still journey back to Balador and Horizon for parties. This sect aided their friends during the Accordance War (see *Changelings: The Dreaming*), and remain in many nobles' bad graces. Nevertheless, Fellows of Pan are welcome at most festivities and often have several changelings as patrons. All are wonderful artists, musicians or craftsmen, and have an even more otherworldly aura than most Cultists do.

The Fellowship leaves initiation to their fair friends; since these tend to be satyrs, acceptance usually involves long bouts of drinking and sex, interspersed with spirited debates and insult contests. Musical talent is essential, and one or two Supernatural Merits help. Most Fellows have high Ally Background ratings, the Faerie Affinity Merit, or both.

DISSONANCE SOCIETY

Another group of Discordians, this one dedicated to intellectual overthrow. Unlike the Rangers, Dissonancers are highly organized, practical and eloquent. By disseminating radical ideas, financial incentives and liberal amounts of music, group congress and spirit magick, these Cultists influence Sleepers to open their minds to anarchy and self-reliance. All governments are seen as evil, but pure selfishness is also attacked. To the Society, hope for the future comes only through mutual respect, responsibility and the overthrow of tyranny. Primal nature is often seen as Divine. Although some Dissonancers can be violent, most prefer subtle magickal attacks over random destruction. "If we hurt innocents," one Dissonancer notes, "we're no better than the pigs."

Obviously, the Society is quite criminal. Initiation involves undercutting some establishment figure or function — driving policemen mad, exposing political corruption, inciting riots, etc. So far, a simple paradox has undermined the Dissonancers' efforts: most people don't want to take control of their own lives. This flaw, and what to do about it, are constant sources of debate within the sect.

KHLYSTY FLAGELLANTS

The Russian Christian sect made infamous by Rasputin, these monks believe that in order to be forgiven, one must sin. By indulging in forbidden pleasures, the Khlysty bring their passions to a pitch; the ritual penance, which involves flogging, fasting, exposure to the elements and sometimes castration, explodes these passions into an ecstatic vision. While an outsider may view the sect as a good way to have your cake and eat it too, Khlysty mortifications are quite severe. Although the sect was supposedly purged during Stalin's reign, some Ecstasies brought it underground; now it enjoys a resurgence in post-Soviet Russia.

Initiates must be Christian, preferably Russian Orthodox. Intense rituals, involving prayers and fasting, may take many weeks before the member's spirituality is accepted. Khlysty monks are known for incredible stamina, longevity and resistance to pain. Rasputin, it is said, was not the only one of his order to have irresistible charisma.

FIFTH WORLD TRIBE (LOS SABIOS LOCOS)

A resurgence of primal Americana, the Tribe incorporates Native American shamanism, hippie anarchism and powerful music into a gestalt that could shake the roots of the modern world. In time, they hope to bring it down and replace it with a cleaner, spirit-oriented culture.

Los Sabios Locos, the peyote-Cultists of the 1800s, laid the framework for this sect during the 1940s. During the '60s, it came into full bloom. Jim Morrison himself may have been inspired by one of their teachers, Red Cloud Thunder. As one might expect, these Ecstasies have friends among the shapeshifters, especially werewolves, wereravens

(Corax) and werecoyote (Nuwishia). Although their magick is potent, the group itself is fairly disorganized, scattered throughout nearly a dozen primal-beat bands. Its members have a bad tendency to let drugs, money and spiritual differences come between them, and the Technocracy has taken advantage of this by sending Syndicate agents to tempt bands with cash, coke and MTV exposure. For now, the power of the Fifth World remains untapped.

Although the Tribe requires no formal initiation, its members go off on frequent visionquests across mountains, deserts and beaches. Natural purity is a must; most Fifth Worlders are vegans who shun anything artificial (except, of course, in their instruments). Although new members should know how to sing or play, the Tribe concentrates on instinct rather than training. High Expression and Dancing ratings are a must.

K'AN LU

A Chinese Taoist sect, these Ecstasies combine martial arts, meditations and sexual congress in order to focus their Chi energies into creative force. In contrast with many Akashic Brothers, the K'an Lu forsake asceticism in favor of stimulation. Unlike the average Cultist ("unenlightened barbarians"), these Ecstasies discipline their unions, combining meditation, breath control and ejaculation denial with arcane postures. These techniques distill personal Chi into Tass, which is said to taste like the sweetest honey. Other, more intuitive Cultists admire the beauty of the K'an Lu style, but dismiss it as "too slow, and no fun at all." The power such discipline channels, however, would shock skeptics. These mysticks are among the greatest masters of Time, Prime and Mind Arts, and many are astonishingly long-lived; Marianna has three K'an Lu Masters on the Balador council (Kuan Si, Chou Lin Hi and Iniko Tajiburo), and calls them "...the most sexual lovers I know."

To enter the K'an Lu, one has to find them; after the Beijing crackdown of the late 1980s, this is difficult. The Masters have moved their temples into secret gardens and mountain retreats, where they school their followers (mortal and mage alike) in Taoist alchemy and secret styles of Tai Chi Ch'uen. Although most are vegetarians, they love spicy foods and are not above the occasional taste of meat. To join the sect, one must meditate under a fountain for seven days and nights, then undergo rigorous training and instruction. Only when the mentor is satisfied of the initiate's discipline is he or she schooled in the sexual postures of the Emerald Pillow, and from there, to the magickal Arts.

ERZULJIMO, KING OF ASTHRITE, BY'N, MHEHDS AND VRATYAS

These five sects have certain similarities: all admit only women, favor spirit congress, emphasize sexuality over drugs, and practice healing, especially on women. The styles of magick they use are fairly different, but flow from feminine Divinity.

The **Erzuli Jingo** follow the Voudun faith; through invocation of the *Loa* Madame Saint Erzuli, they pass into the spirit world, enter dreams and soothe both mind and body. Their offerings of champagne and roses, music and frenzied dancing invite possession by helpful spirits. Initiation requires long training (often by a family member), frequent offerings and a visionquest ordeal.

To those who anger them, these mages are quite fearsome: they visit victims in their dreams and sometimes twist them in grotesque ways with Life Arts. Although a sect unto themselves, Jingo nambos frequently work with the *Bata's* *Craft* (see *The Book of Crafts*). They often gather into coven of nine women, with at least one Awakened mage present, and work hard in their communities to teach and nurture children.

The **Kiss of Astarte** is a modern pagan sect. Dianic in foundation but universal in application. Unlike the **Erzuli Jingo**, many **Astartians** are lesbians, and have close ties with American Black Fury werewolf packs. These mysticks use subtle rituals to direct their combined will into rejuvenation, healing, and occasional retribution. Music, chanting and dance are always important parts of any rite, and vision drugs (especially peyote and belladonna) and ritual sex add potency to spells and celebrations.

In many ways, these Ecstatics resemble *Verbona*; in fact, both groups have close ties. While the **Astartians** also follow the Great Earth Goddess, they focus more upon altered states of consciousness than upon connection to Divinity or the sacred self. Their Arts call and awaken spirits, then use the communion to achieve mystick insight. Their circles involve 13 women, many of whom are "out" about their alternative sexuality and practices. Open as it is, this sect has many enemies.

The **Ka's** project their essence from their bodies after hours of Tantrik exercises, dance and herbal drugs. These women are quite bisexual — they often choose female lovers to achieve a state of ecstasy, then go off to find male partners to add to it.

A secret cult, these Tibetan mysticks seem perfectly ordinary on their own. They meet once a month in remote sanctuaries, in groups of three women whose menstrual cycles always remain in synch. When together, the **Ka's** raise power and leave their bodies behind, then drain *Shakti* from distant Sleepers and carry it home as *Tass*; this essence fuels mental and physical healings. To prevent discovery, the mages change their forms and become dream lovers, usually to strangers. Interestingly enough, **Ka's** never become pregnant when using only magick to make love. Their paramours, however, awaken feeling listless and drained (but cheerful nevertheless).

Maenads have one of the most impressive legacies in the Cult: *Tali Eos*, a Tradition founder, was one of their own. Because of this, these followers of Dionysus enjoy a solid place among Ecstatics and a deep bond with the Black Fury werewolf tribe. It's a good thing they have friends in high places —



they're a fierce and bloody lot. A revel of these modern-day Bacchantes inevitably ends with spilled gore and hidden bodies.

Given modern-day criminology and morality, the small Maenad sub-sects are more discreet than their ancient forebears; members often work in rape crisis centers, halfway houses, daycare schools and government agencies in between revels. Every full moon, however, the sisters meet in some secluded place, drink, dance and scream down the mixon. Dionysus, in his androgynous aspect, is invoked and his spirit sets them free. Whatever insults they've seen or suffered come to the surface to be purged. As the evening progresses, the party gets wilder. Anyone unfortunate enough to stumble upon the meeting is torn apart by a frenzied mob.

Although magically undisciplined, most Maenads are physically imposing, with savagely effective Mind Arts and Life talents. Many use archaic weapons if a battle is called for. Some learn the spirit-ways from Black Furies. Despite the sect's many un-Awakened members, Maenads have little problem with vulgar Effects. The drunken frenzy makes all sisters "aware" while the revel continues (i.e., they're not "witnesses"). In the morning, the Maenads disperse. Only the mages remain in contact between full moons; their Arcane talents often allow them to cover up... indiscretions.

The Indian Vratyas have a long and mysterious history. Tales of these dakinis date back far before the birth of Christ. Few of them have anything much to do with other Ecstasies except to function as Tantrik instructors. When met, they demonstrate impressive powers of Life, Prime, Mind and Spirit, wear black robes and turbans, and refuse to discuss their mystick theories. Several Vratyas accompanied Sh'far to Horizon, and put impolite outsiders in their places. One, Maat'at Sulas, befriended the Dreamspeaker queen Nioba and killed herself when the Arcum was assassinated — but not before slaying the killer with a blow that caused his body to melt like wax. To this day, no one knows how she did it.

Cult rumor states that the Vratyas have an ancestral village in the mountains of Nepal, where no man goes and survives. There, it's said, they raise their children to spread Tantrik teaching throughout India. The boys are forced to leave when they reach puberty, after the elder Vratyas initiate them into sexuality. From there, it's thought, many wandering siddhu begin their lifelong quests.



DEPARTURE

The comfortable life causes spiritual decay just as soft sweet food causes tooth decay.

— Colin Wilson, *Poetry & Mysticism*

I didn't really realize that I loved Wolf until I saw him in another's arms. The fact that "another" was a man didn't help my confusion. That fact that I can already hear his apologies, his insistence that no one owes another, didn't patch the rips across my heart. So I'll run before he says he loves me back.

No Aria, either. Just a note on the table: "Cassie — Gone. See ya in Nevada." To hell with them both. After crying my fool eyes out, I'll toss some shit in a backpack and

hop a plane. I can get cash without selling anything.

Before leaving, I punch the CD player to "Random."

Music helps me think. Janis, the Voice of Truth, cries

also, 26 years gone. "Piece of My Heart," indeed. I screamed

my frustration with her as I danced. Wherever you are,

Janis, bless you. My eyes go raw and wet. When I finish, all I

see is mist, green mountains, and desert flat as the taste of old

beer. I'm going lots of places, I see. Good. I need the space.

My belly drops with the feeling of flight. Before I leave,

I'm already gone. Jesus. So this is freefall. Real freefall. Where

there's no one to catch you but yourself. God, I hope I know

what I'm doing.





THIRD VERSE: FIREDANCE

The only real blasphemy is the refusal of joy.
— Paul Rudnick, *Jeffrey*



I dream of otters on my quest. Otters with Aria's brightwater eyes.

The journey takes me west, to Colorado, California, Arizona and finally to Black Rock playa, an ocean turned to dust. I've kept my promise to meet the others here, and I've learned a lot besides.

It's easy — too easy — to think you understand a thing by gazing at a pattern and performing rituals in a candle-lit room. To truly understand the Divine Pulse, though, I had to walk an endless road. Not with magick, but with humanity. By the time I reach Nevada for the festival, I've seen the Lakashim reflected in a thousand faces, voices, names. I've left a bit of myself in each person I've met. And they've left themselves in me.

SLEEPERS, BLOCKHEADS AND SHADOW-FOLK



Your enemy is never a villain in his own eyes. Keep this in mind; it may offer a way to make him your friend. If not, you can kill him without hate — and quickly.... A brute kills for pleasure. A fool kills from hate.

— Robert A. Heinlein, *Time Enough for Love*

She calls herself "Raven." More butch than Stallone, but good with a knife. During our time together, she leaves designs carved in my skin. The pain is exquisite, but never dulls my loneliness.

On the beach one night, I share a fire with some teenagers smoking bad dope and drinking cheap beer. Three seem all right, but their "leader," a feral-looking dude called Max, sends all my danger signs into the red. They offered me some pot, but I declined and quickly made excuses to leave. I hope no one ever accepts their offer.

Outside Reno, two men almost ran me down. As the engine gunned suddenly behind me, their malevolence hit me like the car itself. I dodged to the side, rolled and hid in trash while they stopped, searched, cursed and left. Lucky. Maybe there's something to the guardian angel

thing. If Aria or Wolf was around, I never saw them. Then again, perhaps it's just me.

In a bar in Boulder, I found myself appraised by a man with eyes like eternity. Even Aria would lose a stare-down with this spook. My skin crinkles like burnt paper as he looks me over, smiles, then moves on. Whatever he was, I don't think it was human. And I have this feeling we'll meet again.

In Phoenix, I meet Linda. One too many lovers of the wrong kind have wrecked her. I didn't mean to take her into my care, but by the time we leave, we're companions. In Nevada, I set her free. We both cried, but the last time I saw her, she was laughing, rolling in mud with a friendly boy from the Bronx. Funny, how I remember this. It hasn't rained since we've arrived.

Raven taught me the fire dance. In Nevada, I put the lessons to work. Before a crowd of curious folks, I light the batons. Flames flare in darkness, total desert darkness lit only by fitful campfires and the inferno in my hands. The night is a cool, dry breeze. Looking beyond the crowd, I begin.

THE SLEEPERS

It's a pipe dream, I know, but when a girl thinks a boy's slap on her face means he loves her, you have to start somewhere.

—Timothy Tuner

We're not alone. Never. The Lakashim throbs within each sacred thing, a live design of vast complexity. I may call myself Awakened, now, but no one truly sleeps. Somewhere underneath the mundane world, potential stirs, sluggish but no less real. "Existence," Wolf's memory says, "is just a shared hallucination; few people realize it, and fewer still act on the knowledge. Those who don't should be awakened with a kiss." He smiles, then: "Just don't throw water in their face. They'll kill you."

He's not kidding. In San Francisco, I was nearly arrested. Along a road in Cuttersville, a woman screamed obscenities and shot at me. I've met men I've loved and men I'd have loved to kill and lots of men and women in between. If you meet the Cultist on the road, don't kill him, please. Lots of folks have already tried.

We never give up, though. Sleeping folks are flames to our kind. So many would dance if they only heard the rhythm. And, as Jim Morrison said, we do have the numbers to start a hell of a party. Some Ecstasies consider mundanes toys; others, tools or company; and still others, victims. Me, I'd prefer to see them as parts of myself. Don't ask which view is true. I'd say all of the above.

BLOCKHEADS

Now we've got this great oppressive force that's trying to homogenize and make everything the same! And that we must resist and fight, because that's anti-life! Evil is "live" spelled backwards. Whatever would tend to crush the individual expression of life in people — that is evil.

—Fakir Musafar, *Modern Primitives*

I understand fear. My whole Awakening has been a lung fight to transcend terror. Some people never escape their fear. It drives them, consumes them. In the process, it consumes others, also. The witch-hunts didn't end when the fires died down. If any-



thing, they've begun again, bathed in a warm TV glow and scrutinized for our protection.

Do you wonder at the powers behind the demagogues? I don't anymore. Did you ever ask yourself why otherwise sane human beings could be so afraid of change that they'd plaster their bumpers with "Rush is Right" and "Don't Blame Me..."? Believe me, there are reasons.

Blockheads don't get it and never will. In their perfect little worlds, there's no room for catastrophes, no need for fear. If they had to, they would dig the thousand names of chaos from the sand and burn them all alive. Some do. Those men in Reno, for example. Now that I've stepped outside the lines, mine is one of those thousand names. To blockheads, I'm a threat worth killing for. To me, they're sad, pathetic. But a loser with a chain-gun still has a chain-gun, so it's best to skirt his borders and leave when he arrives.

THE OTHERS

Some say the gods are just a myth
Well, guess who I've been dancing with?

The Great God Pan is alive
— Waterboys, "The Return of Pan"

Some supernaturals have closer ties with the Cultists than others do. For the most part, the wise fools entice the Kindred, intrigue the werewolves, disgust the Garou, embarrass the Traditions, alarm the Technocrats, infuriate the Fallen, sadden the ghosts (but deal well with nature spirits), and frolic when they can find them, with the fae. Still, the vampire clan Toreador, the Daughters of Cacophony bloodline and the satyr fae enjoy especially close relationships with the Cult.

• Vampire Clans

As the undead have discovered, certain magi are more susceptible to their games, but make more formidable opponents when crossed. Although a character needs the Lore Knowledge (or Mage Lore, in the case of vampires) to recognize another's clan or Tradition, these relationships are worth noting.

Unlike most vampires, the Toreador comprehend the Lakshmi. They don't see it as Ecstasies do (unless they achieve the fifth level of Auspex), but can feel it — and use it — in their own way. This is the arena's call beneath their art fixation. The pulse of creation itself.

The Daughters of Cacophony unleash the dark side of the Pulse. Their songs open the doors of perception further than most people can stand. Cultists are used to this, though — such insights rarely drive them mad. Vampires who use the Melancholic Discipline against Ecstasies must add +2 to their difficulties.

The dark corruptors of Set and Bael know Cultists all too well. Many mages have fallen to their temptations — or have destroyed their drug and slave cartels. Tradition leadership knows these vampires exist, but understand little about their powers or origins.

As artists and sensualists, Ecstasies recognize a good time when they meet him (even if he does feed on blood). Thus, vampires and Cultists sometimes become playmates... or rivals. No "official" pact exists between the groups (quite the opposite); but individual vampires and mages often meet in the night. The tone of those meetings (and the amount of blood spilled) depends on the characters and egos involved.

• Satyrs

This relationship should be obvious. Goodwill between goats and Ecstasies goes back to ancient Greece, and they're often found in each others' company. While most fae treasure Cultists' company (can you say "Glamour factory?"), the satyrs enjoy a bond similar to dikshara: *trages kalein*, the Call of the Goat. Struck during the revels of Dionysus, this bond prohibits fighting between the groups. The Call is broken every so often, but for a 2,000-year-old truce, it works pretty well.

THE SHADOW-FOLK

There was no doubt left in my mind that these people were carrying out some sort of test that Don Juan had set up for me. By confronting them I was being hurled into a realm which was impossible to reach or accept in rational terms. He had said... that my rationality comprised only a very small part of what he called the totality of oneself. Under the impact of the unfamiliar and the altogether real danger... my body had to make use of its hidden resources, or die.

— Carlos Castaneda, *The Second Ring of Power*

The shadows are alive. I've seen them watching me from banisters and spiderwebs. Some are mysticks like myself, while others are unknowable, alien. Even in my rush for discovery, I'm not in a hurry to learn them all by name. The man in Boulder chases my dreams. I only pray he never catches me in the open. Someday, perhaps, we'll dance, but not now. I'm far from ready.

Among the wizards, Wolf tells me, we have few friends. The Dreamspeakers and Verbena still remember

our Divyas, if not our contribution to their Council. The others, I'm told, wash their hands of our fools' wisdom. More the fools, they. Some hacker-mages may take time-outs in techno-ecstasies' chatrooms, but I'm leery of those types of friends. Best to walk with my own kind, with Sleepers, or alone.

Outside the lines of ecstasy, hungrier shadows wait. Some are demented, or have black-hole hearts. As I heft the flame batons, I chase the darkness from my sight. Within my reach, a firestorm whirls, close enough to singe but not to burn. I'm careful, you know, and well-trained. This fire dance won't consume me. Not now. Not ever.

ANANDA

*All the fear has left me now
I'm not frightened anymore
It's my heart that pounds beneath my flesh
It's my mouth which pushes out this breath
And if I shed a tear I won't cage it
I won't fear love
And if I feel a rage I won't deny it
I won't fear love*

— Sarah McLachlan, "Fumbling Towards Ecstasy"

I stand out in the morning now, my hair ruffled softly by desert winds. Blue-gray skies vault above me, the night retreating slowly from an unseen sun. Beneath my feet, the playa dust drifts, grain by grain, tickling my ankles, powdering my soles. Far from me, yet close enough, I feel, to touch, thunderclouds flash silently across distant mountaintops. Across the plain, there is no sound, only bolts of silent fury. Before long, the sun will blaze across the desert and the festival will begin again. For now, I wish to dance alone and greet the morning my own way.

Above me stands a modern wicker man, arms outstretched before the morning. I mimic him, dropping my blanket, baring my body to the morning cold. Nipples snap erect, hair bristles, skin prickles as the breeze plays across me.

I stretch the sleep from aching muscles. In my throat, sounds form. Words I cannot speak because no one has invented language for what I feel. A song. An Aria. Now I understand.

Somewhere across the flat expanse, a lone drummer greets the morning. I shift my weight from side to side, catching the faraway beats and translating them to movement. They match my heartbeat. The Divine Pulse. Maybe I only imagine this, but perhaps he feels it too. Surely I'm not the only one Awake here.

I let my song become my movements, let them bleed together in breath, in heartbeat. My throat rasps; there's too little water here, and I have gone without too long. I run my tongue from side to side and caress each tooth in turn. I swallow and milligrams of miracles caress my dusty throat.



I fill my lungs with cold dry air and raise my voice with passion praise. Behind closed eyelids, my sight races, pulsates from my stomach to my feet to my fingers and away, to embrace the spirits of this barren waste and the visitors who sleep. To me, the thumping bass of a miles-distant rave is close at hand; the tender skin of sleepers relaxes at my touch. The lightning-crackle miles from me sets my hair on end and the cool wind is a lover with roving hands. I sense, though I cannot see, the lake this was a million years ago; the passage of ghost-fish and ancient currents cause my lungs to hitch for just a moment, as if I were submerged. Then all I feel is dust beneath my feet; it saddens me.

Then it passes and I feel the pat of future raindrops spatter dusty skin. It will rain today and I revel in it now as I will six hours hence. The lovers I'll caress tonight and the

ones I had before visit me as I dance below the wicker man. I send myself to visit them, so those I haven't met will know me and the ones I have met will remember. From my belly, just above my groin, I grow warm and wet. The tingle spreads to chase away the cold across my skin, pulses outward and joins the morning's heartbeat. The desert's heartbeat. Even here, it never stills.

One final note. I pitch it high and long, follow its waves as it echoes across the desert, then fall back into myself and shiver as the wind cools my sudden sweat.

One final gift; I send a ghost of my sensations to the lonely drummer at his fire. Perhaps I'll meet him later, maybe not. For now, he'll know someone loves him.

For now, at least, I've left the fear behind. It's wonderful to be alive.





FOURTH VERSE: ...FROM THE ANCIENT GALLERY

*Death makes angels of us all
& gives us wings
where we had shoulders
smooth as raven's
claws*

— Jim Morrison, "American Night"



*Some died in ecstasy
Some died in poverty,
But they all die
With their boots on
At the shouting end of life*

— Oysterband, "The Shouting End of Life"
Story's over. Let's talk game systems.

Ecstatics are daredevils, shamans, renegades, hippies, and seekers of joy in a cold, impersonal world. They could be you, if you were one of them. It's not appearance that makes an Ecstatic mage — it's a willingness to step however far out it takes to realize that, buried under all the garbage, some Divinity exists. The journey they undertake to find it may be treacherous, but to them, the danger makes the prize all the more worthwhile.

Most Ecstatics are their own foci, and they learn by intuition. The drugs and instruments they use to propel

themselves into an altered state are only tools, *upaya*, the "skillful means" to an end. It is the mind and the spirit that provide their Arts. Don't be fooled by the Hallmark brigade; primal magick is nasty stuff — painful, frightening and very, very potent. As this chapter illustrates, many Cultists burn out at an early age. Their impressive legacies, however, make the sacrifice seem worthwhile. For a short, glorious time, these mages see the world from perspectives most of their cousins could never imagine.

(It bears repeating once again that this is not an endorsement for real-life danger-play. If you can't tell a game from reality, close this damned book and go back to killing orcs!)

The following templates may be used by players or Storytellers. The histories in the later part of this chapter show the wild lives — and sudden deaths — that make Cultists so notorious among their kind.

DREAM DANCER

*Floating on waves of music and light
The chariot of the Daemon of the World
Descends in silent power.*

*It's shape reposed within; slight as some cloud
That catches but the palest tinge of day
When evening yields to night*
— Percy Shelley, *The Daemon of the World*

Quote: *If you have only one day on Earth, you'd better make that day worthwhile.*

Prelude: Since childhood, you've loved music. As soon as possible, you moved to it. Something powerful waited beneath the beat, an element that whispered to you through half-heard tunes and vivid dreams. As you grew, you reached for it. Dance classes. Singing lessons. Sports. Then darker things. Nothing quite worked.

From Athletic Tomboy, you graduated to Wild Child. Sex was an adventure, and drugs a free ride. Running away from home was a rush; even hunger didn't dull the edge. Dreams fit you better than reality did. You were heading for a serious fall when your mentor picked you up. He played, you danced — great combination. Then he taught you how to reach the rhythm that seemed forever out of reach. He taught you yoga, Tantra, the real dance of the seven veils. Better, he taught you discipline. That lesson helped you survive your adolescence.

Finally, it happened. Energy surged through your chakras one night and burst out in a furious wave that literally carried you from your body. There you found the end of your quest.

The dreamdance. Astral travel. Flesh had always constrained you; now you could escape into your dreams. Once you discover how to do that trick again, all sensations will be yours.

Concept: Although you're an astonishing dancer, your talents go beyond that: Singing, carousing, and of course, magick. You're a young survivor who's just discovered her Holy Grail — a wild Mind talent. This lets you go further into your dreams (and others') than you ever did before. This magick thing is a blast. Be careful it doesn't take you with it.

Roleplaying Tips: Beneath your indulgences, you're an adrenaline junkie. Speak quickly, gesture with wild grace, and stay in motion. Sensations intoxicate you; self-control is a recent thing, so still go overboard when the opportunity arises. Death, when the subject comes up, terrifies you. Life is for living; do so at full blast.

Magick: Asleep or waking, your Mind Arts are formidable. With them, you can influence another's thoughts, moods or dreams. Other Spheres turn life's intensity up loud. Cool! Music, movement and Tantrik sex rites are your main foci, although crazy stunts and even drugs will do in a pinch.

Equipment: Anything that won't weigh you down.



TECHNO-ECSTATIC

You've got to stop thinking about time and space as if they were inviolable. They are not inviolable! They do not exist in themselves! They are postulates of the conscious mind!

— Paddy Chayefsky, *Altered States*

Quote: *There are no limits to experience. There's nothing new out there in the woods, though. The future is in technology. Here, slip these on. I'll show you things you've never even dreamed of...*

Prelude: A restless, intelligent and unsociable child, you were drawn to the wonders inside an Erector set. The things you did with it made your folks both proud and nervous. Chemistry sets, broken appliances, spare parts from Radio Shack — these were your favorite toys. Instruction didn't matter; the things inside your head looked so much better.

Although you'd never been popular in school, the sudden technology explosion brought others running to you. By high school graduation, you'd had your first taste of sex — and were bored. Once again, the sensations you imagined were so much more potent than the pitiful scrapings of mere flesh. Sex chatlines left you cold, too. Who wanted to download nudie pix and innuendo when *Hustler* could be found in your father's bathroom? Then one day, you found the Real Deal.

It seemed innocuous enough: alt.xtasy.snsatn@spdm.com. Bringing the newsgroup up was a bitch; the effort made you sweat — not figuratively, but for real. The harder the puzzle became, the more determined your efforts. By the time you'd logged on, the room was spinning and hollow, as if you'd gone a whole day without food or water. The clock on your screen said you had. Impossible! This newsgroup had better be worth it, you growled as the greeting spread across the screen.

It was.

Now you have plenty of friends. Some of them you've actually met in the flesh, but most were imprinted on your brain in the most dazzling VR setup in the goddamned world. These days, you get out more often. Your talent for invention has made you very popular, and brings in some amazing offers. Who needs college with teachers like this?

Concept: A newly-Awakened technological genius, you strive to create things no one else has invented yet. Your mundane skills were formidable enough; with magick, anything you want will be within reach in a few short years. In the meantime, you're having a ball.

Roleplaying Tips: You're still a kid, but a brilliant one who's just realized that a world beyond imagining exists in her back yard. Try hard to be cool. Oh, yeah, and be mysterious. Very, very mysterious. If your new friends thought that just anyone could do this stuff, they'd leave you in a heap. Talk way above their heads to keep 'em guessing.

Magick: Although you're concentrating on sensory input right now, Matter and Forces will be your future specialties. Although you prefer high-tech foci to the old-fashioned ones, body modification, smart drugs and industrial music seem fun. Why limit yourself?

Equipment: Clusters of gadgets, decks, gear, discs, black clothing, micro-tools, sensory-enhancement mods, smart drugs, Glock 9mm pistol.



PRINCE OF PAIN

How do we measure being alive?... Fight, flight and ecstasy are the three things. Those are all combined in piercings and tattoos and the marking of your passage through life and the idea of it being a visual, permanent library of experiences that cannot be taken from you except by death.

— Genesis P-Orridge

Quote: *How can you say this is sick if you haven't tried it?*

Prelude: In a past life, you know you belonged to a tribe. Their rites of passage were painful, but they taught you how to leave yourself behind. Those memories have haunted you into this incarnation, where no such rites exist. You remembered them so well, you made up your own.

It began with small piercings and home-made tattoos, then furtive experiments with constriction. While imitating the O-Kee-Pa in your garage, you nearly died. As your limbs went numb and blood spattered to the floor, you watched yourself from the other side of the room. Somehow you must have come down off the hooks; those memories seem lost, but you've been trying to find what you encountered that day ever since.

Body modification became your religion. Every book and film you could find became gospel. For kicks, you did a stint with Jim Rose's circus. Kala the Serpent Girl — your future lover and mentor — works there as well. Now she teaches you how to leave time and flesh behind. Some lessons take a while, but the prize is worth it. Perhaps some day you can visit those tribal lands in person.

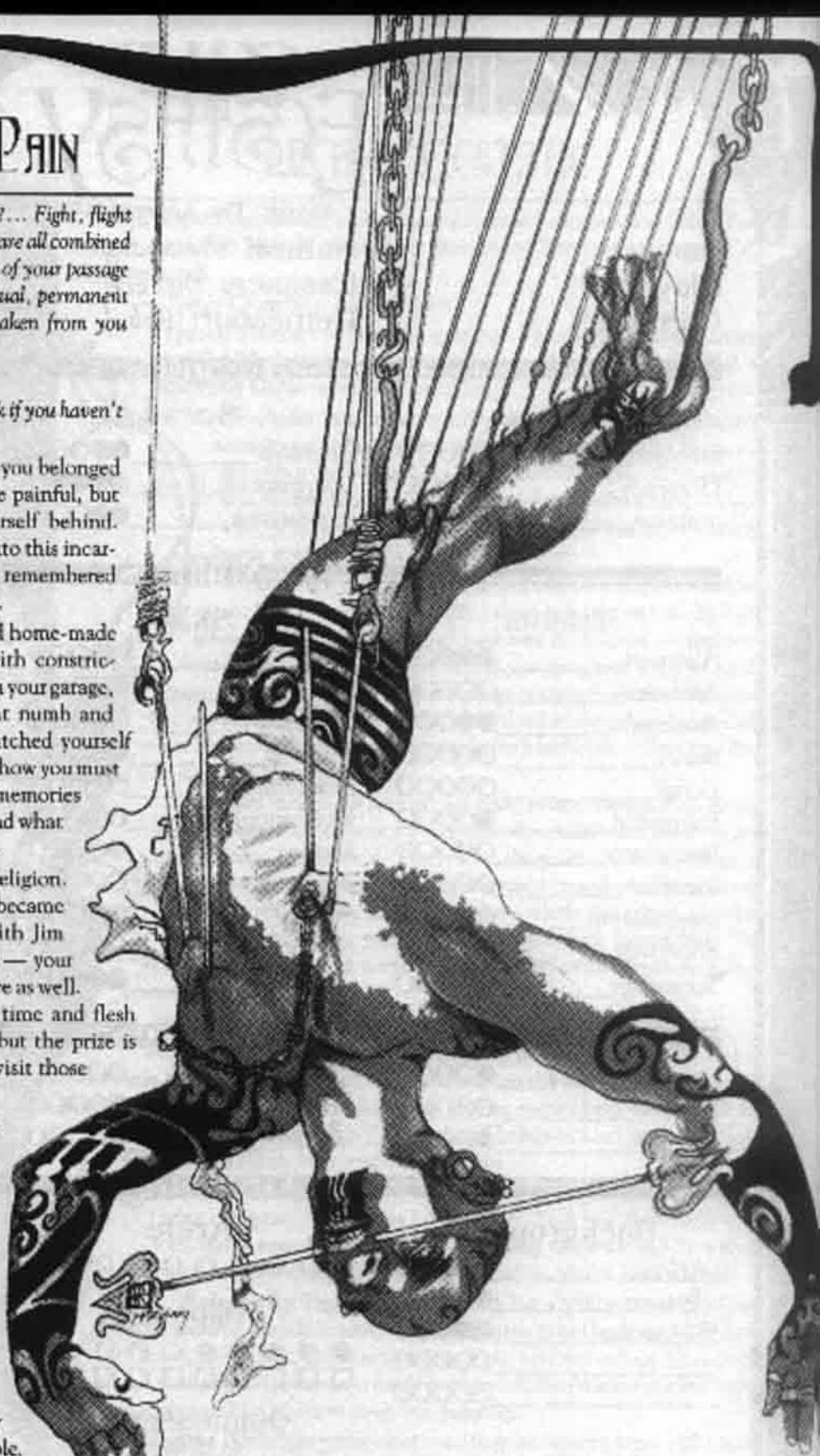
Concept: A modern yogi in search of transcendence, you've realized the hollowness of the industrial dream. A world without ritual is a world without hope. Your scars and tattoos are marks of passage beyond all that. There is something better than endless drudgery — you've seen it, you know it, and sharing that insight is imperative. On tour, you've seen the crushed souls, the real freaks, who come to watch you "perform." They're pathetic. You pity them. Maybe all they need is an example.

Roleplaying Tips: Taking yourself over the edge brings ananda. Others think you're a masochist, but they can't see the insight beyond the pain. In other cultures, you'd be considered normal; here, you're sick. Life's funny, but it's okay. You've learned how to laugh.

Magick: When you step outside yourself, time falls aside too. Your skill with Life magick reflects control

you've learned the hard way. Spirit Arts intrigue you; that's probably where you'll concentrate next. Your kamamarga include ordeals of all kinds, body art and trance dancing. Someday you'll need no help at all.

Equipment: Rings, weights, blades, extensive library, Jim Rose tour jacket.



CULT OF ECSTASY

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Fanatic*
Essence: *Questing*
Demeanor: *Deviant*

Concept: *Prince of Pain*
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina <i>Hardy</i> ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●●●●	Do ○○○○○	Computer ○○○○○
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive ○○○○○	Cosmology ○○○○○
Awareness ●●●●●	Etiquette ○○○○○	Culture ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●	Firearms ○○○○○	Enigmas ●●●●●
Dodge ○○○○○	Leadership ○○○○○	Investigation ○○○○○
Expression ●●●●●	Meditation ●●●●●	Law ○○○○○
Instruction ○○○○○	Melee ●●●●●	Linguistics ○○○○○
Intuition ○○○○○	Research ○○○○○	Lore ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●●●	Stealth ○○○○○	Medicine ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●	Survival ●●●●●	Occult ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○	Technology ○○○○○	Science ●●●●●

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○	Life ●●●●●	Prime ○○○○○
Entropy ○○○○○	Mind ●●●●●	Spirit ●●●●●
Forces ○○○○○	Matter ○○○○○	Time ●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds	Arete	Health
<i>Avatar</i> ●●●●●	● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised -0 ☐
<i>Dream</i> ●●●●●		<i>Hurt</i> -1 ☐
<i>Mentor</i> ●●●●●		Injured -1 ☐
○○○○○		<i>Wounded</i> -2 ☐
○○○○○		Mauled -2 ☐
		<i>Crippled</i> -5 ☐
		Incapacitated ☐
Other Traits	Willpower	Experience
<i>Aerobat</i> ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
<i>Dance</i> ●●●●●		
<i>Escape</i> ●●●●●		
<i>Torture</i> ●●●●●		
○○○○○		



(IN) FAMOUS ECSTATICS



He could read the Bible like a preacher
Full of ecstasy and fire
But he also was the kind of teacher
Women would desire

— Boiled in Lead, "Rasputin"

Unlike many other Traditions, the Cult of Ecstasy has few truly powerful luminaries. It's said that Ecstatics would rather leave behind a wild legacy than live forever. Certainly, the histories of many of the group's most notorious members bear the theory out; most burn brightly for a few years, then either disappear, spiral downward or perish in an amazing display of Paradox.

Mystery surrounds most notable Cultists. Did Sh'zar fade away, or does he live on in some distant Realm? Was Isadora Duncan's fatal ride truly an accident? And is Jim Morrison really dead? Chronos keeps many secrets, and if the Ecstatics know the answers, they aren't talking.

SH'ZAR THE SEER

Where he came from, no one knew. His name, a corruption of sh'ir, or seer, hinted at Indian origins, but many thought him an Arab or a Persian. Although a devotee of Tantra, he was open to the entire spectrum of Ecstatic arts. After a lifetime of wandering the Middle Eastern wastes, he traveled to the hidden courts of Persia and Greece with dire prophecies upon his lips:

"...and as I watch, the great dawn becomes a fist of iron, whose fingers brush the clouds and bring low the stars. As the celestial lights fall to Earth, the fingers close and all things — stars, mountains, rivers, cities — become as a lump of coal in the giant fist."

News of the distant philosopher-scientist was not new, but Sh'zar was among the first to take the Order of Reason seriously. To every magus he encountered, the Seer spoke of the coming tribulation. Finally, three Masters listened. Valoran, Nightshade and Baldric took his prophecies to heart and began to forge the Council he had also foreseen, "...a wise gathering, men and women both, clustered about a glowing sphere like unto the Moon at full rise."

No one knows what Sh'zar really looked like. His face was said to change like a bonfire flame, always flowing into different guises. In many, he was handsome and proud, dressed in finery; sometimes he appeared ugly, naked or in rags. Three things distinguished Sh'zar, however, regardless of his appearance: his eloquent perceptions, his disgust for violence, and his magickal companions.

Everywhere he went, Sh'zar was guarded by a fiery hawk and two grand male peacocks. These familiars, Adamu, Ka'bah and Kadishtu, watched all of Sh'zar's acquaintances "...with an almost human assessment." Although many Europeans considered them demons,

Sh'zar's companions often saved innocents or battled monsters. The Seer himself considered hashish to be his best weapon. Tales speak of the Conversion of Malach, when a horde of bandits were stopped in their tracks by clouds of smoke and words of peace. Sh'zar prophesied from morning until late afternoon. When night came, the bandits joined him around the fire, then left the next morning without incident.

Like so many of his kind, Sh'zar disappeared into time after his disciple Akrites was accused of cowardice. After a long meditation, the Seer shut himself in his tent and was never seen again. By 1480, everyone agreed that he was gone forever. Although histories speak of his appearance in the clouds at the jambo of 1867, most Ecstatics consider that a myth.

ALEISTER CROWLEY

The rise and fall of "The Great Beast 666" stands as an object lesson for all Cultists who would follow him. A brilliant scholar and magician, Aleister Crowley popularized the darker side of magick and handily rebelled against Victorian morality. Sadly, his single-minded pursuit of power and sensation ended in a downward spiral that supposedly climaxed in 1947. The so-called "Master Therion" seems to epitomize hubris gone mad.

That Crowley was Awakened is almost indisputable. His influence and wealth were likewise infamous. While squamous Hermetics were quick to dismiss the dark mystic, Cultists recognized one of their own from the start. He studied Tantrik magick and used it as a springboard for his own ideas. Sadly, he favored excess and cruelty. Crowley's "Do what thou wilt" approach included orgies, ritual sacrifice, curses and constant drug experimentation. Many Cultists believe he turned *barabba* halfway through his career, but perhaps he simply let power go to his head. One Virtual Adept claims he gave Crowley's termination order during the post-WWII Nephandi cleanup, but the truth remains unknown.

Ironically, although he supposedly died dissipated, friendless and broke, Crowley's influence lives on long past his reputed death. For better or worse (Cultists themselves can't agree about which), the Master Therion's writings and charisma have inspired dozens of Awakenings and undermined a good deal of established dogma. It may be that in reinventing modern magick, Crowley reached his own dark Ascension. Still, most Cultists frown on his example.

RASPUTIN

A series of outrageous tales has credited Russia's mad saint with every form of vampirism, insanity and venereal disease imaginable, to say nothing of his supposed links to the Celestial Chorus and (ludicrously!) the Sons of Ether. An Ecstatic from the beginning, Grigory Novykh compelled women to abandon their virtue, czars to abandon their sense,



and a young heir to abandon a disease from which there was supposedly no cure.

The details of the Mad Monk's life are far too common to bother relating; what few outside the Cult of Ecstasy realize is that this "Satanic" figure crusaded against Nephandic agents. His brief association with Isadora Duncan exposed a ring of Fallen Ones influential in the Romanov court. With her help (and several miracles), Rasputin dispatched the Nephandi from the court. With one exception: Prince Yusupov.

The Prince's incompetence as a mage was revealed by his inability to handle the Ecstatic monk on his own. When his magicks failed, Yusupov summoned outside help. Rasputin died, but it took a diabolical effort to slay him. With the monk out of the way, the Fallen reestablished their stranglehold on the Romanovs. Soon, the court fell. The whereabouts of Anastasia are a secret even to the Awakened, but most Cultists believe she went to the Cauls. As for Rasputin, he died a hero.

Just ask the Cultists. They'll tell you.

ISADORA DUNCAN

This barefooted revolutionary did more than just stand dance conventions on their ear; she advocated, through her teachings and example, the ecstatic experience in art. To this day, Cultists wonder if her odd death in 1927 was an accident — or an assassination.

Isadora was always drawn to the dance — not the rigidity of ballet, but the improvisational ferocity of the ancient Greeks. She felt dance should be fluid and elemental, not stiff or polite, and danced half-naked and alone, drawing the music into her movements. American audiences were not exactly enthralled; the self-Awakened mage had much to learn. When Isadora moved to Europe, she encountered Jean Garoche, a Nephandi-hunting Cultist; the two became lovers, friends and comrades in arms. With his help, Isadora excelled at magick and became the talk of Europe.

Duncan's charisma and stamina were legendary, as were her grace and libido. Lovers flocked to her bed, and students filled her dance schools. Her sense of the Lakashim was strong; she advocated a return to nature, and many fans listened.

Then fell Garoche; Jean turned *barabbi*. When Isadora found out, she killed him and fled to Russia, where she met the fae-blooded dancer Nijinski, his mentor Sergey Diaghilev (another Ecstatic), and Rasputin. There, she thought she'd found peace. She was mistaken. Friends of Garoche took revenge. One "accident" drowned Duncan's two children and their nanny. Another "coincidence" killed her newborn son. Her success in post-war Russia branded her a traitor back home, the schools failed, and Isadora took to drink. As a focus, it made a great vice; her powers declined, as did her success. When Duncan's husband committed suicide, she almost joined him.

Despite her "luck," Duncan's ecstatic teachings caught on, changing the face of modern dance. Her star was on the

rise again when a mysterious "accident" ended her career forever: Isadora's trademark, a flowing scarf, tangled around a car wheel and snapped her neck. Was it chance — or a final Nephandic strike? To this day, many Ecstatic dancers wear scarves in Isadora's honor — and in defiance of her fate.

JIM MORRISON

Satyr. Poet. Visionary. Drug addict. Rock god. Enigma. Jim Morrison seemed to personify all the best and worst the Cult has to offer. A mystick gifted with uncanny foresight, the Lizard King turned the hippie ideal upside down. Despite The Doors' success, it was years before their dark truths became as obvious to us as they were to him.

Like so many '60s Ecstatics, Jim Awakened without guidance. His magicks evolved by accident, and revolved around time and perception. From the beginning, he seemed to know he was doomed; anyone who heard his voice recognized a man who stared into his own nightmares while turning them into dreams.

The Doors weren't only controversial among Sleepers. Morrison didn't seem to realize how big his game really was. Although obviously an Ecstatic, he never had a mentor and never took sides. Some Cultists claim the Syndicate targeted him from the start. Others say his excesses spoiled great potential. In any case, he quickly burned out, becoming perhaps the largest tombstone in the rock-n-roll graveyard. Some say he was searching for a mentor when he died. Others insist he found one.

Supposedly, Morrison attracted Marianna's eye, took her up on an offer of escape, and has never looked back. Freed from the spotlight, he continues to plumb the doors of perception and recalls his stardom with mingled amusement, regret and contempt. If Jim Morrison does live at Balador, he has changed his appearance and keeps a low profile.

Morrison's heyday involved so many Ecstasy mages and their acolytes that it seems to have been the Cult's finest hour. The fact that so many have either died or gone insane indicates either a massive Technocratic crack-down, a Paradox ripple, or the frailties of Cult doctrine. Everyone has their own theories. The rumors that Mick Jagger is Awakened have since been discredited.





MARIANNA OF BALADOR

Rumor has it that the greatest living Ecstatic Master once loved Lord Byron himself. Marianna has neither disputed nor confirmed the claim. However old she may be, this Divya commands formidable talents, mystick and otherwise.

Best known for her sexual appetites, Marianna is reputed to have been born in Venice, Italy in the early 1800s. That heritage is impossible to tell from her looks; Marianna changes her appearance so frequently that even her best friends seldom recognize her. Although she prefers classical ideals — Greek statues, Botticelli nudes, Persian belly-dancers, etc. — Balador's mistress occasionally samples every mode of beauty.

During the early Cult of Bacchus days, Marianna tended the best brothels in Venice. When the Guild (Syndicate) tried to take her businesses over, she undercut both their efforts and their Constructs. Her impressive prophecies made her many friends and saved many lives. During both World Wars, it's said she hid refugees in her brothels, and in the '60s, she hosted one of Europe's most exclusive getaways. In 1976, the chief councilor of Balador Pleasuredome passed the keys to Marianna. It was a wise choice.

Since that time, the Divya has made free love her crusade. She loathes rapists and pederasts, and enforces the Code of Ananda within Balador. On Earth, she sponsors a number of aspiring artists while pursuing a rumored rape cult. In person, Balador's mistress is friendly and disarming. Some mistake her constant cheer for naiveté, but they miss the point. "I've met so many crazy mages in my life," she purrs in a continental accent, "that I make it my goal to be an exception." If Marianna has an evil side, no one living can attest to it....



APPENDIX: ECSTATIC ARTS

A human being is more like a symphony than a painting. He is a process, not a thing. The scientist of the future will have to be time-oriented rather than space-oriented. When this happens, we shall realize that the universe is driven by living energies, rather than physical forces, and that its essential processes are closer to magic than to science.

— Colin Wilson, describing the theories of Dr. Charlotte Bach; from *The Misfit*



To Ecstasies, magick is an extension of all peoples' potential. Our inner energy can only bond with the pulse of creation through concentration, through deliberately shedding the human blindfold. One of the reasons the Tradition remains concerned with the un-Awakened is because to them, all people can be Awakened. The choice, of course, belongs to the individual. Frankly, given the risks, they're not counting on many people joining them anytime soon.

Cultists dive head-first into their magick; this Appendix describes some of the things they do with it — and the things it does to them.

SHAKTI AND STYLE

The Sanskrit word *Shakti* means many things: power, force, the primal energy which, when given form, begins and ends all things. *Shakti* herself is the creatrix, the wife and lover of *Shiva*; together they dance, make love and birth the universe in their bliss. A complex, tangential concept, *Shakti* embodies creation (especially in its feminine qualities), and contains aspects of will, bliss, consciousness, knowledge and

action. The Tradition's founders considered the goddess a perfect metaphor for magick.

It was Tali Eos' idea to connect the Spheres with the sacred passions. The 10th Sphere, *Lakashim*, would theoretically unite them all. In her view, a mystick feels the *Lakashim*, then becomes one with it. Through this union, all things are possible. To command magick, one must first feel magickal, which is why one's passions are considered so important.

With this perspective, the different Spheres become sensations to master, each with its own rules. The deeper one feels, the more one understands. Thus, most mentors teach the different Spheres as extensions of one another, linked to a mage's passions. Beginners often start with one dot in many Spheres, then work upwards from there. "Cross-training" this way leads to a better understanding of everything, and in the long run, creates a more powerful *Divya* than concentrating on one or two Spheres would do.

In the early days, each passion was linked to a Sphere. These relationships caused controversy, however, and were soon abandoned. For the record, those original correspondences were: Correspondence = Empathy; Entropy = Fear; Forces = Rage; Life = Lust; Matter = Hate; Mind = Love; Prime = Joy; Spirit = Jealousy; Time = Grief.

КАМАМАРГА (FOCI)

Roll me out a barrel, I'll toast you to your knees
Take away this safety net, bring me my trapeze
Order me a stretcher, for midnight if you please
Give me sweet music and strife...
Gunpowder, whiskey, falling off the wire
Anything could put me in the ever-after choir
Hacks that want to see me shuffle off the shelf
I hand them each a bottle, I say
Go fuck yourself

— Oysterband, "The Shouting End of Life"

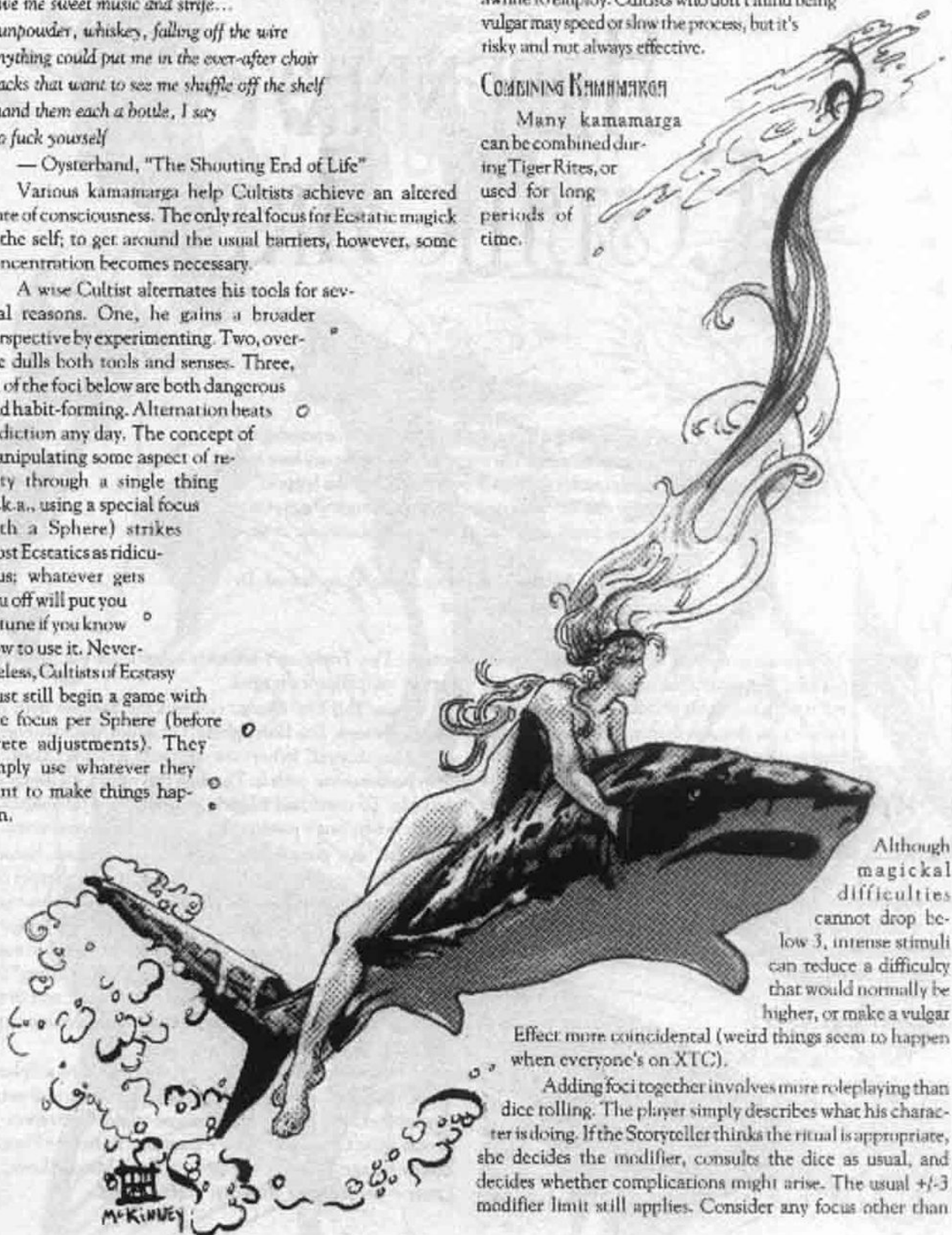
Various kamamarga help Cultists achieve an altered state of consciousness. The only real focus for Ecstatic magick is the self; to get around the usual barriers, however, some concentration becomes necessary.

A wise Cultist alternates his tools for several reasons. One, he gains a broader perspective by experimenting. Two, over-use dulls both tools and senses. Three, all of the foci below are both dangerous and habit-forming. Alternation beats addiction any day. The concept of manipulating some aspect of reality through a single thing (a.k.a., using a special focus with a Sphere) strikes most Ecstatics as ridiculous; whatever gets you off will put you in tune if you know how to use it. Nevertheless, Cultists of Ecstasy must still begin a game with one focus per Sphere (before Arere adjustments). They simply use whatever they want to make things happen.

Concentration is a vital part of the Cult's Arts. Most kamamarga take a turn or more to use — one cannot attain a Tantrik posture in a single turn. Wise Cultists focus themselves beforehand if it seems like their Arts will come in handy. Many of the foci below have lasting effects, although they may take awhile to employ. Cultists who don't mind being vulgar may speed or slow the process, but it's risky and not always effective.

COMBINING KAMAMARGA

Many kamamarga can be combined during Tiger Rites, or used for long periods of time.



Although magical difficulties cannot drop below 3, intense stimuli can reduce a difficulty that would normally be higher, or make a vulgar

Effect more coincidental (weird things seem to happen when everyone's on XTC).

Adding foci together involves more roleplaying than dice rolling. The player simply describes what his character is doing. If the Storyteller thinks the ritual is appropriate, she decides the modifier, consults the dice as usual, and decides whether complications might arise. The usual +/-3 modifier limit still applies. Consider any focus other than

Meditation to have an "Extra Time" bonus if used for more than an half hour without stopping.

Overdose is always a danger. A mage combining or intensifying *karmamarga* should make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) or be overwhelmed when he does. This goes up +1 for every new focus (or every magical success) over the second. If Wolf scores three successes with *Bombolai*, his Willpower difficulty is 7. Whee! Failing this roll knocks the character unconscious for a turn or two; botching it puts him in a coma. Addiction is the Storyteller's prerogative, but remember that Cultists are used to more intensity than mortals are. (*Destiny's Price* has more in-depth rules for addiction and drugs.)

- **Adrenaline:** Daredevils prefer a raw adrenaline rush. By performing some crazy stunt, a mage can focus herself for a few minutes. The madder the act, the longer the sensation lasts. Dodging a bullet might give her a buzz for two or three turns; jumping a motorcycle onto a moving train might last an hour.

- **Art:** Some Ecstasies focus by creating art, while others like Wolf can enter a trance by staring at their creations. Most Cultists have some special bit of custom jewelry or body art; most wear elaborate rings, though some prefer piercings or tattoos. Obviously, creating art requires some effort, so magick using that focus will demand some time and materials to work. This kind of focus must be used quickly before the inspiration fades.

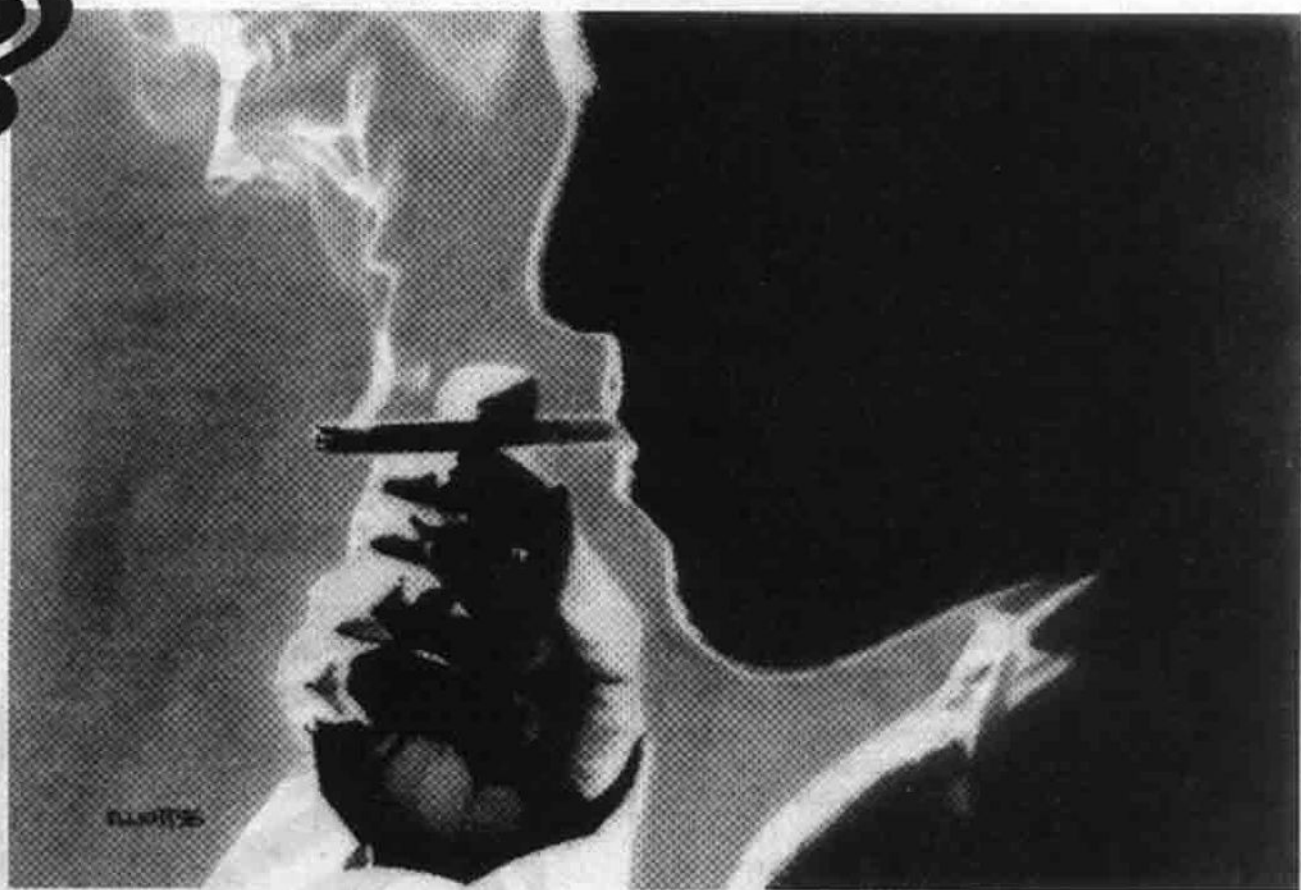
- **Body Modification/Ordeals:** Sacrifice is an important aspect of magick. With body mods and ordeals, Ecstasies use the sun dance, the sleep of nails, flogging, fasting and torture to leave themselves behind. Some SM types have refined these ordeals to bizarre extremes, but the intent is the same: to heighten consciousness by passing the point where pleasure and pain collide. Body modifications — scarification, reshaping, constriction, castration, etc. — make the ordeal's marks permanent. Both require time (several turns or more) to perform, but the focus lasts for hours.

- **Dance:** The safest and most invigorating way to reach the *Lakashim*, dance celebrates the experience of being alive and attunes the mage to music. He doesn't have to be a good dancer, but it helps. This focus usually demands room to move, some music to move to, and time to get in step. A good ecstatic trance takes several minutes to attain. As with adrenaline, the harder you push, the better your focus becomes.

- **Drugs:** Although controversial, drugs are perhaps the oldest way to expand your perceptions. They're risky, quick, easy to use and often illegal. One use will focus a Cultist for anywhere from five minutes (crack, crystal meth) to six hours (LSD, peyote), with most falling somewhere between. As most drugs cause hallucinations, an Ecstatic might lose track of objects, people, or, of course, time.

- **Incense:** An ages-old symbol for human wishes ascending to heaven, incense helps you concentrate by defining a scent to focus on. It's also helpful for covering odors,





especially in crash pads. Burning incense takes at least three turns; it won't hurry, neither should you.

• **Meditation:** Actually, all kamamarga are meditations; this focus, though, involves postures, deep breathing and exercises like yoga, prayer or Tantra. These may be done alone, or shared; some forms, especially Tantra, require several partners and complex positions. Most forms require training and preparation, and none of them may be hurried. Focusing this way takes at least 10 minutes and usually longer. The stimulation can last for hours.

• **Music:** The Lakashim expresses itself most readily in song. The form of music doesn't matter, but the musicians' intent does. Some songs are always powerful, no matter how they're performed, but others require precise execution to work. Although the Technocracy and simple greed have banalized many of the most effective tunes, music is a bottomless resource that anyone can appreciate. Performing it takes time and talent, and the focus can last for up to an hour; listening requires less of both, but is less effective, too.

While most Cultists favor simple acoustic instruments like flutes, guitars, drums or voices, lots of newer recruits use electronic devices, synthesizers and home-made gadgets. No barrier is forever.

• **Sensuality/Sexuality:** Touch itself is a communion of the senses; touch between two people creates a bond. Combining intimate touching with intimate contact is the essence of sex, and of sexual magick. The intensity of the experience (especially if it's done properly) raises

power — ojas — in all parties concerned. A smart Ecstatic knows how to channel that energy through his chakras, or at least how to focus it. Some mysticks concentrate on the sensations, others on the rising power. Either one is effective.

Pure sensuality involves exposing all senses to arousal; massage, electric stimulation, or just concentrating on what you feel all work. Sex may be simple intercourse or elaborate Tantrik rites. Both stimulation and sex require some amount of time. The longer they last, the better the focus.

• **Technology:** Not all Cultists are naturalists. With VR, the Web, computer morphing and industrial music, all-new sensations can be created, disseminated and piped directly to the pleasure centers. Techno-ecstatics prefer to go beyond the limits of everything; their technology is often custom-built, but anyone can use it. Such foci take hours, days or even longer to prepare, but only a turn or two to use.

PERCEPTION

Because they've removed mortal blinders, Ecstatics claim to have mastered perception beyond most "normal" senses. Raw sensuality is a form of ecstasy, so many Cultists stay in touch with their world by wearing little or nothing. Naturally, hyper-sensitivity has a price: Overload. When senses overlap, a mage gets confused. If something stimulates her over the edge, her senses break down entirely. A person who makes a lifestyle of skating along that edge, of course, will be difficult to topple....

Most mentors start their students off with perceptions; they're easy to understand and make a lasting impression. Soon the mystick learns to keep that "enhanced" sense on all the time. The focus "activates" whatever first-rank Sphere Effect the character wishes to use, and it remains "on" for the duration. A Perception + Awareness roll shows her whatever that Sphere might allow her to see.

Let's use Cassie as an example: Say she has one dot each in Prime, Time, Matter, Correspondence and Spirit. By focusing herself, she can "turn on" any or even all of those senses at once, on top of her own (see the end of Chapter Three). This takes a little time, but unleashes a torrent of sensations. After a while, those altered perceptions become normal, as described in the sidebar "That Glazed Look." Cassie may keep one or two magical perceptions going at once, as long as she's had a chance to focus herself beforehand.

Overload is the downside: an Ecstatic mage who moves around in extrasensory mode suffers +1 to all of her Perception difficulties for every magical sense in play over the first (two would be +1, three would be +2, etc.). Some kamamarga can be distracting, too. A peyote trip might open up her magical senses but obscure the normal ones, and Cassie may mistake her hallucinations for mystick sight. Sometimes it really is just in your mind, even if you're a Cultist of Ecstasy!

Then there's overstimulation: Any loud noise, flash of light, cut, caress, etc. will have double its usual effect if Cassie's senses are enhanced, and may overwhelm her unless she makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to overcome the sensation. Pleasure really can become pain this way, although the reverse is also true if she makes the roll. This is a trap some Ecstatics fall into: Overload can feel good — too good!

It's perfectly appropriate, by the way, to buy high Awareness, Empathy and Enigmas scores for Cultist characters. Their sensitivity really does grant them some spectacular insights.

EMPATHY AND AURA

Cultists' sensitivity makes them remarkably empathic; most have at least one dot in the Mind Sphere, which allows them to share another's feelings (the Empathy Effect) and view that person's aura. Most of them do that as often as possible. Few things are more stimulating than unbridled emotion, or more revealing than a look at raw life-force colors.

This empathy may explain Cultists' obsession with sex and violence. The sensation of another's pain can be either revolting or exhilarating, depending on who you are. Sex passions, when shared this way, can rise to almost unbearable levels of pleasure. These sensations come through loud and clear during a fight (Storytellers, take note!) or a fuck unless the character has actively taken steps to block his empathy. In calmer circumstances, the mage might read another's feelings through aura colors, voices in his head, or washes of sensation or emotion. In large groups, this can be exhausting, but it can be a real blast, too.

AURA COLORS

Passion	Colors
Joy/Innocence	White
Love	Deep Blue
Empathy/Sympathy	Pink—Rose
Lust/Ambition	Dark Red—Purple
Grief	Silver—Gray
Fear	Orange
Jealousy/Envy	Green
Hate	Black
Rage	Red
State/Essence	
Calm	Light Blue
Depressed	Gray
Excited	Violet
Spiritual	Gold
Confused	(Mottled, shifting colors)
Frenzied	(Rapidly rippling colors)
Using magick	(Myriad sparkles)
Fellow Cultist	(Sharp flickering colors)
Psychotic/Marauder	(Hypnotic, swirling color)
Unshielded Nephandus	(Black ripples)
Vampire	(Pale color)
Werewolf	(Intense colors)

Empaths also project their feelings, sometimes without meaning to. Tali Eos, a powerful empath, had to cultivate inner peace to avoid alienating every man she encountered. Used effectively, empathy can be a strong weapon, tool or bond. It isn't simply "mind reading" — in many ways, it's more effective.

TIME SENSE

Tomorrow never happens. It's all just the same fucking day, man.

— Janis Joplin

Time is a necessary illusion taken to an absurd degree. Certain amounts of quantification are essential to human understanding: Names and labels help us to communicate and grow. Time, though, has been defined too much; hours, minutes, seconds are unnecessary. To most folks, time passes. Cultists agree — to a point. Time *does* pass. The way it passes depends on how you look at it.

When a person touches the Lakashim, time slows, even fractures. The theories about why could fill a quantum physics textbook, and make less sense. As the Cultists say, don't ask why, just experience. Once you feel time go out of joint, you'll understand. It's disorienting, but that's the idea. Because they do rather than explain, Ecstatics have always perceived time differently. That perception grants them their infamous temporal power.

In game terms, Ecstatics often speak in tense shifts or long pauses (see the Introduction through Chapter Three), arrive late or early for meetings and seem to move quicker or more slowly than those around them. They have little use for schedules, and mock those who do. Even so, they have precise time senses (the **Internal Clock Effect**), which rarely run according to normal clocks but detect temporal warps with ease. Many can see the possible consequences of what they're about to do, a Time 2 precognition Effect like *Songs of Future Days*; after focusing himself, the Cultist might look into space, watch the near future, come back, and act. This drives blockheads crazy: Why's their Chantrymate getting stoned now? For the Cultist, the answer decides his next actions. (Wolf was doing this at the beginning of Chapter One.) Precognition isn't always an exact science, but who wants to live forever, anyway?

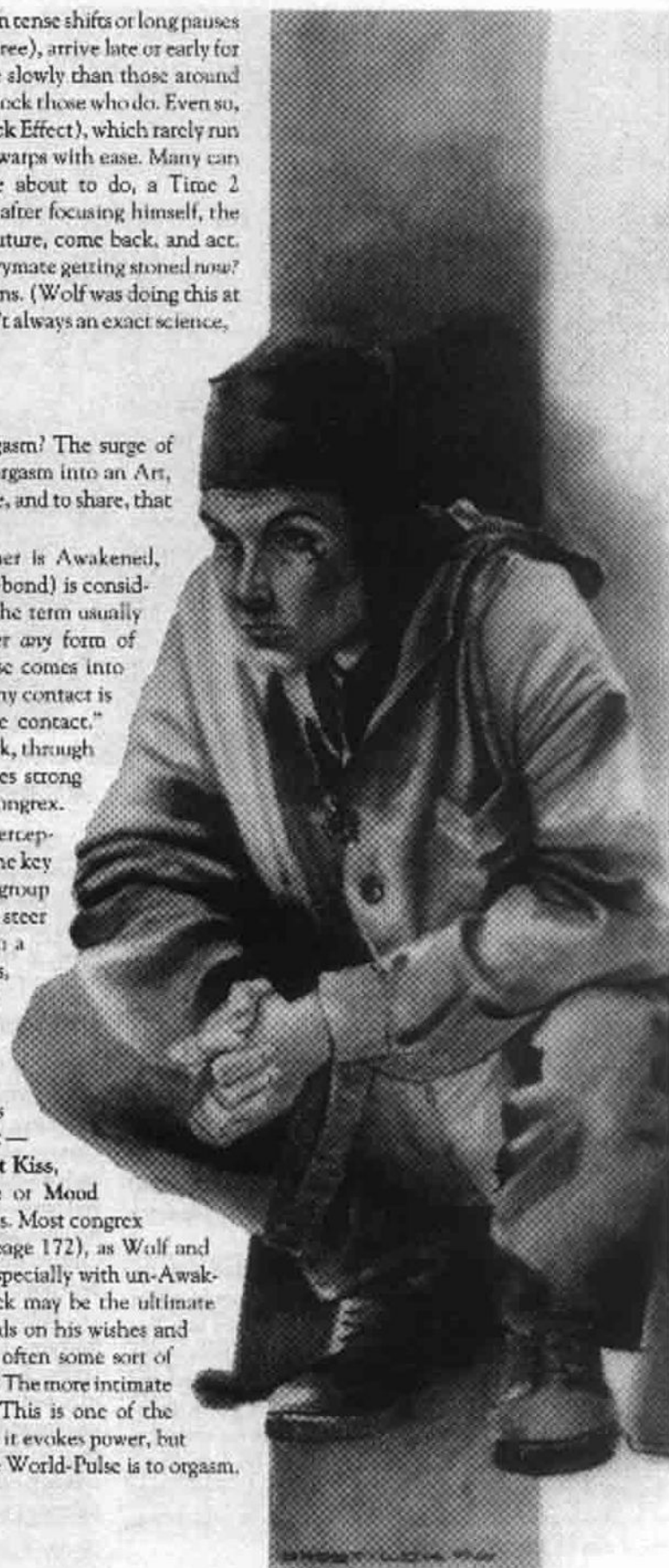
COMMUNIONS: CONGREX AND OKOX

Remember the feeling of a really great orgasm? The surge of energy, the shift in perceptions? Ecstatics turn orgasm into an Art, and they have a thousand different ways to induce, and to share, that sensation.

Cultists love to share. Whether the partner is Awakened, asleep or Otherworldly, a congrex (communion-bond) is considered the highest form of expression. Although the term usually denotes sexual magick, most Ecstatics consider any form of sharing a sexual experience, whether intercourse comes into play or not. "After all," as Marianna explains, "any contact is a form of touch. Sex is just the most intimate contact." Communion occurs through touch, music, magick, through any number of events. Anything that exchanges strong sensations from one being to another is a form of congrex.

Communion shares not only passions, but perceptions. And, as all mages know, perceptions hold the key to reality. The Technocracy agrees. Any time a group gathers, its power increases. Anything that can steer that energy to a common goal — from a riot to a paradigm shift — unleashes tremendous force. This, of course, scares hell out of the power structure. If that power isn't in their hands, it's considered dangerous. And it is.

In game terms, a congrex is a ritual (*Mage Second Edition*, pp. 163-164) with several parties involved (page 172). Okox is congrex with a spirit — dangerous, but rewarding. Effects like **The Spirit Kiss**, **Living Bridge**, (both from *Mage*), **Dreamline** or **Mood Swing** are good examples of mystick communions. Most congrex share perceptions, even magickal ones (*Mage*, page 172), as Wolf and Cassie do in Chapter One. Elaborate congrex, especially with un-Awakened participants, take a lot of time: Woodstock may be the ultimate example. The ritual the character prefers depends on his wishes and goals, but it must involve a give-and-take, and often some sort of promise ("We're gonna rock the house tonight!"). The more intimate the congrex, the more important the oath. This is one of the reasons why many Cultists despise rape. True, it evokes power, but that power is stolen, not shared. To touch the World-Pulse is to orgasm. Rape doesn't touch that pulse. It pisses on it.



Some Ecstasies have discovered that powerful emotions actually coalesce into spirits of an age — zeitgeists. This may take decades of remembrance; so far, no one has discovered how to create such spirits deliberately, though many have tried. Some zeitgeists fade over time, while others grow more powerful. Those who study the Umbrood claim that zeitgeists and Paradox spirits share a common lineage: both appear to personify generations of emotion, and carry some of that power with them. Naturally, Ecstasies who've heard of zeitgeists love to commune with them.

Spirits of an age seldom appear in person; they are more feeling than substance, though they may be seen in the Penumbra. Most simply bring the essence of the time with them as a rush of nostalgia or fear. The strongest spirits, like

the personifications of the Holocaust, the Classical Greek era, the Chinese Age of Heroes and the Summer of Love, can actually Materialize (see the Charm of that name in the *Mage* or *Werewolf* spirit rules), and pack a lot of energy (between 20 to 40 points of the Power spirit Trait). A zeitgeist appears and acts like a common stereotype of the era, and it doesn't always behave consistently: the Summer of Love may be a hippie love child, a Vietnam vet or a vicious cop, depending on the circumstances. Ecstasies say that zeitgeist okos are like drug trips: The vibes you bring influence the spirit you'll receive.

These ephemeral beings never stay for long — five minutes or so at most. Time shamans feel that zeitgeists form a direct link to the Lakashim. To commune with one is considered to be the greatest honor an Ecstacy can receive.

NOTES AND EFFECTS



Mastery of the physical body gives health and strength; mastery of the emotions prevents one from being controlled by others, and opens the inward ear; mastery of the mind, by which the arising thoughts can be either formulated or abolished at will, makes possible intuitive vision.

— Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, *The Opening of the Way*

Each of the Effects below has a long and informal history. Divyas trace them to the earliest shaman workings, so no real "history" is available, even to the Masters of Time. Each goes by many names; they're intuitive Arts passed down through use, not "spells" written down for others to study.

Mood Swing/Communion (** Mind)

This elementary but potent communion spell sends empathic messages to anyone in the area, spreading good vibes, anger, pain, joy, whatever. Often performed as part of a ritual (a concert, an orgy, a rave, etc.), this Effect grows more intense and affects more people over time.

[As the "Range, Damage and Duration" rules say (*Mage* Second Edition, p. 165), this magick spreads sensations to one nearby person per success. It communicates only feelings, not thoughts, but can be very effective when worked into a long casting. Several mages can combine their efforts, or add Manipulation + Expression rolls to decrease the difficulty of this often-coincidental spell.

[A Correspondence 2, Mind 2 variation, *Communion*, sends empathic feelings across a distance. For simplicity, assume that the emotions last for an hour or two after the event which caused them ends.]

Tamara/Aphrodite's Blessing (** Life)

To endure hardships, a Cultist must harden herself to the elements. This ancient gift, known by some as *Inner Heat*, allows the mage to acclimate to hostile environments — intense heat or cold, toxins, pain, etc. — without dulling the sensations, only the bodily effects. If she chooses, the Cultist may alleviate stimulation that's too intense; few do, however. It's more fun to see how far you can push yourself. A variation, *Aphrodite's Blessing*, increases sexual desire and stamina to inhuman levels. Life 3 can extend the *Blessing* to others.

[The caster heals damage inflicted by environments that actually injure her (fire, poison, torture, etc.) at the normal rate. She can't adapt in any superhuman way (i.e., growing gills) until Life 3. The effects of *Aphrodite's Blessing* are best left to roleplaying....]

Call Forth Zeitgeist (** Mind, ** Time, ** Spirit)

Also known as *Nostalgia*, this spell summons the spirit of an age so that others may experience it. Ecstasies often do this to make a point; bringing someone the actual feelings of the Summer of Love is infinitely more effective than simply telling them about it.

[It helps to be near some relic or location tied to the age when summoning its spirit; the Burning Times may be evoked more easily (and more coincidentally) in a Nuremberg dungeon than in a field in Kansas. In a neutral place, such as a library, no modifiers apply. Using a place or thing that's actually tied to the time lowers the difficulty by -1 (like a Node), or perhaps more; evoking the zeitgeist in a completely unrelated place raises the difficulty the same way.

[Most zeitgeists wash across the area where they were summoned, touching all people there with a brief sense of

what it must have been like, then fade away. Four successes or more should bring the spirit in a more active form. The way a zeitgeist acts is up to the Storyteller, but the summoner's state of heart and mind should shape the manifestation. A shaman trying to evoke the Free Love aspect of the Summer of Love will stand a better chance if he's listening to the Jefferson Airplane and feeling frisky than if he's listening to The Doors and afraid.]

Dreamline (•• or ••• Mind, •• Correspondence, •• or ••• Time (or ••• Correspondence, •• Spirit))

All Ecstasies form a bond when they meet. This urgent communiqué jumps across space and time to deliver important messages through that bond. By entering a trance, the summoner can reach into the dreams of his comrades. An advanced version (Correspondence 3) allows him to contact several friends at once.

[Many variations exist. Mind 2 sends empathic impressions, while Mind 3 delivers actual messages. Time 2 adjusts the message so that the receiver "hears" it before it's actually sent; Time 3 accelerates time so that the Cultist can send many messages in a short period. Correspondence closes the gap; the intimacy of the bond determines how hard the message is to deliver (as per the Range chart). Finally, a Spirit 2 variant calls friendly Umbrood to deliver the message without mental contact. The shaman making such a bargain should be prepared to pay her "delivery boy" a sender's fee.]

Prolong Pleasure/Pain (••• Mind, ••• Time)

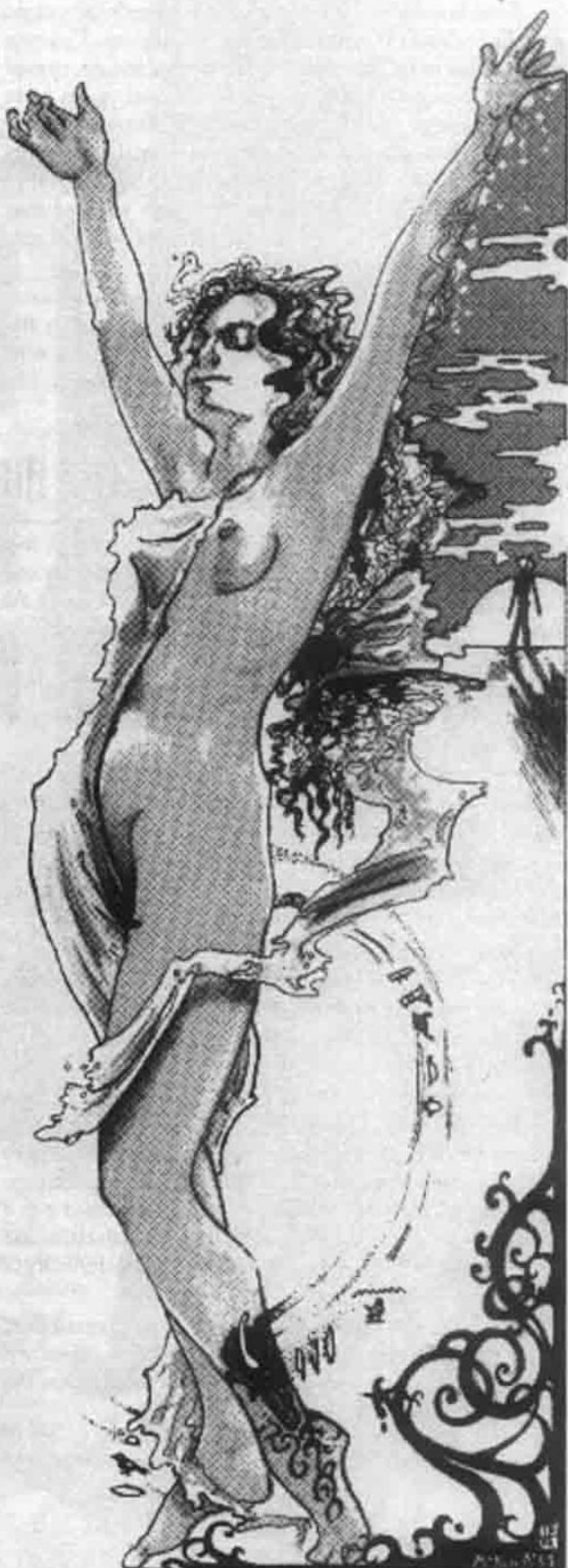
A simple example of a time loop; by setting the Effect in motion (often with a kiss, caress or slap), the Cultist can set up a "hovering" sensation. His subject will feel the next thing the mage does for as long as the magick lasts. No physical effects linger; the sensations are all in the subject's head. This can drive Sleepers to unparalleled ecstasy — or to madness.

[An act sets the sensation in motion. Time and Mind begin a loop which keeps the feeling at its peak level. An orgasm can last for hours; a whiplash can burn for just as long. Depending on how strong the sensation is (and how long the Effect lasts), the recipient may have to make a Willpower roll to think of anything else. Minor touches would be difficulty 4, intense pleasure or pain would be difficulty 9, and everything else would fall in between. For every hour the magick lingers, the difficulty goes up by +1. A strong new stimulus cancels the Effect.]

Bombolai (••• Spirit, or •• Matter, •• Prime)

Named for a blessing performed over a hash pipe or bong, Bombolai awakens the spirit of the drug itself, making it more potent (see Spirit 3 rules). While holding out the bong or pipe, the Ecstatic shouts the blessing, lights the bowl and inhales. Ideally, the rush will be intense....

[Two variations exist: with the first, a shaman rouses the drug's spirit; with the second, a more atheistic mage charges the drug's Pattern with a burst of Quintessence. Both styles have the same effect. For each success, the potency of the rush doubles. Scoring five successes or more demands a Stamina roll (difficulty 8) to avoid a blackout.





[Yes, it's possible to OD doing this spell! Combining it with **Prolong Pleasure** has put some Cultists into comas.]

Purify (* Life, ** Matter, or both)**

Concerned Cultists use this ancient spell to cleanse a body or material of harmful elements. Drugs can be forced out of a user's system, poison can be separated from wine, etc.. When used on a living being, the subject feels a bit shaky afterward, but suffers no serious effects.

[First-rank perceptions are often used to discover what needs fixing before this spell is cast. Drugs and poisons are considered one and the same when cleaning out someone's system. Matter pulls the components together and Life expels them. The Matter-only variant cleanses poisons from inert materials, while the Life-only option averts venereal disease or unwanted pregnancy. Sadly, HIV and AIDS have resisted long-term cures; this spell causes a remission, but not a solution. The Cult suspects the Progenitors of engineering such hardy viruses.]

Dionysus' Gift (** or ***** Life (possibly with *** Matter or Forces))**

The god of wine, women and song was also an accomplished shapechanger and transmuter. He escaped capture by turning pirates into dolphins and himself into a lion, and often changed those who offended him into animals or plants. Some Ecstasies, notably the Maenads and Fifth World Tribe, carry on Dionysus' legacy.

[These various Effects work as per the Lesser Shapechanging, Animal Form and Perfect Metamorphosis Life spells. Working Matter or Forces into the magick will change live creatures to inanimate matter or energy. See page 187 of *Mage Second Edition* for details.]

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I want to repeat for the record that I do not, through this book, condone all of the practices I've described. They're offered for insight and accuracy, not for imitation. Drugs, visionquests, alternative sex practices and body modifications can be extraordinarily dangerous. *Cult of Ecstasy* is a work of fiction, not an advertisement.

I've found the following books and musical artists inspirational and/or informative while working on *Cult of Ecstasy*. Highly recommended sources have been asterisked. The greatest influence I've had, though, comes from life; not from dropping acid or attending orgies, but from hikes, concerts, midnight swims, and especially from the millions of sensations we take for granted every day. I can think of no better "Roleplaying Hints" for Cultist characters than these: Get a life. Experience it. Cherish it. Enjoy it.

— Phil Brucato



Books

- * *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy*, by Margo Anand
- * *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Wisdom*, by Rufus Camphausen
- *The Art of Dreaming*, * *Journey to Ixtlan and The Second Ring of Power*, by Carlos Castaneda
- *Altered States*, by Paddy Chayefsky (the film's fun, too!)
- *Sex Magick*, by Louis T. Culling
- *A History of Secret Societies*, by Arkon Daraul
- *Ecstasy: Understanding the Psychology of Joy*, by Robert A. Johnson
- *Re/Search: * Modern Primitives, * Angry Women and the Industrial Culture Handbook*, by Andrea Juno and V. Vale
- * *Food of the Gods*, by Terence McKenna
- * *The American Night*, by Jim Morrison
- *Goa Freaks*, by Cleo Odier
- *Talk Dirty to Me: An Intimate Philosophy of Sex*, by Sallie Tidale
- * *The Misfits and Poetry and Mysticism*, by Colin Wilson
- *Sex & Drugs*, by Robert Anton Wilson
- *Comics, Game Supplements and Magazines*
- * *Mara of the Celts*, by Dennis Cramer (Fantagraphics)

• * *Ghostdancing*, by Jamie Delano and Richard Case (Vertigo/DC)

- * *Mondo 2000* (Fun City Meglomedica)
- *GURPS Religion*, by Janet Naylor and Caroline Julian (Steve Jackson)
- * *Destiny's Price*, by Forrest Black, Phil Brucato, Beth Fisch, Amelia G and Steve Long (White Wolf; gives game systems for drugs, black market, sex industry and more)

Music Artists (all in heavy rotation during this writing; each epitomizes the C of E spirit)

- David Bowie
- * Crash Worship
- Dead Can Dance
- * The Doors
- Vanilla Fudge
- Jimi Hendrix
- Jackalope
- * Janis Joplin
- * Oysterband
- Nine Inch Nails
- * Robbie Robertson & the Red Road Ensemble
- * Rusted Root
- * Márta Sebestyén
- Ululating Mummies

MAGE: The Ascension™

Concept:
Mentor:
Cabal:

Mental

Perception_____●○○○○○
Intelligence_____●○○○○○
Wits_____●○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer_____	00000
Cosmology_____	00000
Culture_____	00000
Enigmas_____	00000
Investigation_____	00000
Law_____	00000
Linguistics_____	00000
Lore_____	00000
Medicine_____	00000
Occult_____	00000
Science_____	00000

Prime_____00000
Spirit_____00000
Time●00000

Health

Bruised	-0	☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Experience



Paradox

CULT OF ECSTASY

MAGE: The Ascension™

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Magick

Preferred Effects

Notes

Mystick Senses (On)

Talismans

Name	Level	Arete	Quintessence	Appearance

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

Brawling Table

Maneuver	Difficulty	Damage
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Kick	7	Strength+1
Body Slam	7	Special

Armor: _____

CULT OF ECSTASY

MAGE: The Ascension™

Expanded Background

Contacts, Sleeper

Contacts, Awakened

Influence, Sleeper

Allies, Awakened

Resources

Mentor

Familiar

Chantry

Companions

Node(s)

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Preferred Kamamarga & Congrex

CULT OF ECSTASY

MAGE: The Ascension™

History

Awakening

Goals/Destiny

Seekings

Quiets

Description

Age

Apparent Age

Date of Birth

Age of Awakening

Hair

Eyes

Race

Nationality

Height

Weight

Sex

Appearance/Nature of Avatar

Visuals

Cabal Chart

Character Sketch

CREDITS

Written by: Nicky Rea and Jackie Cassada
Developed by: Phil Brucato
Edited by: Cynthia Summers
Art Director: Lawrence Snelly
Layout and Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles
Art: Ron Brown, Mike Danza, Anthony Hightower, Heather J. McKinney, Alex Sheikman
Front Cover Art: Michael Wm. Kaluta
Front and Back Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles



780 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 100
CLARKSTON, CA 90021
USA

© 1997 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews. White Wolf and Mage the Ascension are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Dreamspeakers, Cult of Ecstasy, Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, The Vampire Players Guide, Axis Mundi the Book of Spirits, The Book of Worlds, The Book of Madness, The Book of the Wyrm, The Book of Mirrors, Ascension's Right Hand and The Book of Shadows are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

Permission to reproduce blank character sheets is granted for personal use only.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

Because of the mature themes involved, reader discretion is advised.

Check out White Wolf online at <http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN CANADA.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Rich "Coffin Break" Dansky, for making the chicken soup without saving enough for himself.

Cary "Kitty Litter" Goff, for playing in Phil's sandbox.

Clayton "Scratching Post" Oliver, for providing a new toy for Rich's Psycho Attack Kitty.

Rob "Starsky" Hatch, for looking "innocuous" enough to learn cool cop tricks. Brrrr...

Paul "Tongue Tied" Lepree, **Chris "Star Child" McDonough**, **Mike "Spaced Ace" Tinney** and **Greg "Cat's Cradle" Fountain**, for kissing up to that good ol' American cheese.

Louvie "Backside Pass" Locklear, for putting Peter Criss behind her.

Laurah "Shriner" Legend, for getting into the E&D spirit.

Lori "Boarding House" Snyder, for playing "Stuff the Phone Booth" with her apartment.

Ronni "Rantin'" Radner, for rapping us across the knuckles with style.

Ethan "Dr. Woof" Skemp, for his perspective on the sex lives of the dead and (un)buried.

Ian "Mighty Isle" Lemke, for going to Britain without leaving his office.

...and **Sarah "Blimey!" Timbrook-Nugent**, for being flooded in Europe.

AUTHORS' DEDICATION AND THANKS:

To those who follow the dreams of equality, freedom and universal love, who struggle to preserve nature in the face of overwhelming opposition from government and industry, and especially to those modern shamans who continue to serve their people in a world which no longer believes in them.

To Floating Eagle Feather, friend and storyteller. He is gone, but his spirit sings on.

To my unknown Cherokee and black ancestors, who speak in the world of dreams: Thank you for the inspiration.

Thanks again go to Carla Hollar for her efforts in locating resources. Special thanks to Phil Brucato, who carries the vision within his heart. Though he must jump higher with every effort, his legs are very long.

Phil himself thanks Owl Goingback and Amy Reed for many hours of fascinating, inspiring and informative discussion, wonderful friendship and good company. Osiyo to you both, and thank you.



DREAMSPEAKERS™

CONTENTS

DREAMS OF STEEL AND CONCRETE	4
CHAPTER ONE: SHATTERED VISIONS	10
CHAPTER TWO: WALKING THE SPIRIT PATHS	24
CHAPTER THREE: BEYOND THE DREAM	38
CHAPTER FOUR: SPEAKERS OF THE SACRED TONGUE	48
APPENDIX: INSIDE THE DREAMWHEEL	60



DREAMS OF STEEL AND CONCRETE

There is nothing like a dream to create the future.
— Victor Hugo



The nightmares came for him again that night, their gibbering mouths uttering words he could not understand. Michael felt their soundless speech cover him like a second skin, as though they were trying to eat their way through his flesh. Unless he could understand them, they would devour him, piece by tiny piece. He opened his mouth to scream and found himself falling, tumbling endlessly downward from nothing into nothingness.

His own scream jolted him out of the dream. Outside, a fire truck roared by, its siren cutting a swath of agony through his head. He'd lived in the city too long.

At work, later, standing atop a narrow bridge of steel that would soon become the 82nd floor of the Something-Manhattan Office Tower, Michael looked down at his favorite landmarks — Central Park, the elegant St. Patrick's Cathedral and the old lady of skyscrapers, the Empire State Building. He saw his dream phantoms emerging from the glass and steel skeletons around him. He blinked, nearly losing his balance. Not a good move for an ironworker. High steel didn't tolerate mistakes. Michael went to work, shutting out everything except the task at hand.

He ate his lunch in uncharacteristic silence, scared with his raising gang. Usually, he was eager to contribute to the general conversation after a morning spent communicating with the other connectors through hand signals. Today, he hardly heard the jokes

and sports talk. Every time he opened his mouth to speak, his words got tangled up in images from his dream. Halfway through lunch hour, Hank ambled over to sit beside him. A 20-year veteran of the high steel, Hank had been his union sponsor three years ago when Michael was fresh from the reservation and first breaking into his father's trade. It was Hank who'd tried to fill in when Michael's father died in a fall two years ago.

"What's up, Mikey?" Getting no reply, Hank tried again. "Earth to Michael Skywalker, what's up?" Michael turned a little too quickly, and shrugged.

"Nothing," Michael said, looking away. Hank stared at him quizzically. Michael wanted to explain about the ghostly figures, but couldn't even begin telling Hank about his nightmares and waking dream.

Just before quitting time, he heard the drumming. He barely noticed the throbbing sound amid the whine of heavy drills and clank of steel girders being hoisted into place. But when it became the only sound he could hear, he tried to locate the joker who had brought a drum to work.

Perched overhead on a narrow girder, a wizened old man with skin so dark he seemed like a silhouette looked back at him. He lifted one hand from a double-headed skin drum and waved, then went back to his drumming. Michael couldn't imagine how he even heard such a soft, pattering rhythm.



He signaled frantically for the figure to come down. The old man wore no hard hat, no protective gear. From his backlit shape, he didn't seem to be wearing much of anything at all. The drummer waved again.

To bring the old man down, he would have to go up and get him. Like most Mohawks who worked the high steel, Michael refused all but the most minimal safety precautions. Hooks and ropes hampered his movement and led to an artificial dependence on gadgets. He preferred to rely on his own sureness and steady nerves. He began to climb.

Above him, the old drummer seemed excited, and stood up to lean toward Michael. Gazing upward, he realized the drummer had withered breasts — an old woman. *Shit, she's gonna fall!* He tried to hurry, not entirely watching where he was going.

Straining upward, Michael extended a hand to reach for the old woman. His foot slipped. Suddenly he was back inside his dream. Screaming, falling, eyes meeting those of the old woman, he plummeted down. For a moment, frozen in place, suspended crazily between earth and sky in a timeless breath of unreality, he heard the gibbering voices again. Throwing his arms out wildly, impossibly trying to catch hold of something solid, Michael connected with a narrow girder. Bone-jarring pain shot up both arms as he grasped unyielding metal. His grip felt weak, uncertain, but Michael clung fiercely to the steel, legs dangling as he hung in mid-air, only a handgrip away from the street, hundreds of feet below. Doubting anyone could hear, the young ironworker screamed for help.

The next few minutes seemed dreamlike in their intensity. His fingers ached from the rough steel. Michael gritted his teeth, locking his hands together around the girder. Finally, some of the men below him pointed upward and reacting with a flurry of activity. Fatalism washed through him, leaving a strange calm in its wake. *Either they'll get to me or they won't.* Chancing a quick look above him where the old woman had been, Michael saw only empty space.

"I've got you, son. Stay with us while we get you out of this mess."

Michael heard Hank's voice and felt the safety harness being snapped around his waist. Hank helped Michael release his death grip. As his fingers were pried loose from the metal, he panicked, shuddering with the fear that he might fall again. When he knew he was safe, the sudden relief brought giddy elation as Michael realized that death had stepped aside. Only part of him kept track of his rescuers' progress as they maneuvered him out of danger, hustling him into the lift down to the street.

Hank rode down, too, worry plain on his craggy face.

"They've got an ambulance waiting," Hank said as he stepped out of the elevator car and

helped Michael onto the sidewalk.

"I don't need one," Michael said. He started to explain that he was fine, but his legs buckled beneath him, and his head exploded in a warm burst of bright colors that led to blackness.

...

The sound — one sharp tap followed by a steady rainfall of raps and taps — woke him. He opened his eyes to a no-color world of blacks, grays and ghostly whites. Slowly shapes resolved into a stainless steel sink, plastic chair and nightstand.

I'm still in the hospital. Michael turned his head toward the window, where moonlight streamed faintly through the flimsy curtain. A shadow hovered outside. He tried to focus on the shape, and heard rhythmic drumming. He rushed to the window, shoving the curtain aside to get a better look, heart pounding in time to the drumbeat.

He beat on the glass. The drummer nodded, raised a hand in a wave, then went back to drumming.

"What do you want?" Michael yelled, slamming his fist on the glass.

"Is everything all right, Mr. Skyhawk? I heard a noise...."

Michael opened his eyes. He was still in bed. The nurse flicked the light on. Michael looked at the window, but was unable to see anything beyond the room's reflection in the glass.

"I had a bad dream," he said, immediately regretting his words.

"I'll bring you something to help you sleep," the soft-voiced nurse said.

"I don't need anything," Michael replied, but she had already left. Quickly, he rose and went to examine the window for the smudge marks that should have been left by his fists. The glass was clean. *I am not losing my mind.* Taking a deep breath he made his way back to bed. The nurse returned with water and a large orange pill. He didn't awaken again until morning.

...

Discharged the following day, Michael spent the afternoon looking up at the towering buildings. That night, he came home with a 12-pack and drank himself into a dreamless stupor. The next day, he went to work.

Stepping out onto the girders, Michael moved to observe his favorite view. As he neared the edge, he heard the drum again, and broke out in a sudden sweat. Whipping around, he looked for the old woman, then realized that the pounding was from his own heart. Dry-mouthed, he stared over the edge and down, captured by the terrifying allure of the street far below. He jerked back from his precarious position, realizing he had almost fallen again. Forcing himself to concentrate, he shakily started the climb up to the day's work area.

By lunchtime he ached from the slow, careful planning and placement of each hand and foothold. At lunch, Michael couldn't eat. He began a frightened, laborious crawl to the elevator and rode to the ground. Even there, Michael's legs felt too weak and his stomach too knotted to allow him to eat. He walked across to Dooley's instead. Several beers later, he felt bolstered enough to go back to work. Michael paused to look up at the framework rising above him. Churning terror rushed upward from his feet through the top of his head as he felt himself falling into the sky.

When he came to, the gang boss was standing over him. "Go home, kid," he said, "Come back tomorrow if you're feeling better.

We'll find somethin' for ya." As he left, Michael heard the gang boss tell someone, "Lost his nerve. Happens all the time. One minute they're connectors, the next they never go up the steel again. Damn shame."

...

All during the next week, Michael promised himself he'd return to work. He heard the drum whenever he tried to sleep, invading his dreams, bringing with it the voices he felt he should know, but didn't. The only cure lay in the pain pills prescribed for his wrenched muscles and the six-packs he ventured out for each day. Eventually he didn't hear the drum anymore.

The nightmares began again. Screams echoed through his head and swirled through hallucinogenic landscapes of endless steel frameworks covered with metallic webbing. Inevitably caught as he fled from the spiderlike creatures who created it, he struggled vainly until awakening. Sometimes, far off in the dream, he thought he heard echoes of tapping. Waking covered in sweat, he would crawl from the bed and sit in his armchair until dawn. On the fifth night, as he again woke and moved toward the chair, he saw a shadowy figure in it.

She tapped once sharply on her drum and sighed. He squeezed his eyes closed, shaking his head, denying what he saw.

"Don't shake your head at me, boy," she whispered, her voice like snakes slithering over rock. "You're poisoning your own dreams and laying yourself open to bad possession. You got to get over this and go back up the steel!"

He laughed bitterly. "You don't know what you're asking."

"Yes, I do," she answered. "It's you who doesn't understand. Whatever happened to showing brave? You got to gather your courage, boy, or you'll stay on the ground the rest of your life. After the first 40 feet or so, it makes no difference how far you fall. Forty feet, or a thousand and 40 feet, you're most likely dead when you hit the ground. The only difference is in how you see it. How did I get up there? How can I hover outside a window 10 floors up? Why can't you do that too? You are the skyhawk. You need to fly, and you can. All you've got to do is believe, so come on, boy, wake up!"

Her last words brought him fully awake, and he sat up suddenly in bed. Shame for his cowardice and determination to prove himself warred within him as he dressed. False dawn painted the sky as he reached the construction site. He let himself through an opening in the fence and moved to the elevator, beginning his ascent.

On the 80th floor, he moved resolutely toward the outer framework. Concentrating on nothing but the hand and footholds he needed, he started the climb to the top. His breath rasped shallowly as sweat broke out on his forehead and prickled against his armpits and back. With shaking hands, he pulled himself upward. On top, no overhead beams sheltered him from the sky. The skeletal framework made up a floor without wall supports. He felt as if he were being offered up on some modern equivalent of an altar to the gods. Gathering his courage, Michael looked down and felt as if he were toppling into an endless chasm. He jerked back, almost falling as he overcompensated.

His heart's rhythm beat in his ears. "How can I hover 10 floors up? Why can't you do that too?" Got to believe, he thought shakily. Show brave. Slowly at first, then with greater confidence as he felt his fear start to leave him, he began to dance along the girder. He danced to the beat of his heart, an old dance of his people,

movement made new again as he leap: from beam to beam. As the sun rose, he lifted his arms in greeting, then closed his eyes, dancing faster and faster. *If this is a dream, he thought, I prefer it to reality. I am the skyhawk.*

Opening his eyes so he could know the moment of his choice, Michael felt a rush of purest ecstasy as he stepped off the building and into the dream.

LEXICON

Most "official" Council terms reflect the Traditions' Indo-European roots; thus, such titles carry little or no significance among the Dreamspeakers. While these medicine workers still use standard words such as "Avatar" or "Quintessence" in mixed company, they prefer calling such concepts by their "true names" among themselves.

Aiyana — Spirit guide; Oracle. The word means "eternal bloom."

Diaspora — The scattering of African tribes throughout the world as a result of the slave trade; any dispersion of groups of people through exile, enslavement or emigration.

Dreampath — A path or roadway through the Umbra. Dreampaths can either connect locales in the Otherworld or form bridges allowing passage into the dreams of another. Some believe that dreampaths correspond in some fashion with changeling trods.

Dreamtime — The spirit world; to Australian aborigines, it represents the true world without limitations of time or space.

Great Dream — This vision of an Earth reclaimed for itself and transformed into a new home for all its inhabitants (spirits, humans, animals, plants and inanimate beings) forms the heart of Dreamspeaker lore.

Howahkan — "Mysterious voice"; Avatar. See also *Mawiya* and *'Uthane*.

• **Kaimi** — A newly Awakened Dreamspeaker who has not yet undergone initiation; seeker; Apprentice.

Mana — Quintessence.

Mawiya — The life-force within all things, called *Atman* by other Traditions; sometimes used as another word for Avatar.

Medicine — Magick as understood by all shamans; the term distinguishes this gift of the spirits from sorcery, which is power wielded for personal gain. Most native cultures view sorcerers (including other magi) as evil, selfish or deceitful beings, to be watched carefully and dispatched when they become a threat. The difference between magick and medicine colors most Dreamspeakers' views of their fellow wizards, and causes difficulties to this day.

Moe'uhane — Literally "soul sleep," this word describes each individual's personal dream or vision.

Nahimana — A Dreamspeaker who has achieved mastery in at least one form of medicine (Sphere); a wisdom keeper or Master.

Path of Nightmares — Summation of all the corrupted uses of Spirit magick as practiced by Vision Mockers and sorcerers.

Rituals — Rites; spells.



Sacred Objects — Tools used to concentrate and direct the powers of Dreamspeakers; foci.

Shaman — The standard term for "mages" within the Dreamspeaker Tradition, this usually denotes a tribal medicine worker who has traveled the realms between life and death. Other names for Dreamspeakers are included below.

So'cha — One who has completed her first initiation into the ranks of the Dreamspeakers; initiate, Disciple.

Society of Dreams — Name commonly used to denote the Tradition as a whole.

Sorcerer (Witch) — One who uses magick for personal power. Sometimes this word also describes Nephandi or mages from other Traditions.

Tarche — A meeting for spirit-walkers in the Dreamlands, where matters of great importance are discussed in a protected circle.

Tisa — The Path by which a Dreamspeaker approaches Ascension, an ongoing attempt to reach higher levels of consciousness and to use that awareness for the betterment of others. Tisa is a Tibetan word meaning "ladder."

'Uthane — The Avatar; Dreamspeakers acknowledge four types of 'Uthane, which roughly correspond to the four Essences. These are: *Donona* ("visible sun"), akin to Pattern; *Maska* ("powerful"), associated with Primordial; *Haidera* ("lioness"), which corresponds with Dynamic; and *Virma* ("hero"), similar to the Questing Essence.

Vision Mocker — A Dreamspeaker who has betrayed the true Path and entered into a treaty or pact with evil spirits; a.k.a. *barabbi*.

Wemilo — Term used for Dreamspeaker Adepts, the word means "all speak to him" and implies someone worthy of respect; an elder.

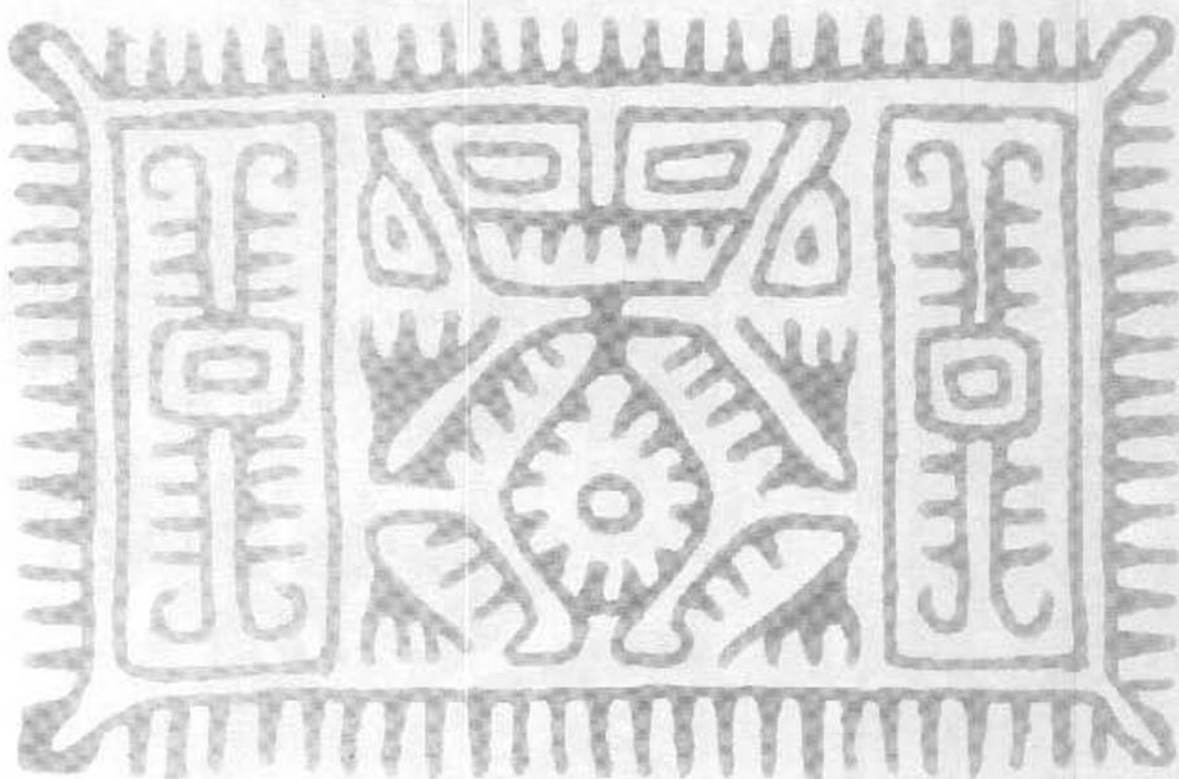
OTHER TERMINOLOGY

Many disparate cultures came together to make up the Dreamspeaker Tradition, bringing with them their own words. These are used interchangeably throughout the text. Dreamspeaker players should choose one or two of the following (whichever seem most appropriate) and stick with them. Names given to spirits are capitalized to make it clear when they are in use.

- **Dreams** — Dreams may be referred to as visions, *Maya*, the pathways of the mind, the sleeping realm, *moe'uhane*, spirit visitations and waking sleep.

- **Dreamspeakers** — The Tradition's diversity has given rise to the following synonyms: clever men and women, the wise, *sami* ("wise"), lorekeepers, *bakhita* ("the fortunate ones"), honored ones, servants of the tribe, medicine men, *hada* ("people of destiny"), *ramla* ("prophets"), *gowan* ("rainmakers"), *kha'vadi* ("those-whose-visions-shape-the-world"), spirit doctors, *konata* ("men of high station"), medicine workers, *taiun-ki* ("voices of the spirits"), dreamcallers, *anuviri* ("those-of-great-knowledge"), *maskai* ("the powerful"), *babalawos* ("diviners"), *sangoma* ("priest"), spirit workers, men of high degree and wise women, among others.

- **Spirits** — These are also known as the Invisible, Other Beings, *Iwa*, Little Brothers and Sisters, Shining Ones, the Timeless, Friends Within, Hidden Helpers, Brethren, *Ei* (the Mayan word for "brother"), Grandfathers, Grandmothers, Unbrood, Wisdom Speakers, Vision Guides, Branches of the Sacred Tree, Weavers of the Hoop and Meridians (energy currents).





SHATTERED VISIONS (HISTORY)

*The dreams of the dreamer
Are life-drops that pass
The break in the heart
To the soul's hour-glass*

— Georgia Douglas Johnson, "The Dreams of the Dreamer"



All around him Michael heard the sound of drums, rhythms and timbres pounding and throbbing in a splendid cacophony of driving beats.

"Open your eyes, boy," a reedy woman's voice sounded from behind him. Michael blinked and looked around. He was standing in the midst of a vast twilight forest. Impossibly tall trees loomed overhead, their leaves and branches shrouded in a thick, blue-gray mist. *Nor trees, buildings. Skyscrapers.* The mist resolved itself into a fine network of spiderwebs that enveloped the ghostly buildings. Here and there a zigzag line of green light arced from one building to another, leaving a trail of sparks behind it.

"Down here," the voice continued. Michael looked down and saw a now-familiar figure, barely four feet in height, old and wizened, her dark skin wrinkled like fine black crepe.

"You're the one!" he said, and the woman chuckled. "I saw you up on the girder, and outside my hospital window. You were in my dreams—"

"— and stopped you from killing yourself with drugs and booze, too, didn't I?"

Her voice cracked whiplike. The young Mohawk smarted from the verbal blow.

"In the material world, the one you left to come here, you stepped off the top of a building. Where are you now? Did you land there — on the pavement in some unrecognizable bloody mass of crushed bones and splattered brains? Or are you here, with me — with all of us — in a place where you are about to begin the real story of your life? Will you hear what I tell you of who you really are, or would you rather return to the world you know and give up all you *might* have been? You stand on the edge. You have taken the first step and begun the dance. Will you sing the spirit song or live broken-voiced forever?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about—," Michael began, faltering as she began to laugh.

"Oh, really? Then open yourself to the dream, and learn."

The confused babble of voices he had heard in his nightmares rose up, threatening to deafen him. Just when he thought he'd be driven insane, he heard, underneath them all, the soft patter of the drum. And he heard a soft, strangely rhythmic man's voice speaking....

BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF NINE



Every Indian learns how to be a magician and learns how to misdirect attention and the dark hand is always quicker than the white eye and no matter how close you get to my heart you will never find out my secrets and I'll never tell you and I'll never show you the same trick twice.

I'm traveling heavy with illusions.

— Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Brother, I speak to you in the language of my people. You hear me in the language of dreams. My part in your Awakening is to tell you of the beginning time. In the darkness of the earth, the seed awakens and looks around, wondering where it came from and how it came to be. You are that seed, and this is the story of where you came from, the tale of your ancestors.

We are not of the same tribe, but all people are one — made so by the Great Spirit that some call the One Ancestor, the Creator or the Mother. In that making, the Great One had need of helpers to shape the world and the people who would be in it, and so were created the Pure Ones, beings of radiant energy and wisdom, of great power and unsullied spirit.

Other Traditions say theirs were the first Paths of true magick. According to their histories, these claims may hold some truth. Our history as Dreamspeakers begins with the Council of Nine, in 1466 according to the calendar of the West. But we existed long before we took that name unto ourselves. We, too, can claim that our medicine dates from the time of the first people, for we are the first people. We have been here since the time before time, when the world's dreams of itself were fluid and changing, and magick was commonplace. We have existed for thousands of years in harmony with the spirits and the Earth. We are true workers of medicine, and we are called Dreamspeakers. The Pure Ones taught us their ways so that we might be caretakers of the world.

Our Tradition is a potlatch of diverse peoples and cultures, thrown together by those who understood none of us — only that we practiced magick and had mastered the Sphere that they called Spirit. In this, they were both right and wrong. Wrong because they saw only the color of our skins, the strangeness of our customs, and believed us too primitive to fit in elsewhere. Right because without knowing it, they reunited us, all children of the same mother. Their failure was in not understanding that they shared kinship with us as well.

Do not let our name mislead you. We speak the language of dreams, but we are far more than the mouthpieces of the spirits. We are healers and world travelers, givers of names and defenders of our visions. We are the last remnants of what were once proud peoples, and the dreams we now carry within us will shape the future of the world yet to come. To understand who you are, you must first know who we all are. Each of the groups who came together to form the Dreamspeakers has a different world view, yet each holds certain truths in common. Each shall speak for itself and tell you of our origins.

TRAVELERS THROUGH THE DREAMTIME

We have been here since the time before time began. We have come directly out of the Dreamtime of the Creative Ancestors. We have lived and kept the Earth as it was on the first day.

— Australian Aboriginal tribal elder

On the first day, the Creative Ancestors moved across a barren world, giving birth to mountains, seas, plants and animals. Wherever they stepped, they created something that was not there before. Before they took those steps, they dreamed what they would make. All things were possible in the Dreamtime; all things could become other things. Mountains might transform into animals. The Ancestors could be animals or men. Plants could walk about because all things were interchangeable and one.

The Creative Ancestors grew tired and went into the clouds, the sky, the mountains, the people, the animals and the plants. Each left behind a part of itself to connect us together and remind us that visible and invisible are the same.

All peoples were created here, but not all could stay. They forgot the Dreamtime Law after the Ancestors withdrew completely into the invisible world. Some forgot the language of creation, and forgot that all time is one time. They forgot that things cannot be owned, and no longer felt the life force which rises from the Earth through the feet and up into the head. They tore at the ground and enslaved their brothers, the animals. Our lost kin forced plants to grow where they did not wish to be. They built shelters and wrapped themselves in the dead pelts of their sisters to cut themselves off from their connection to the wind and the rain and the changing ways of nature. They had to go out from here for they forgot that they were only a part of the Great Dream of the world. They forgot that the Earth was alive, that it had dreamed itself into existence.

Many believe that these forgetful people were the first, for when they came to new lands, they built great cities and stayed in one place. They burrowed into the ground and brought up stones and metals, cut and planted, and forced animals to serve them. These things have left signs for later people to find.

Those who stayed behind honored the sacred visions of the land. We used only what came to hand, and left no scars upon the Earth. When hunting, we took only those who were prepared to surrender to the dream of death; when we gathered seeds and plants, we harvested no more than our share. Many of our people were Awake to the spirits that inhabit all things, and knew their hearts to be one with those of the land.

We lived within the Dreamtime, understanding the need to move back and forth from the solid world to the Otherworld. Those who could step across the boundaries most easily acted as guides for those who could not. By entering into the invisible world and bringing back messages, we helped our people remain true to the Great Dream. They called us wise women and men of high degree.

Our understanding allowed us to move through different parts of the Dreamtime, reaching back to the earliest days and forward

into the dreams that are yet to be. We spoke with spirits, heard the thoughts of our people, and knew the forces of nature. Calling forth the potency of the Earth in dances and songs, we made ourselves and the land strong and vital; healing illness and injury by bringing the body back into communion with its inner self. All these activities would later be known as *magick*. To us, they were the natural state of the world.

The sacred vision of the Earth is like a seed waiting to be born into a plant. All that will be is already present in the seed. It does no good to force the seed to be something other than what it was intended. The Great Dream is complete. We must remember that our dreams are meant to form only a part of that greater vision. Though the Dreamtime seems far removed, we are in transition. There may be only a few of us left, but the rest wait for us in the timeless time of the invisible world. You are a part of this, too, a small seed seeking the spark that will cause you to flower. You have only to Awaken from slumber into the true dream of the world.

DREAM PRIESTS OF AFRICA

All the power that was, that is, that ever shall be, is there waiting for you to dream it, to bring it forth from the potentiality of Winter to the blossoming reality of Spring. Sleep, and in that sleeping, wake. Go into the darkness and once there, see the light...

— Luisah Teish, *Carnival of the Spirit*

I am one of the living dead, an ancestor remembered from the third generation since my death, and I speak to you from within this priestess, who lends me her mouth and body that you may know us all.

We are the children of sun and moon, light and darkness, wind and rain, thunder and lightning, and all the natural forces of change and growth. Our true history lies not in books, but in the minds of our lorekeepers and storytellers. It is the tale of kings, warriors, priests, hunters, farmers and traders. Our people built great empires before white men ever laid eyes on our lands. We were ancient when the Egyptians came to power.

All African people know the world came from one Creator, whose children embody the greater and lesser parts of that creation. Outsiders claim that we worship many gods, but we know better. We honor the spirits of nature and those of our ancestors who act as the links between Creator and creation, but we do not worship them.

The Creator and sustainer of the world has many names, takes many forms, and has many spirit helpers. The Yoruba speak of Obatala, the maker of the world, whose animal is the spiral-shelled snail, and of Olurun, Lord of the Sky, distant and unknowable, who birthed Olodumare and Eleda, the twin forces that power the universe. The Voudoun of Dahomey tell of Nana Buluku, mother-father of Mawu (the moon) and Lisa (the sun). Her only temple marks the place where once she dwelled. There, she speaks to her priests, teaching them a hundred tongues. Yemonja, the queen of dreams, who is also the water from which all life springs and in which all life begins, and her son Olukun, the god of the ocean, hold between them all that is necessary for passing on life from one generation to the next. We are Fulani, Dogon, Ashanti, Masai, Ibo, Zulu, Himba. We come from the Ivory Coast of West Africa, the Great Rift of East Africa and the veldt of Africa's southern tip.



We are of many tribes and languages, some enemies to one another, others allies. Only the eyes and the chains of outsiders have imprisoned us in one category.

They call us Dreamspeakers, but we are witch doctors, priestesses, diviners, hougans, babalawos and sangoma. We were the first healers, the first to treat unbalanced minds, the first priests and storytellers. We travel the Otherworlds, change into animals and learn what it is to be "other," welcome good spirits into our bodies, and drive out the evil ones who would do harm to others. It is our task to speak with the Iwa, to learn what they have to teach, and to pass on messages they have for the living. We have done so for thousands of years; we will do so in the future.

WARRIORS OF THE VISIONQUEST

Remember, we are here for a grand purpose, beyond self. We are the caretakers.

— Coyote Thunder, Apache elder

Hear my words, for I speak the dreams of the spirits of the Pure Land.

The songs of the shapeshifters tell how the Pure Folk, whom some call the "Wyck," brought them across a great land bridge to a place untouched by corruption. With them came the People, whose eyes still saw the invisible world, whose hearts had not forgotten the songs and the rhythms of the Earth Mother. We were the first Dreamers, and without the spiritwalk in quest of a new vision, we could not have come to this place.

Our stories tell of many different journeys. The People of the southern forests remember their beginnings in the mud of the Lower World, where they were fashioned into human form by the working of someone powerful. The *Houwhan* of the Upper World joined the clay of the Lower World, becoming one creature, who belonged to both worlds and to the Middle World, the Earth. The southwestern People traveled through many underground ways to reach this one. The details of their journey make up a secret story, told only at sacred times to those worthy of hearing it. The People of the plains, too, entered this world from below. Coyote's blood formed the People of the plateau. Raven created the People of the cold northern lands. Some of the People of the northeastern woods call themselves the children of the rising sun. There are too many stories to tell all at once, but through them runs one great tale, the story of the coming of the People to Earth, to the Land of the Turtle, the Middle World, the Pure Land.

We are the sons and daughters of Earth and Sky, the animals and plants are our brothers and sisters. We came from the womb of the Earth, and the Grandfathers touched us and taught us — as they still do.

Whether or not we came to the Island of the Turtle — which some call the American continent — from some other place, our eyes were the first to see its beauty, our ears the first to hear the thunder in the sky above our heads. Ours were the first



bodies to feel the sun's warmth and the life-bringing moisture of the rainfall. To us, the features of the land are sacred. We came from a cave in this mountain, or rose up from the waters of that lake. This great river marks the place where Ukten, the river serpent, made his home, and that rock bears the footprints of a giant.

Our medicine folk, our shamans, healers and sacred clowns keep the knowledge of our beginnings and our connections to the spirit world, the Lower World and all the worlds around us. They are Dreamspeakers not only because they have been given that name, but because they speak to us of the world of visions. Some have journeyed to the land of the dead and returned to share with us the powers they gained from touching the next world. Others walk the paths of the invisible world and meet with the totem spirits who live there.

Our people are the 500 nations; Iroquois, Cherokee, Zuni, Ojibwa, Inuit, Athapaska and Salish are only a few of our names. We are hunters, fishers and farmers. Or we were, before strangers came to the Pure Land and made us conform to their customs. Some of us still keep the old ways, but more have traveled far from the ancient paths. Keepers of the bond between the Great Spirit and his children, between the Earth Mother and her offspring, we dream of the Pure Land that was and that will one day be again.

I have spoken.

KEEPERS OF THE BALANCE

*We only come to sleep, we only come to dream:
it is not true, not true, that we come to this world to live.
We come to change ourselves in green spring grass.
Our hearts grow green again, they open into crowns.
Our body is a flower — it blossoms, and then dries.*

— Nahuatl verse from the Aztec, "We Only Come to Sleep"

From deep within the Earth, we came to the sunlit world, a world born from the words of the gods. We live a life borrowed from the gods, who spilled their blood over the bones of the first race and gave us life. One day we must return that life to them. You know our ancestors as the Aztecs, Toltecs, Olmecs, Zapotecs and Maya, but we are older than any of those great fallen cultures.

We paid homage to the feathered serpent, the smoking mirror, the fayed god, the god of the underworld, the skybearers and other great powers. Jaguar and Eagle taught us the way of the warrior and gave us their forms when they were needed. Their children, the Balam, Pumonca and Hashiya, remain hidden on the fringes of our world, but they come when we need them. We share a common bond, a common blood given by gods.

To honor those gods, we built great cities filled with temples. We made sacrifices to keep the balance between life and death, and to pay the gods back for the lives they had given us. Our diviners read the signs and kept the calendar so that we might live in harmony with the cycles of the world. Our priests, who were sometimes our kings as well, interpreted the gods' words and read the omens that guided our lives. Our shamans gave their bodies to the animal E: and took their forms, inviting a link between the worlds of spirit and flesh.

You have heard of the Inca, but do you know of the Cagaba and Chibcha? The Caribs, Muisca, Quechua or Aymara? We, too, are Dreamspeakers, though most of our dreams are lost.

The southern American continent, with its great rainforest and towering mountains, gave us life, but the Otherworld gave us meaning. The Shining Ones lived all around us. We sang, danced, and made offerings to the great beings of the spirit world. To us, dreams were portents of the future, and we listened to the messages that came to us in the language of symbols.

So few speak for us today, but those few will not remain silent.

THE WAY OF THE KAHUNA

Our ancestors came from the far west. Ours are the islands of Polynesia and Hawai'i, built from the fire within the Earth and carved by the oceans, populated by the wind and waves that carried upon them the whispers of life.

We cultivated the spirits and gathered their energy, their mana. Our kings and queens kept that power safe, guarding it for the good of their people. We heard the voices of the Little Brothers every day, in the stirrings of Pele, the goddess of the volcano, as she walked within the earth, and in the body of Mano, the shark, who ruled the ocean that surrounded us. Our priests — kahuna — interpreted the will of the gods, and did the work of the dream world. Today, many of their survivors have joined the Dreamspeakers; others, called Kopa Loei, continue the old ways without welcoming newcomers in our lands. Before our ancestors knew of other lands and people, they were healers, wisdom keepers, teachers and overseers of rituals. They walked and talked with the Hidden Helpers, who taught the people to live in harmony with the land. Our kahunas protected us from evil sorcerers, who worked dark magicks and brought suffering, disease and other evils to torment the living.

As in other lands where Dreamspeakers kept alive the link between the Otherworld and the world of matter, we, too, fell before the civilizers and their missionaries. But we have not disappeared utterly. We grow strong once again.

OTHER VOICES

We of the Buryat, Yagakir, Tungus and other tribes of Siberia, and the Lapps of northern Scandinavia count ourselves among the Dreamspeakers as well. The word "shaman" first applied to us. It came from the Evenki word *xaman* — "one who knows." Tibetan and Himalayan Dreamspeakers have stories and histories as old and rich as the ones you have heard.

Do not believe that we come only from a few places; the world beyond the flesh is everywhere. We have only recently come out of hiding, for the grasping reach of the Soviet Union has been shortened. The Chinese now regard many of us as "cultural treasures," living relics of a bygone age. Working within strange parameters as "entertainers," we perform ceremonies and healings before attentive audiences, who view what we do as historical drama. Thriving wherever there are tribes in need of our help, we hide behind such titles as "lorekeepers." Do not think we are not there simply because you do not see us, for like our Invisible Brethren, we are a part of the life of the Earth; our inner voices prevail over attempts to silence them. Even the destruction of our outer shells does not always rid the world of our presence. We continue. We pass on our wisdom, and guard the sacred places for all.

OUT OF MANY, ONE



The drum shall beat so my heart shall beat. And I shall live a hundred thousand years.

— Shirley Daniels

The voices continued as Michael wandered after the old woman, following her into the cobwebbed forest. As he passed towering skeletons of steel and mesh, his stomach rolled with vertigo. *If this is a dream, he mused, it's a damned realistic one.*

And a long one, too. The journey seemed to last hours, then days. The old woman led the steelworker into iron gardens and asphalt caves. By the dim flickers of street lamps and television screens, he saw a world transfixed with false dreams, mass-produced visions which held out hopes they would never fulfill. He saw children with guns and basketballs, and watched dark spirits coiled around feral packs of young warriors. The noise of boom boxes, cars and shouting drowned out the elder voices in the city's familiar wash of sound.

"Is it like this back on the rez, too?" he asked the old woman at length.

"In ways, boy, it's worse. This age of man is dying, and people's spirits die with it. There's lots of nightmares hanging around to eat the meat off our world," she said, shooing off a crippled creature with vacant hungry eyes, "and we've become what we are to chase them off before they eat it all away."

"Who's this 'we' you keep talking about?" he demanded, annoyed. The walkabout had made his feet sore and sent his mind off on wild tangents.

"If you'd shut your face, you might learn something," the elder cracked. Chastened, Michael fell silent, and concentrated on the voices again.

In time, the murmur resolved. One voice in particular seemed to stand out. And he listened....

...

Brother, hear now the story of how we came to be known as Dreamspeakers, when before we were clever men and women, shamans, elders, wisdom keepers and many other names.

There was a time when we were one with the witches called Verbena. We did not call ourselves a Tradition; that word did not yet exist. We shared—and still share—a closeness with the Earth and a reverence for life, but long ago we found different ways to express that affinity. We chose the path of the spirits, for we hold that our Mother Earth and everything on Her, in Her and around Her possesses consciousness. Our task consists of speaking to our Invisible Kin and carrying their message to the physical world.

We came from many places, traveling across wide oceans, crossing hostile lands to attend a grand wizards' Convocation in a place called Horizon. Many of us endured hardships, privations and terror of the unknown, trusting in the Great Mother and Father and their Invisible Children to guide us. Some never made it to that first gathering, felled along the way by those who feared their strange garb and colored skin, or by diseases from which they had no protection. Those people we encountered seemed equally strange to us. Their clothing, customs, even the food they ate was unlike anything we had seen before. They prayed to different gods,

and spoke harsh languages we could not understand. Still, our visions drove us to make accord with other wisdom keepers.

Those of us from the Dreamtime of Australia met people who sheltered within the torn-up bones of the Mother, hiding from their brothers, the elements, and who gouged the Mother's skin with hard, shining stone that would not break. We of the deep jungles encountered those whose skins were the color of death and whose eyes trapped the sky. For the first time, those of us from the Pure Land to the west saw square hogans made of stone. Knowing the power of the circle, the hoop of life, we knew not why these strangers failed to honor it in their homes. Worse, they seemed not to know honor and truth-speaking as we did. Many of us learned the strangers' tongues; they dismissed our languages as barbarous. We were made to feel that our skins were the wrong color, our clothing strange. They believed our ways were primitive, our thoughts somehow lesser than theirs. Though we are the principle people, they saw it not.

The Council of Nine made the Dreamspeakers a Tradition because they knew not what to do with us. When they saw us with our black, brown and red skins, our strange looks and stranger customs, they lumped us into one category to "round out" the Council. They knew we were true workers of magick, but our cultures, appearances and approaches differed from their own. Our diverse customs and beliefs worked against us in the early days. Convincing members of rival tribes to lay aside their grievances for the good of all took many days. Ignorance of one another's customs led to conflict from insults unwittingly given and vigorously returned. These differences nearly led to battles as we sought to understand one another and unite.

All this happened in the 1400s, when the Mythic Age of Europe fell to the concerted efforts of the mages of science. Most of the lands we came from still lay beyond the reach of European civilization. Still, the mages whose dreams founded the Council of Nine traveled beyond the borders of the world they knew, convincing Star-of-Eagles, Naioba and others to journey to Mistridge for the great Council that would decide the fate of True Magick.

From Hawai'i came Kelekokio, whose name means "seahorse," representing the kahunas of the western sea. She said she had followed the directions of the stars, and had traveled to us in an outrigger canoe. To this day, we do not know how she completed that journey. "I traveled where I needed to be," was all she would say.

From Australia came a small woman with skin as dark as night and eyes that held the stars within them. She called herself Wida, which means "eucalyptus tree," and announced to the gathering that the dreampaths had brought her to this place inside the Dreamtime. She greeted Star-of-Eagles like a son and Naioba like a sister. Although she could not have met them before in the waking world, she had spoken with them many times in dreams.

This closeness among them finally overcame our initial antagonisms, and convinced the other Traditions that we were all members of one common Path of medicine, the way of Those-Who-Speak-With-Dreams. Mages at the Convocation were frightened by us, for we demonstrated few of the outward trappings by which they recognized their own. At first, some argued that we belonged with the Verbena, for we used blood and life-fluids in our workings. Only when we demonstrated our primary focus in Spirit



medicine did they decide that we merited a Tradition apart from the Life Keepers.

At the time, we did not gainsay them, so set were they on their Nine-Fold Path. Star-of-Eagles and Naioba shared the leadership of the new Tradition. Their marriage and their children were born of love, and their union served to unite us and make us strong.

We needed that strength as our newly formed Tradition quickly came under attack from within and without. It began with Naioba's death, in 1464, at the hands of one of our own who had turned away from the ancestors to walk the Path of Nightmares. Some of us saw Naioba's murder as an omen foretelling disaster, and counseled our brothers and sisters to walk away from the Council of Nine. Before the dissenters could act on their belief, Naioba appeared to each of them in a dream, explaining the need to transform her death, meant as a sacrifice to her assassin's Infernal master, into a sacrifice that would bind all Dreamspeakers together.

The second assault on our Tradition took us by surprise. Members of the Celestial Chorus, offended by our talk of many gods and our ignorance of Christian ways, attempted to force us to abandon our beliefs and accept their vision. Star-of-Eagles and all who cherished the memory of Naioba remained steadfast, despite efforts to convince them that they were wrong. The Chorus finally backed down, but many Choristers still harbored a great resentment for their "backward" brothers and sisters in magick who refused to convert.

VISION MOCKERS (DREAMSPEAKER BARABBI)

The dark brethren have their speakers as well. Driven by dreams of power and delusions of false greatness, some Dreamspeakers have bargained their souls to evil spirits who seek to destroy all that exists. These false Dreamspeakers are sometimes born when an evil Howahkan Awakens within a mortal prepared for its possession. More often, they arise from the seduction and corruption of true shamans, whose anger, indignation or greed drives them to fall for the promises of instant gratification and immediate power.

The young sorcerer Dhamburu (ever after known as He-Who-Is-Outcast, Killer-of-Dreams and the first Vision Mocker), jealous of the attention and respect paid to Naioba and Star-of-Eagles, made such a dark pact. As the price of his admission to their ranks, the Infernal ones demanded a sacrifice. Feigning repentance for previous cruelties, Dhamburu the Outcast asked Naioba to help him redeem himself. When Naioba arrived at the designated meeting spot, he thrust a sacrificial knife into her back as she bent to draw a circle of purification.

Though Naioba possessed the power to heal herself and defend against further attacks, she instead called out to Star-of-Eagles with her dying spirit, warning him of the dangers represented by Killer-of-Dreams. As Dhamburu began his chant demanding power, the sky darkened, and the wrath of wind, lightning and thunder battered him as Star-of-Eagles and other Dreamspeakers strode forth from the angry clouds to confront the Vision Mocker. They took vengeance immediately, sending his dark soul to its Infernal master and scattering the dust of his remains to the four winds as a warning to others of the consequences of following the Path of Nightmares.

THE AGE OF INQUISITION

The Verbena call these centuries the Burning Times. The Inquisition raged throughout Europe, purging the Christian world of heresy. Guided by directives from the Cabal of Pure Thought, subjects of this madness attacked those whose ideas of reality differed from their own. The European Traditions bore the brunt of the Inquisitors' wrath in the early centuries of their existence, for our lands were still unexplored.

Only after Walking Hawk returned from the debacle of the First Cabal with dire warnings and prophecies did those of us in the Americas hear of the coming invasion of pale-skinned fanatics. He urged the tribes to unite and prepare to withstand the forces that would destroy us. Some listened, and the Iroquois Confederacy was our answer. More refused to hear, or, on hearing, could not accept that our world would soon end in blood and conquest. We were wrong.

When more of us returned to our homes, changed by our experiences after seeing such amazing sights and speaking with those so different from us, our people would not believe our words.

EXPLOITERS AND EXPLOITED

*They sailed away from their own country
To another man's land far across the sea
And they stole that land from the people there
And they called that land Australia
Why did you do it, white man?
They sailed away one winter's day
To a sunlit land that was far away
And they stole that land from the people there
And they called that land America
Why did you do it, white man?*

— Steeleye Span, "White Man"

I speak now for both the Africans and Native Americans who suffered under the European conquerors. When the world was younger, Mediterranean vessels sailed across that island-pocked sea and met our traders sailing the opposite way. In Northern Africa, our empires rivaled those of Greece and Rome. As our merchants exchanged wares and ideas, our wise ones traded knowledge with others like them from the northern lands, continuing their association even during the Crusades. We were not such strangers to Europe as some would have you think.

The 15th and 16th centuries, known to Westerners as the Age of Exploration, brought their own version of the Burning Times to the lands that were our homes. When Columbus returned with his tales of the strange inhabitants of the "Indies," he opened up the Americas to the exploitative dreams of Europe. While the Order of Reason marshaled its forces for an assault on Western reality, the seeds of its static dream began their own voyage to new and fertile ground.

The mages of Reason were not the only ones who saw opportunity in the new world. The Celestial Chorus included its agents among the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries who accompanied the exploratory fleets. While black-robed priests sought to convert us to the worship of Christ, the Celestial Choristers renewed their battle of will and word with those Dreamspeakers they found among "primitive" people.





Portuguese voyages to the western coast of Africa reintroduced the slave trade to Europe in 1441. Other countries quickly followed their lead, and the Spanish soon began importing African slaves along with their settlers to the lands claimed by Spain. Our sacrifice on the altars of the new gods of economic greed and colonial expansion met with the approval of our enemies. The sorcerers of science watched as arrogant European colonizers swept across the newly discovered worlds, impelled by nothing but their own hunger for power. This began a long period during which our cultures were wiped out and we were denied status as human beings.

In the past, when we warred with one another, we took slaves to keep them from coming against us again, and to adopt new members into our tribes to replace fallen warriors. Only with the coming of the Europeans did we sell one another and make war to profit from slaving.

We wisdom keepers came to America on the slave ships and remained with our people, trying to keep alive the knowledge of the invisible world and to do the work of the Iwa. For the first time since the Convocation, African *kha'vadi* made contact with their Native American counterparts in the flesh. Some of us had met in the Otherworld, but now we found ourselves forcibly joined in the physical world.

Ironically, the African *diaspora* transplanted *sowade* from one continent to another, erasing distances between us and other groups of medicine workers. Each came to better understand the other. As the cultures that supported us were destroyed, we became ever closer to one another. Those of us who had lost our tribes and families recognized our fellow shamans as new kin, drawing us into relationships we never would have known if not for our shared troubles.

AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT, COLONIALISM AND INDUSTRY

The "white man's burden" and imperialistic expansionism took its toll. By the 1600s, Europeans preached the gospel of science, stamping out "superstition" around the globe in the name of the "Enlightenment." The next 300 years saw the spread of Western civilization and beliefs throughout Africa and both Americas. Even Australia, one of the last bastions of the Dreamworld, fell to the might of Technocratic expansion. The European "dream" of technology and science encompassed the Earth, waging a battle on two fronts.

The physical war assaulted Mother Earth herself. Discoverers and explorers, in the name of archaeology, slowly mapped our sacred places out of existence, condemning our holy mountains and rivers to contour lines on topographical charts. Our ancient cities and temples became relics suitable only for museum display. The Europeans "discovered" the ruins of our civilizations and drained them of any mana, or Quintessence. When explorers like David Livingstone penetrated the African interior in the 19th century, the spirit world shook with anger as its most secret connections to the physical world disappeared under the weight of Technocratic zeal.

The second front undermined our spiritual beliefs. While cosmologists like Kepler brought order and science to the stars, silencing the sky spirits with pronouncements of planetary motions, natural scientists like Francis Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton hammered the laws of the universe into molds of their own devising.

Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, our homes were overrun and our people enslaved or driven from their lands. We appealed to our fellow Council members for help. It did not come. Many Tradition mages saw us not as keepers of ancient wisdom, but as those whose time had passed. Taking advantage of our hardships, the Celestial Choristers renewed their assaults on our beliefs, while the Hermetics decried our uselessness in the "modern" world. Many of us felt we had no place in an alliance of mages and sorcerers who looked down on us and belittled our ways.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution gutted religious conviction, providing the Technocracy with a perfect vehicle for destroying humanity's belief in the supernatural. Social Darwinism, an offshoot

of Darwin's theory, allowed white Europeans the license to identify all tribal and "colored" people as subhuman, ripe for extermination as part of the ongoing progress of "man." The same excuse allowed them to take lands away from native populations who, they claimed, underutilized the Earth's resources. This opened the door to re-educating "backward" peoples, destroying our cultures, languages and belief systems to bring us the "glories" of Western civilization.

We Dreamspeakers, crushed under the heels of the conquerors who enslaved our people, felt the anguish of the spirit world as it retreated further from the new consensual reality. Some among us wondered if we paid too heavy a price in our hope for the future.

DIVISION OF THE DREAMSPEAKERS

In 1756, after many attempts to garner assistance for their people, the Iroquois delegation left Horizon in disgust in response to mortal insults proffered by the archmage Sao Cristobal of the Order of Hermes (see *Horizon: Stronghold of Hope*). Nashoba, a Choctaw medicine man, persuaded half the Dreamspeaker delegation — 100 Native Americans — to depart with them. Some expatriate Dreamspeakers formed their own lodges and realms within the spirit world; others returned with their families to their native lands, joining their tribes against the Europeans. Many arrived in time to assist Tecumseh's valiant, futile effort to unite the Shawnee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Cherokee tribes against the westward expansion of the new American nation. Those who survived Tecumseh's defeat sought refuge in the Second World of the Diné, joining the Lodge of the Gray Squirrel (see *The Book of Chantries*).

Today, many descendants of the native peoples remain reluctant to trust the so-called "Council" that refused to aid them. The Celestial Chorus, which tried so hard to convert its "neathen" compatriots, endures the deepest resentment of all. To the Dreamspeakers who departed, their fellow Traditions harbored lying, self-serving sorcerers. Even in the modern era, these sentiments remain heated.

Those who stayed with the Council did so because of their ties to the Verbena, the Cultists of Ecstasy and the Euthanatos — the only Traditions who defended and sided with the Dreamspeakers. Those four groups, often criticized by their more "enlightened" companions, represented the mastery of Spirit, Life, Time and Fate; their unity should have warned the other Council members of the perils of ignoring their counsel. Many Dreamspeakers hoped their continued presence would eventually prompt action by the Council on behalf of their homelands. Many who remained in Horizon received dream visitations from Naioba, who urged them to stand firm and make no hasty judgments.

Bejide, a young babalawo, received a great vision, divining that nothing would reverse the tide of conquest. She spoke of this to the other tatan-ki, telling them that a new age of man had begun, and would have to run its course. Though many Dreamspeakers would have chosen to return to their people if only to die with them, Bejide called on them to sacrifice their own desires so that the Tradition itself would survive. With a vision of the distant future, she discerned that the native people could return from the brink of destruction — but only if the Dreamspeakers remained a living Tradition. Moreover, their survival would require the might of the whole Council, which in time would learn and grow and recognize its mistakes.

The young seer likened this sacrifice to the shamanic journey. The Dreamspeakers faced near-death. By confronting annihilation, the shamans chose whether to surrender to it or to commit themselves to long hardship, deprivations and sacrifice for the greater good. Their decision to remain within the Council of Nine served as their initiation into a new, painful wisdom. Many of the Dreamspeakers who quit the Council perished with their people; those who remained dedicated themselves to conserving what they could for the times to come. Thus, they served their people in the long run, fulfilling the Dreamspeakers' most sacred task.

Angry and saddened, half of the Tradition elected to follow Bejide's call for sacrifice. Unfortunately, those who remained behind found themselves at odds with their former cousins, forced to defend other Traditions with whom they rarely agreed. To this day, the Dreamspeakers' greatest sorrow is the disdain with which their former members regarded those who stayed behind. The Council's unity was purchased, some would say, with the blood of the shamans' own people. It is a price no Dreamspeaker is likely to forget.

THE 20TH CENTURY



This path to the primordial religious experience is the right one, but how many can recognize it? It is like a still small voice, and it sounds from afar. It is ambiguous, questionable, dark, presaging danger and hazardous adventure; a razor-edged path, to be trodden for God's sake only, without assurance and without sanction.

— C.G. Jung, "Self-Representation of the Spirit in Dreams"

The first half of the 20th century saw our fortunes fall even further. The machines of global war knew no boundaries, and the powers of Europe, Asia and the United States battled for land, ideology and economic supremacy over the breadth of the world. Behind the scenes, great philosophical and social movements reaped the fruits of groundwork laid in the preceding century.

THE "SCIENCE" OF DREAMS AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The most direct attack on our beliefs came from the theories of Sigmund Freud, the inventor of modern psychology. His writings demystified dreams, making them functions of human biophysiology. He claimed these images represented the mind's unconscious struggle to convert inner conflicts and unresolved traumas into symbols. Vivid and recurring dreams signified mental sickness "curable" by his psychoanalysis.

The Technocracy applauded Freud's work; like the Void Engineers, who imposed an orderly geography on the physical world, Freud and his followers became cartographers of the mind's unexplored lands, systematically mapping away connections between the outer world and the inner realm of dreams.

Freud's "victory" enjoyed a setback when Carl Jung, one of his own students, proposed his theory of the collective unconscious. In the language of science, he returned the reality of myth to the belief system of the world. Jung reintroduced the idea of archetypes, and argued that the language of dreams tapped not the isolated fears and hopes of the individual but the cultural foundations of entire races. He told the world what we had known all along: The dream world is a real world. The best of us know that his so-called "archetypes" are very real spirits dwelling in courts beyond the mortal world, and that they project their essences through the imaginations of artists and mythmakers. This "discovery" was not enough to undo the damage, but it was a start, for Jung spoke to the Western mind, eroding its confidence that rationality could explain everything.

KARL MARX AND THE POLITICS OF MATERIALISM

Just as Freud's work attacked the world of dreams, Karl Marx's treatise on dialectical materialism gave new ammunition to the Technomancers. Marx sought to free the working class from the shackles of a religion that deferred gratification to the "next life," enabling the powerful to retain their privileged positions. By reducing the forces of history to an economic struggle, he unwittingly buttressed the arguments of the Technocracy.



The idea of holding material goods in common was not new. Most tribal cultures espoused some form of communal life, realizing land could not be owned, only shared. Marx, however, reduced communality to commonality. In his ideal society, everyone was equal because everyone was the same. It was as if he had said that all flowers must be daisies and all animals must be cows, even if the "daisies" were red and had thorns and the "cows" had fur and claws. His idea sparked a revolution in Russia and spread after World War II to the areas won by the Soviets.

Neither communism nor the capitalist alternative spoke to the best interests of the land or the spirit world. Born from materialistic ambitions, both doctrines denied that anything existed outside of the measurable universe. Both espoused grand ideals but offered only conformity and repression.

DREAMSPEAKERS AND THE MODERN WORLD

*My peoples' culture was calm and reserved
If not for that white dream, it would have endured
My people were left with no choice but to decide
To conform to a system
Their minds enslaved
Their souls they caged
I feel the rage
Brutality can never be undone
But the sun is not yet set
The bass and drums and microphone's a threat
— Rage Against the Machine, "Darkness"*

Something happened in the last few decades, however, to give our people hope. Dreams of freedom have grown stronger in the waning years of the 20th century. Once again, the voices of the voiceless cry out in rage. This time, those voices are being heard. In Africa, the 1970s saw the birth of self-determination movements. Former European colonies won national independence. The intervening centuries had left their mark, though, as the ideals of our new nations fell to tribal rivalries and artificially imposed boundaries. Charismatic leaders succumbed to the lure of power, becoming military dictators. American and European interests, backed by a cabal called the Syndicate, funded many of these governments and reinforced economic colonization. African bodies became targets for exploitation as Progenitor-backed research used them as experimental populations to test new drugs.

The demands white settlers had imposed on the landscape left many new nations with depleted, ravaged countrysides. By turning rainforest to farmland, exploiting mineral resources, polluting rivers and forcing urbanization on rural farmers or nomadic hunters and herders, the Western invaders changed the face of the African continent. Along with our struggles for survival in the world marketplace, the people of Africa now battle epidemics, droughts and famines, the bitter harvest of centuries of greed.

We have interceded with the angry spirits to determine what sickness infects the land. While other Traditions fight for their idea of Ascension, in Africa, we wage a desperate battle to salvage the spirit of the world.

In North America, Native Americans seek to reclaim what was lost. You, Michael Skyhawk, know this struggle all too well. We demand our tribal rights, try to enforce long-broken treaties, reclaim our ancestors' bones from museums and private collections, protect our sacred places, and give our people hope and pride. We have declared war on the culture that stole our land and relocated us to reservations. When activists such as Leonard Peltier remain in prison far longer than the worst rapists and murderers, it becomes clear that we battle a system that fears "crimes" against the status quo far more than violence against mere individuals. The Dreamspeakers of the 500 nations have roused the spirits of the Pure Land in support of these struggles. We have other concerns besides Ascension.

The Africans of the diaspora, despite the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, still struggle for equality in a land which supposedly guarantees it to them. Though we won the battle for civil rights in the courts, the war for the hearts and minds of white America still goes on. Ignorance and fear of the "other" leads to violence, just as poor housing and education guarantee lack of opportunity. Nevertheless, many black Americans are not content to blame all their ills on white prejudice. Unemployment and lack of equal opportunity may cause family dislocations, gang violence and drug abuse, but in the end, it is the individual's choice to smoke crack or shoot someone else over "cool" shoes.

The anuviri of the diaspora seek to awaken the spirits of the ancestors and to revitalize traditions that died during centuries of slavery. By promoting the growth of self-identification, self-respect and responsibility to family and community, we hope to reconnect with the visions of those ancestors. We try to teach, but we are not afraid to force our wayward children to face the consequences of their actions. The decision is still theirs to make. We only show the way and urge them to follow.

THE NEW AWARENESS

In the 1960s, explorers on the edge of consciousness discovered the philosophies of Africa, the Orient and the Native Americans. Suddenly, these forgotten ideas became "cool." Throughout the Western world, the practices of meditation, shamanic healing, visionquests and other forms of alternative spirituality blossomed. Where once we had been curious relics, now we had our foot solidly in the door. Over the last few years, our forgotten customs and practices have become culturally acceptable.

This may not seem important until you consider that all magick depends on belief. For too long, the Technocracy and even some Traditions belittled our paradigm of reality. Now that it is fashionable to seek a "spirit guide," read the sacred oracles or study shamanic drumming, our voice in the world grows louder. A few of us have begun to accept Dreamspeakers from among the children of the conquerors. Some Europeans and Anglo-Americans have Awakened with the knowledge that the Tradition to which they belong is not that of their cultural heritage but of Those-Who-Speak-with-Dreams. When they are sincere, who are we to deny them? We see it as payback for the shamans we have lost to other Traditions in the past.

LEONARD PELTIER

As head of AIM (the American Indian Movement), Leonard Peltier took part in demonstrations intended to dramatize Native American grievances and force the American government to negotiate with tribal leaders. In 1975, when many government officials felt threatened by Indian claims for their rights, two FBI agents were murdered while engaged in agency business — undermining AIM — on a South Dakota reservation. Of four targeted suspects, Leonard Peltier was the only one convicted, and was ordered to serve two consecutive life sentences.

Despite questions of alleged FBI tampering with evidence, ballistics tests that showed shell casings did not match Peltier's rifle, and possible intimidation of key witnesses, Peltier has spent 20 years in jail. His most recent attempt to reopen his case and apply for parole has been denied, and new evidence supporting his case has been suppressed. Whether or not Peltier is, in fact, innocent of the charges, he deserves another hearing, or the parole commonly granted to those who commit crimes far more grievous than those ascribed to this civil rights activist. Considering that the average rapist spends five years or less behind bars, the injustice of Peltier's imprisonment demonstrates that the Indian Wars have not ended, but merely changed tactics.

THE WAR FOR ASCENSION

Brother, as far as I am concerned, the Ascension War is no war at all. Let the other eight Traditions fight the Technocracy over the spoils of the lands they have all helped plunder and rape. We stand with the people who need us, who live on reservations, in ghettos, barrios and forgotten villages. We speak for the land that has been defiled and the creatures driven to the brink of extinction. We bring messages of warning from the angry children of the Earth Mother.

Our war is a war of dreams. Our vision demands a voice. Our anger will be let loose. We fight for nothing less than the redemption of the visible and invisible worlds. Our sacred multiple heritage draws its roots from spirit and mind as well as body. Let our dances reflect our determination to withstand the ravages visited upon us! Let our songs reverberate with cries for justice and with words that strip the flesh from the despoilers of creation! Let our dreams shape a rebirth of our lost connections to our Friends Within! Let our thoughts create anew a vital world! We can wait no longer for the Sleepers to Awaken, but must shout their Howahkan into full awareness. The Ghost Dance has begun.





WALKING THE SPIRITPATHS

(CULTURE AND POLITICS)

That TV interviewer, that woman with the orange-dyed hair, told me: "Lame Deer, don't put us on—being able to talk to animals. Come on. This is the 20th century!" I told her: "Lady, in your Good Book a woman talks to a snake. I, at least, talk to hawks, and falcons, and eagles."

—Lame Deer, Minneconju Sioux



"Dreamspeakers is not just a name." The old woman's voice joined the murmur of ancestors, then rose above them. "The nature of visions binds us together. Your vision binds you to us."

The wizened elder gestured for Michael to turn around. "Look," she said, pointing outward in front of them, "and tell me what you see."

The young ironworker gazed at the massive barrier of twisted metal girders rising upward at impossible angles, obscuring his view of what lay behind it. "I see a dead end," he answered.

"Look harder," his teacher admonished him. "See what lies before you with the sight of your 'Uthane."

Michael stared again at the tangled heap, trying to make sense of it. In frustration, he closed his eyes to clear his vision. The barrier remained etched in his sight, but somehow, it looked different.

"Wait," he said, reaching out with eyes still closed to touch the jutting piece of iron nearest him. "This is a foothold," he muttered. "And here is another — this is a road!"

"This is *your* road," the old woman said. "By seeing it for what it is, you have already taken your first step."

DREAMSPEAKERS AND SHAMANISM



*You can only die each morning,
And live again in the dreams of the night.*

—Fenton Johnson, "The Daily Grind"

The Path of the shaman forms the core of our Tradition. Although the word *shaman* describes anyone who practices tribal medicine, actual shamans are those who have made the journey, either in the flesh or in spirit, to the realm of the dead and returned changed and blessed by that dark trip. Like our cousins, the Euthanatos, Dreamspeaker shamans understand death as a natural and inevitable part of life.

In many cultures, shamans are healers, diviners, wisdom keepers and wonder workers. Above all, we are dwellers in two worlds. Our ability to pass back and forth between the material world and the Otherworld sets us apart, and lets us serve as a bridge between both.

The road to becoming a shaman is not an easy one — it is harsh, often demanding. Setting forth on that Path requires sacrifice and change. Most shamans do not choose to become so; the spirit world calls them, and they either answer or, in some cases, die by refusing the call. Those who survive to walk the shamanic Path are sometimes called the *twice-born*. Visionquests and Seekings form a continuous cycle of sacrifice and learning throughout the shaman's life.

Shamanism is not about having power. It is about service — serving your people, communing with the Weavers of the Hoop,

and preserving the Earth Mother. Sami recognize that everything is connected, both in material form and in spirit, and we seek to protect and heal those vital links. Our Path requires that the traveler open herself to forces outside and beyond herself, that she seek guidance in visions and speech with the Invisible Brethren, but most of all, that she sacrifice herself. Without total commitment and serious purpose, the shaman cannot hear the voices of the spirits, cannot travel in the Otherworld, or cannot transform the world around her.

THE SHAMANIC JOURNEY

When you have talent, you have to be careful. A man who's not open to the world can walk into a room filled with demons and not have a problem, but if you walk into a room full of devils with your eyes open, you're going to be attacked. You've got to keep a clear head and stay in touch with God, or you're going to fall. Having vision opens you up to a lot of temptations.

— Owl Goingback

A person doesn't just wake up one day and say "Hey, I'm a mage! I think I'll learn some Spirit magick and become a Dreamspeaker!" The Path is a bit more complicated and personal than that. More often than not, it is the Path that chooses the shaman, not the other way around. Realizing the particulars of that Path are essential to playing a Dreamspeaker character.

A Storyteller or player who wants to run a Dreamspeaker must realize the central role shamanic transformation plays in her character's existence. From beginning to end, the road of the shaman encompasses her life, marking her progress by the milestones encountered along its demanding route. Such phases need to be planned for and brought into play at appropriate times.

- **Beginning Visions:** Early in the character's life, usually in the Prelude, the fledgling Dreamspeaker experiences intimations of what lies ahead of her. These visions may take the forms of invisible playmates and animal companions in childhood, vivid dreams and hallucinations in early adulthood, and finally an irresistible summons from the Ancestors.

- **The Call:** The 'Uthane or Avatar Awakens in a dramatic and sometimes violent fashion, overwhelming the potential Dreamspeaker's body and sending it into cosmic overload. Extreme illness, coma or seizures announce the presence of the Spirit Within.

Elders of tribal cultures may recognize this event for what it is and welcome the arrival of a new shaman into their ranks. Those who do not belong to a tribal society often undergo brutal Awakenings; well-meaning but deluded psychotherapists lock many newly Awakened people in mental hospitals to "cure" their delusions. Intense shock therapy and medication might catapult a new shaman deep into the Otherworld; from there, she must learn to cope with her surroundings to escape. Most eventually escape their situations and find teachers. Others escape through attempted suicide. Those who are strong enough survive this unusual form of the near-death experience through the intervention of friendly powers, who guide the untried spirits back to their proper places. Such incidents might be the first times that new shamans encounter their totem spirits.

- **Near-death Experience:** The Call leads to a near-death experience, as the newly Awakened willworker makes her first official crossing into the spirit world while her body hovers at the brink of death. Clinical death sometimes occurs, followed by a miraculous revival when soul and body reunite. This will not be the only time a shaman comes close to death, but it is the first and most frightening step along her Path and marks her as a Kaimi, or "one who seeks initiation."

- **Vision Quests and Ordeals:** The new Kaimi now undergoes trials to ascertain the truth of her Call and to determine the direction her new life will take. During this testing period, the new Dreamspeaker usually adopts a radically new style of dress and behavior to mark her transition (often drawing on her ethnic roots, or on those she might prefer) into another life. Things must be surrendered as signs of devotion, and new practices must be adopted, if the would-be shaman is to continue. New taboos, fasting and solitude introduce her to the important role sacrifice plays in her new vocation. Through meditation, visions and prayer, she learns to enter the world within.

- **Initiation by Others:** Formal initiation comes only after the Kaimi has proven that she is worthy of the arduous ritual of transformation. In tribal societies, this ceremony often involves a private ritual witnessed only by other shamans, followed by a public celebration announcing the new medicine worker to her people. The Kaimi "dies" to her old life, either through symbolic death and burial or through a voluntary near-death experience, like those practiced by the Euthanatos. She also takes a new name at this time, signifying her identity as a So'cha, or "Initiate."

- **Acceptance by a Guardian Spirit:** The So'cha must present herself to the Ancestors and Invisible Ones and seek their approval and sponsorship. Each Dreamspeaker undertakes a major visionquest in search of a totem who will accept her and act as her mentor. (See Chapter Three for more information on spirit companions.) She usually returns from this journey with a physical token to show others that she has gained a guardian spirit. Seekers who have accomplished great deeds or who carry mighty destinies might even return with animal familiars that embody totem spirits — a coyote, a bear cub, etc.

- **Learning Spirit-Lore:** Although the So'cha spends much of her time in the physical world studying with her elders, her knowledge of spirit lore comes from contact with the Invisible Ones. The Timeless have their own methods of imparting knowledge and powers to those they favor; the So'cha may have to undertake quests on behalf of her spirit teacher or answer riddles before attaining the

enlightenment she seeks. Each successful journey marks the questor in some way, either with physical evidence — such as a feather or scale — or through physical alteration, such as a change in eye color or a tattoo-like pattern on her skin. Some So'cha mark themselves through ritual scarification to symbolize what they have learned from the Et, while others are marked by their elders or by the spirits.

- **Recurring Dreams:** As the So'cha becomes more familiar with the Otherworld and the dreampaths, certain images recur in her dreams and visionquests. These may be more familiar than she expects — many would-be shamans have such experiences during childhood. These symbolic communications seem incomprehensible at first, but resolve into an overriding vision. This "true seeing" reveals to the shaman her place in the Great Dream and signifies her transition to *Wemilo*, or "Adept." (In game terms, the Dreamspeaker must attain four dots in at least one of her Spheres and have achieved an *Arete* of no less than 4.)

- **Seekings:** The *Wemilo*'s journey increases her understanding of both the material and spirits worlds, and of her place in them. From there, she pushes herself toward more strenuous tests of endurance and will, making greater sacrifices to the spirits to earn their favor and prove her worth. Through rituals, fasts and solitude, she attunes her body and mind to the unseen universe. Storytellers should devise "Seekings" for Dreamspeaker characters who want to buy their *Arete* to higher levels; such things never come without wisdom and sacrifice.

- **Temptation:** Sacrifices often leave a shaman vulnerable to temptation by evil spirits and sorcerers. Playing on the toll denial takes, they encourage the Dreamspeaker to abandon her hard road for the less arduous Path of Nightmares. Even the wise may be lured with the thought of attaining enough personal might to bring their visions to life in the material world. Although these seductive roads to power may appear as paths leading to greater good, there are always signs that this corrupt way is delusionary — if the mystick cares to look for them. Those who choose self-advancement over sustained work find they are no longer shamans. They may still be willworkers, but their focus has changed from service and respect to self-aggrandizement. All shamans experience temptation at various times. Difficulties loom across the Path, hardships so horrible that any solution (even corruption) seems better than failure. Those who do not succumb, but trust in the guidance of their totems and their own abilities, become *Nahimana*, or "Masters." *Nahimana* must attain mastery in at least one form of medicine (in game terms, five dots in a Sphere and an *Arete* of 5), but more importantly, such Masters must keep the high road in mind and avoid the temptations of power that bring so many mazes low.

- **Old Age, Death and Transcendence:** Although most accomplished Masters have the power to prolong their lives, many Dreamspeakers choose not to do so. Aging carries its own wisdom, and death offers the shaman a chance to return her body to the Earth Mother who created it. A true spirit worker sees death as a part of life's cycle. She has faced death's terrors at the beginning of her journey, and she is not afraid of it by the end. Dreamspeakers who feel their work on the material plane is done use death to transform, moving to a higher plane of consciousness. This Path leads a *Nahimana* to become an *Aiyana*, or Oracle. Many choose to reincarnate instead, sending their *Howahkan* back into the world to continue and refine their visions.



...

"So when did I end up on this Path?" asked Michael. "When I saw you on the girders and tried to get you, or when I stepped off the frame and fell...." He didn't continue. Why risk ending up like Wile E. Coyote!

"Both," replied the elder, "and during your drinking binge as well. You were tempted, and I must say you gave in in grand style."

I was almost tempted not to let you know what you were doing to yourself, but I knew you just needed another chance."

"Thank you," he mumbled, a bit uncertainly.

"Oh, don't thank me yet," the old woman continued, leading the steelworker into a cave filled with glowing strands of web and skittering neon spiders. "Before we get done, you may wish you had drunk yourself to death...."

VISIONS OF THE OTHER WORLD



The spirit world does not speak in the tongues of man, but through the language of the heart.

— Stalking Wolf, Apache elder

In the darkness of the cave, Michael stumbled. The glowing spiders immediately rushed across him. As he swatted and shook, they wrapped his legs in moonlight strands. He couldn't rise, only roll, and the spiders clung like drops of tar. Bound in their webs, he felt the tickle of hundreds of hairy legs, saw the dripping fangs of larger things as they scuttled down the webs and wove him into their complex design. Strong as he was, the spiders settled about him, cocooning the steelworker in their own form of steel.

"Don't just stand there!" Michael howled as the elder leaned off to the side and chuckled. "And what the fuck is so goddamned funny?"

"An irony, is it not? Or are you still too wrapped up in yourself to see the humor in this? Get it? Wrapped up...."

Michael kicked and swore, but the spiders continued. Huge ones, larger than he, marched from the darkness, waiting to feast. "Jesus Christ!" he gasped. "Do something!"

"How does it feel to be wrapped like a package? How does it feel to have your arms pinned down at your sides while hungry things devour you alive? This is the doom of the Earth, Michael

Skyhawk, and all the strength in the world won't free you. I'll do nothing! If you can't figure out how to get loose, you'll find out the hard way how bad dreams end."

...

Call it the spirit world, an elder's voice had said. *The Dreamtime, the Umbra or anything else you want; within it, we hear the heartbeat of Mother Earth and see the life that permeates the universe. Though this realm exists outside the confines of time and space, it is as real as the world we touch with our bodies. We recognize the Otherworld as the home of our Invisible Brethren, and seek them out to learn from them....*

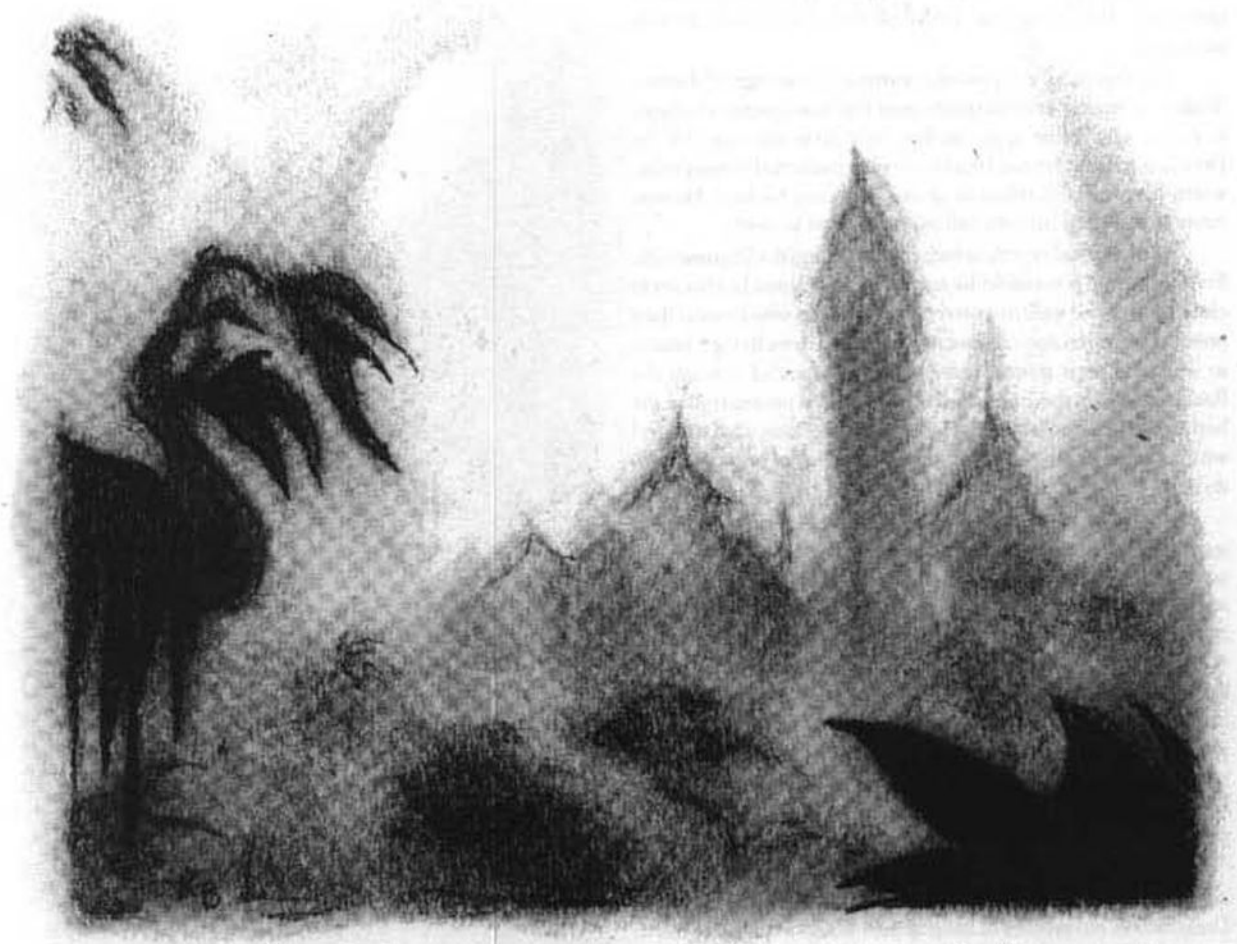
Within the Umbra, the dreams of all people, Awakened or not, comprise pockets of reality. Some exist only so long as the dreamer dreams them. We can enter those places physically as well as in spirit form, and these worlds of dream become as real to us as the dirt beneath your feet.

Vast reaches lie within the heart of the medicine wheel. Many Iwa reside there, and so long as we come with respect and intend no harm, we are welcome within their lands. There we construct our sacred lodges, holy meeting grounds and great medicine circles. Some, like the Lodge of the Gray Squirrel, protect whole Realms within that world. Others occupy only small portions of it. In these places, we work our medicine without arousing the angry specters of the white man's magick, without ripping the blankets we seek to weave.

PRESERVING GRANDMOTHER'S CHILDREN

In addition to their threefold sub-Realm in Horizon, many Dreamspeakers maintain Horizon Realms to preserve the old ways of life. As refuges for tribal people, endangered species and expatriates who wish to leave the modern world behind, the Realms below serve as last repositories for ancient wisdoms:

- **Njia Panda:** The Keepers of the Sacred Flame constructed this complex Horizon Realm as a haven for native populations facing destruction. It consists of a series of linked homelands which contains the elements that each wishes to preserve. One area is much like the Eastern woodlands of the Iroquois Confederacy, while others resemble pristine Pacific islands, the Australian outback, the Great Plains, the rainforests of South America and the African savanna. All six intersect at a meetpoint which gives the Realm ("crossroads") its name.
- **Onikari:** This small, pristine, wooded Realm, named for the Cherokee word for "sweat lodge," serves as a place of purification and renewal. Powered by a Node located in the mountains near Asheville, NC, Onikari is maintained by a group of Cherokee elders and their Uktena werewolf allies.
- **Yambula'kitino:** Though surrounded by jungle, the heart of this African Realm lies within the magnificent city of Yambula. Modeled after the great walled enclosure of Zimbabwe, the city serves as a workshop and repository for traditional crafts and learning, including storytelling and tribal rituals. Hundreds of Africans and African-Americans live here, learning and teaching the tribal ways. Many Baruti (see "Factions") bring troublesome youngsters to this Realm to help them learn responsibility and identity. Those who cannot adopt proper honor and respect are quickly ejected but most "visitors" choose to stay.
- **The Lodge of the Gray Squirrel:** Although it has existed for thousands of years as a secluded paradise, this Native American Realm gained a permanent function when the forces of Tecumseh were routed by "Mad Anthony" Wayne. Many survivors retreated to this so-called "Second World" to preserve their ways. A number of ex-Dreamspeakers came here as well, bringing their families, and later, importing buffalo and other endangered creatures from the American West. (See *The Book of Chantries* for a more detailed treatment of the Realm.)



MEETING IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

In the Spirit: Walk, we are young forever. Good deal, huh?

— "Blackwing," Forever Knight

Ours is the communality of the Otherworld, linked by something more than geographic or demographic definitions. No matter what land gave birth to us and colored our skin, as Dreamspeakers, we speak the same language — the language of truth. We share the same spirits and totems, though our names for them may differ, and we all strive toward creating a future in which the Great Dream becomes a reality.

We are at once solitary and social. We must walk our paths alone, but we seek out each other's company in the Dreamtime. Because we are such a far-flung Tradition, most of our meetings take place in the Otherworld, in dreams, which send images of ourselves into the world within.

Each of us enters alone through the inner door of sleep, or by opening a gateway into the forgotten homeland. There, we find a country without boundaries, a landscape of unharnessed potentials and ever-shifting parameters. In the Otherworld, everything is as it truly is, and every spirit shows the form it was meant to have. When we meet in dreams, we appear as our inner selves. Unlike our bodies, our soul-selves do not age or grow weak. Many of us prefer our dream bodies to our flesh-bound ones for that reason.

We know, sometimes, when others like us — travelers across the boundary — are present, and we communicate with them regardless of where they may be in the physical world. Many of us, who have never met in the flesh, have become friends in the Otherworld and have spoken together in the place of dreams. It is not uncommon for someone on walkabout in Australia to meet with someone traveling the great North American plains, intent on her own visionquest.

Like the founders of our Tradition, we still meet in dreams more often than we meet in person. Through the medicine of our ancestors, we traverse the pathways between worlds, leaving signs for knowledgeable travelers to find. Such signs point to arranged meeting places where elders wait. At appointed times, those who understand the signs converge and confer, then go their ways and return to the waking world. These meetings, called *tarehes* or "appointments," are held in sacred circles guarded by our spirit allies and powerful medicines. We hold one large tarehe each midsummer unless some great trouble descends, and all who can attend do so. Many smaller meetings occur throughout the year; those who are welcome receive invitations — often riddles or visions — that only they can understand.

Meetings between individuals are easier to arrange. Those with the proper medicine walk the dreampaths to the doorways of the people they wish to meet. If they are friends, the caller asks for

an invitation, enters, and begins his talk. If they are not, he may batter his way into the other person's dreams and force his message upon her. This is not our preferred way, but it is sometimes necessary.

The Dreamcry is a powerful warning or message of distress. With it, a Dreamspeaker in trouble may summon anyone who hears it to his side. Most spirit walkers recognize the signs of the Dreamcry, and understand the ill fortune it bears; no Dreamspeaker worth his name will refuse or ignore such cries for help. He may never know when his own call might need an answer.

All of our kind bear their badge of honor into the Dreamworlds. Even if a person is invisible, he may be noticed unless he chooses to cloak himself and walk in mystery. Spirit walkers who conceal their presence are often suspect, and may carry bad news in their hearts, so we avoid their mistakes and walk open-handed through the Realms. Even so, there are times when stealth is necessary; like the hunter who fox-walks silently, a Dreamspeaker may need to travel without signs. This is skillful medicine, but many of us know how to do it.

Manners demand an introduction when we meet by chance; a spirit walker who refuses to name herself, or who uses a false name, is often suspected of sorcery and left alone. It is good to mention your ancestors and teachers when you meet a Dreamspeaker in the invisible world, or when you meet her anywhere, for that matter. It is important to show where you have come from, and to let others know who taught you. These things are sources of pride, and should be declared. By tradition, an elder man introduces himself before a young one, and a man before a woman, and an elder woman before a girl. These are old ways, but they serve us well and thus they remain. Respect is important, even between an elder and a youngster. We all share a kindred heart, and are all worthy of our own dignity.

Bad times demand a Nyimba, or "a Sing." Such gatherings call all Dreamspeakers together, either in a waking place or in the Dreamworld. No brother or sister of ours would willingly refuse to attend a Nyimba unless they had something to hide or could not reach the meeting place. We send word of a Sing across the worlds through the Dreamcry, sending visions of the meeting place and often of the matter to be discussed as well. Spirit allies carry the news as well, bringing it to remote deserts, Realms and hiding places. Because the Nyimba are so urgent, such meetings are called only in the most dire times. No Sings have been called for nearly 10 years, and we pray that none will be again.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF DREAMS

The people who man the barricades in science, religion and politics have one thing in common which they do not share with the rest of the citizenry: They are responsible for creating a technical language, incomprehensible to the rest of us, whereby we cede them our right and responsibility to think. They in turn formulate beautiful sets of lies that lull us to sleep and enable us to forget about our troubles, eventually depriving us of all rights.

— Vine Deloria, Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies*

Dreamspeakers carry messages back and forth between the invisible and material worlds. To do this, we learn to speak the language of the Iwa, a language that has remained unchanged since the first days. Human language imposes its reality upon the world





based on humanity's perceptions of how things *seem*, rather than how things are. Differences in vocabulary account for many ideological differences between people.

To call "god" the Creator conjures up an image different from those of the words *Father*, *Mother*, *Life-giver* or *Prime Mover*. Wars arise from such varied perceptions. The Technocracy has transformed the Creator into the Big Bang or the unified field theory. These names echo across the barriers of the worlds, but they carry nothing sacred within them. To truly understand the power of a name, imagine that the name you choose will force its nature upon the thing you address. If such power does not frighten you, you still have much to learn.

To give something a name changes that thing forever. Before the separation of the world within from the material realm, words were power, linking the soul and its house. The sacred stories of many peoples tell how, in the beginning, animals had no names. Then someone — either the first human or the lord of animals or a god — gave them names, and in the naming, they *became*.

To change a name changed the named. Such is the power of language transformation. Long ago, we traveled the worldpaths and sought out the true names of the Shining Ones, of our ancestors, of ourselves. We brought those names into the world and spoke them into being. And what we said became real.

When the spoken word became the written word, language stagnated, no longer holding the breath of the speaker within it. Only the language of dreams still retains its old power. Unlocking the secrets contained in our dreams forges another link between flesh and *Mawiya*, the life-force.

VISIONS

Interpreting dreams comprises an important part of our work. From the earliest times, visions have guided our actions, warned us of coming troubles, and taught us what we could never learn consciously. Listening to the voices or seeing the pictures that come to us from beyond the physical world involves awareness of the many meanings behind the symbols, and the true meaning, or *Odu*, hidden inside each *moe'uhane*.

Unlike dictionaries, which limit words to certain meanings, dream vocabularies differ from one culture to another and from dreamer to dreamer. While some symbols have universal meaning, others mean one thing to one person and something very different to another. Visions of ravens may portend disaster to one who sees those creatures as signs of misfortune. To someone else, who associates ravens with war, they may mean conflict or battle. To discover the truths cloaked in symbolic images, you must solve the riddles of the dream tongue.

ODU: THE TENTH SPHERE

The Yoruban word *Odu* stands for a sacred letter or rune usually hidden or encoded in myths, proverbs or dreams. It is meaning wrapped in language, a message from the Otherworld clothed in words. It is the *Logos*, the *ogham*, the breath of the gods, the essence or spirit of the thing itself. For us, this is the 10th Sphere — the Sacred Word.

Words unlock the secrets of the world, enabling us to understand the truth of a thing. The first users of magick were the first namers. They called a thing into being by name and there it was. The first Dreamspeakers spoke sacred words and made their visions "real."

INSIDE THE SOCIETY OF DREAMS



Let us dream the world anew!

— Dark Crow Laughing

THE 'UHANE (AVATAR) AND ITS ESSENCE

The Dreamspeakers believe everything has a Mawiya — a spark of life-force — inside. The medicine power of the *kha'vadi* flows from their connection with the spirit world. The Pure Ones, when they broke apart, did so in order to make certain that no part of creation was left without a Howahkan ("mysterious voice within," a soul portion). Every human has one of these soul-shards inside her, but most of the time, it lies dormant, waiting for the one whose body houses it to call it by name and bring it out of slumber. Dreamspeakers claim that a person Awakens when she discovers a particular 'Uthane and gives that spirit its name.

Most Traditions recognize that Avatars have tendencies, or Essences, that shape mages' goals and destinies. Although the shamans agree with the basic concept of the four "personalities" that Avatars possess, they prefer to call them by the following names instead:

- **Donoma (Pattern)** — 'Uthane of the Upper World, these great forces move the world (sky, sun, moon, wind, fire), creating the pattern of life. In their pure forms, they embody Mother Earth's grand design. Dreamspeakers whose 'Uthane are Donoma (literally "visible sun") see the webs of Grandmother Spider holding the world together.

- **Maska (Primordial)** — 'Uthane of the natural world, these beings inhabit trees, rocks, volcanoes, waterfalls, rivers and natural formations that hold the secrets of a time before time. They have a primal connection to the Earth Mother, for they are her flesh, bones and skin. Dreamspeakers with Maska 'Uthane tend to be strong, stubborn and formidable people; when such an Avatar Awakens, it sends the stirrings of the Earth through the dreamwalker's body, alerting her to coming earthquakes, eruptions and so forth.

- **Haidera (Dynamic)** — 'Uthane of animal spirits move about in the Otherworld as the arms and legs of the Great Mother. Shamans who feel these affinities within them become like animals themselves (in the best and worst ways), and learn to shapeshift. Such Avatars teach their mages about the sacred dances of growth and change.

- **Virena (Questing)** — 'Uthane of the spirits of ancestors, heroes or important leaders arouse in Dreamspeakers a sense of purpose and direction. Dreamspeakers with such Avatars often become vehicles for unfinished business from past lifetimes, or bring lost wisdom back to the modern world.

PROTOCOLS

Although they maintain close relationships with their tribes, allies and blood relations, most Dreamspeakers walk their Paths in solitude. Unity is an important tool for teaching and survival, but ultimately a medicine worker learns her best lessons alone.

That isn't to say the shamans are loners like their Ecstatic allies. As a whole, the Dreamspeakers are friendlier to each other than the



ruthless Hermetics or competitive Ether mages are known to be. Their society has endured great stresses since its inception, and its survival has been built on cooperation. The Society of Dreams, the name that Dreamspeakers call their Tradition, has various protocols that have changed very little since the Tradition's early days. While neither as formal as the grand Hermetic ranks or as informal as the Cultists' scattered paths, these protocols form an important link between Dreamspeakers of different ages, tribes and cultures.

• The Great Tarehe

The Dreamspeaker Tradition refers to itself as "the Society of the Great Dream" or "the Society of Dreams." Although its members do pretty much as they please throughout the year, the midsummer tarehe gathering decides which actions the Tradition will take as a whole. This meeting, a grand affair which lasts for six nights, takes place in a sacred spot in the Nevada desert where dream and Earth become one. Everyone is expected to attend unless some important force or event interferes with their arrival, and there will be questions for any Dreamspeaker who does not attend.

The heart of the great tarehe is the Grand Circle where major decisions for the coming year are debated and made. Everyone has a voice in the Grand Circle, but not everyone has an equal say. Kaimi and So'cha have the right to sit on the fringes of the Circle, but it is the elders who speak with the greatest authority. Anyone may address the gathering, though it is considered presumptuous for newly Awakened mysticks to do so. The Circle acts as a governing body for the Dreamspeakers and is (theoretically, at least) unswayed by the origins of its members. In practice, of course, Dreamspeakers of European descent are usually viewed with suspicion, and their words carry less weight than those of more "traditional" members.

Although the meeting occurs in the waking world, many elders attend in spirit form only, to ease the strains of travel and to prevent an all-out massacre. (The U.S. Cavalry attempted such an attack in 1863. It was the first and last time such a thing occurred, but the elders have been watching for another ambush ever since.) The decisions made in the Circle are conveyed by proxy to the Council of Nine as the words of the Dreamspeakers as a whole. The Hermetics have always been impressed with and envious of such solidarity, and wonder about its origins to this day. The spirit walkers, of course, say nothing about the meeting to outsiders. This Tradition is used to having enemies, and is not likely to offer its throat to one anytime soon.

• Family

Despite their reputation as solitary nomads, the majority of Dreamspeakers stay in one spot for most of their lives—physically, at least. Even so, many shamans travel long distances in the flesh and beyond it, seeking visions and working to bring the Great Dream to pass. Nevertheless, family, clan and tribe are extremely important to shamans and give them their identity. Tribal mysticks receive visions not only for themselves but as gifts for their communities. Their concerns revolve around the welfare and preservation of their people, traditions and lands, respect for the spirits and the healing of the Earth Mother. Solitary wanderings are part of the learning process, but the wanderer is expected to bring the wisdom he discovers back to his people and to use it for the good of all.

Most Dreamspeakers view their Tradition as an extended family. Many have lost their own native cultures, or have seen them assimilated into the modern world. They acknowledge that the best way to help their people regain what they have lost is to work within their communities, promoting responsibility and self-respect. Even so, a

shaman is a person apart in any mortal society; only another mystick can understand the Path he walks. Distant as they may seem to outsiders, the Dreamspeakers value each of their Awakened fellows as brothers and sisters. Most have no better tribe to call their own.

• Teaching

As in any family, children must be taught and protected. Shamans act as teachers or respected elders within their tribes, imparting stories of the tribes' origins and accomplishments to the young. They take newly Awakened Dreamspeakers under their wings and explain their traditions and duties. Such instruction is rarely straightforward; instead, it consists of stories, riddles and meditations designed to make students think for themselves. Those who are lazy or too self-serving (and therefore too fond of their own comfort) do not become shamans. If a student cannot or will not learn on his own, the teacher may ridicule or frighten her pupil into an Epiphany. If these tactics fail, the teacher refuses to waste any more time on one who will not learn. When and if the student matures, he may seek another teacher and try again.

Mentors are usually respected elders, in experience if not in years. A young but wise Dreamspeaker can and will teach an older initiate the ways of their kind. Even after the teaching is done, the two Dreamspeakers often remain friends. A student may well return to his mentor for advice, aid or healing, while the teacher might seek out the student for the same things in times of need. Although a mentor may guide her student through the early stages of Awakening, he must go out on his visionquest alone. The actions he takes, the signs he deciphers and the temptations he encounters are his to face, and his alone.

It is almost unheard-of for mentor and student to form love bonds. Their relationship resembles the bond between parent and child, and most mentors see sexual congress with their students as taking unfair advantage (this has been, and remains, a sore spot between the shamans and their Ecstatic allies, who often share sexual bonds between mentor and pupil). Mentors do expect services and payments for their teaching—a student who isn't willing to pay for his tutoring must not be seriously interested in his studies. The Art is not passed on lightly, and payment is only the first sacrifice along the way. Many shamans keep their students' personal property and return the items when the students take their first steps alone.

• Disputes and Dissension

Some mysticks still continue to hold old tribal rivalries, faction disputes or personal animosities against their fellow Dreamspeakers. Difficulties too large to be smoothed over with words or gifts are decided either by a Circle or by a duel. Either party, or both of them, may call a Circle of respected elders to act as judges and witnesses for the dispute. Each shaman gives a token gift to the judges, and each speaker attests to her truthfulness by smoking the sacred pipe. Traditionally, no one who intends to lie, or even exaggerate, may defile the pipe by touching her lips to it. Smoking places all parties under a sacred oath to tell the truth as they understand it. Since arguments are often a matter of differing opinions or simple misunderstandings rather than lies, such speaking from the heart is often enough to settle the issue. If not, the judges decide based on the evidence. Their decision is final, and has no appeal unless new evidence is brought before another Circle. Meanwhile, the participants must abide by the commands of the judges, whether in making restitution, accepting punishment or dropping the matter for good.

A mystick can always challenge an opponent to a *Reckoning*, or duel, which takes place at a site agreed upon by both combatants. The rules and victory conditions are likewise agreed upon. Witnesses for both sides attend to see that neither side cheats. In essence, *Reckonings* are elaborate forms of certamen. No physical harm to one's opponent is tolerated. Penalties for losing may include service to the winner for a certain period, surrendering a disputed item, or an end to some offensive behavior. The ancestors of Dreamspeakers who left the Council prefer personal *Reckonings* to Circle trials; few of them feel they can get a fair hearing from those who were left behind.

• Punishment

By and large, the Dreamspeakers are a Tradition based on honor and responsibility; even so, there are times when their members break taboos, harm those within their care, or fail to follow the ideals of the Society of Dreams. Such offenders are called before a Circle of elders who hear the case against the offender, listen to her explanations, and rule on what punishment, if any, should be exacted. Punishments include public ridicule, branding of the 'Uthane for a short time (or forever, if the offense warrants it), enforced servitude, ostracism, spiritquests, restitution and, in extreme cases, Gilgul and death. Dreamspeakers exact harsh penalties on those who transgress because their entire Tradition revolves around service to others and to creation.

NAMES OF POWER: RANKS AMONG THE DREAMSPEAKERS

Dreamspeakers do not recognize the usual Tradition titles (Apprentice, Master, etc.). Instead, they divide themselves according to more ancient grades of initiation. Initiation divides children from adults, allows full acceptance into the tribe, denotes membership in secret societies, and acknowledges the progression of wisdom. Though Dreamspeakers learn from teachers who may be other willworkers, spirits or even deities, they see themselves as equals in potential if not in learning.

• **Kaimi (Seeker)** — *Kaimi* (pronounced "ka-EE-mee") are what other Traditions would call Apprentices. The term "Apprentice" implies a servile relationship, which the *sowadé* do not recognize. Calling a new mage a seeker identifies her as someone willing to step outside normal bounds of consciousness to look for essential truths. *Kaimi* have usually had some sort of vision which encouraged them to take up the Path of the shaman. They may or may not have experienced the death journey.

• **So'cha (Initiate)** — Those who have undergone initiation to prove their courage, resourcefulness and willingness to die to continue their quests are known as *So'cha* ("show-ka"). *So'cha* are roughly equivalent in knowledge to other Traditions' Disciples. Once again, however, the more common term implies a power relationship the Dreamspeakers are unwilling to accept. *Kaimi* who have attained sufficient wisdom and skill undergo an initiation which earns them the "rank" of *So'cha*. This makes them one with their "tribe," and recognizes their ability to function as an equal, not as a follower of someone else.

• **Wemilo (Elder)** — *Wemilo* ("wehm-ee-YO") have attained some measurable mastery in magick. Their words carry greater

weight than do mere initiates', for they have experienced more than newcomers could imagine. They function as older siblings, teachers and counselors, helping *Kaimi* and *So'cha* learn all they need to know, but do not lord over the others as some accomplished mages have been known to do. They acknowledge that their wisdom has limits, and that, through teaching, they also learn. *Wemilo* have walked the dreampaths and spoken with spirits. Called Adept by the other Traditions, these elders are powerful enough to help shape the Great Dream of the future.

• **Nahimana (Wisdom Keeper)** — Regarded as lore masters, revered as treasures, *Nahimana* ("na-hee-MAUN-ah") know many secrets. Their vast knowledge is sought, their wise counsel valued. Wisdom keepers acknowledge many Iwa as their friends and helpers. Called "Masters" in other Traditions, these elders claim mastery over nothing but themselves. Repositories of ancient traditions, *Nahimana* actively create the Great Dream, bringing it into being as they speak words of renewal and change.

• **Aiyana (Spirit Guide)** — Some few transcend the boundaries of flesh to become *Aiyana* ("I-ee-YAW-na"). Known to some as Oracles, these mysticks guide the destinies of many. Such wise ones see beyond the artificial separations of spirit, flesh and mind. They live the Great Dream, often walking outside time and space.

FACTIONS AMONG THE DREAMSPEAKERS

The Society of Dreams, like any other group, has its factions, each of which speaks for a different vision. Some Dreamspeakers belong to several of these factions, while many avoid them altogether. When a shaman's Path demands a new or different approach, she is likely to leave her old society and either join another, create a new one, or choose to go off alone.

Entering a new society takes time, tests and sponsorship. The would-be member must track down an elder of that faction, petition her for admission, and fulfill a number of tests related to the society's purpose. An initiate into the Four Winds might have to complete a long quest in the Umbra, confer with spirits, and give up all her worldly goods. A future Red Spear would be given a "mop-up" assignment to test her resolve. Each society has its own secret code language (see "Knowledges" in *The Book of Shadows*) and oaths, which are taken quite seriously. Betrayal, among the Dreamspeakers, is never forgiven.

A few of the better-known factions include:

KEEPERS OF THE SACRED FIRE

Dreamspeakers who remain with their native cultures try to keep the old customs from irrevocable assimilation. The Keepers do not deny that changes have occurred, but work to prevent those changes from engulfing their people. Shamans, *kahunas* and tribal healers, the Keepers have banded together to form the Horizon Realm *Njia Panda*, where they have re-created their traditional lands. Tribal people in danger of extermination on Earth can find new lives in these Realms, if they so choose.

Because of their work in preserving their peoples' homelands, the Keepers are accorded much respect among the Dreamspeakers. Even so, their affiliation with the Council of Nine and their "colonial" aspirations bring them into conflict with outside Crafts like the *Bat'a* and *Kopa Loei* (see *The Book of Crafts*), who



regard their own groups as the saviors of their people. These tensions have created a few ugly disputes — which group really has the culture's best interests in mind? That question remains unanswered, and will probably stay that way.

SOLITARIES

These isolationist Dreamspeakers believe they must remove themselves from the modern world. Solitaries often remain in tribal homelands and on reservations, eschewing technology and science. These mystick fanatics believe they serve their people best by weaning them away from outside influences. Some go so far as to punish young people of their tribes for falling away from ancient traditions, and become angry figures on the fringes of the modern world.

The Solitaries, as their name suggests, are not a large faction, but their voices speak loudly indeed. Many Dreamspeakers consider the Solitaries the purest and most worthy of their kind. A number of the oldest shamans, who remember the ways before white domination, join this "society-of-many-but-none" and pass their memories on to younger heirs through tales and visions. Living museums, these ancient fringes carry the last mortal links to most Dreamspeakers' pasts. Cranky as they may be, the Solitaries are venerated as the treasures they are.

GHOST WHEEL SOCIETY

"The old ways are gone," say these urban Dreamspeakers, who seek new paths of meaning that encompass modern life. Speakers for the new spirits of technology, these urban medicine workers believe that the weapons of the Technocracy can be turned against their creators by convincing the techno-spirits to join the ranks of their Elder Brothers and Sisters. Ghost Wheel shamans often masquerade as Technocrats, infiltrate Constructs and wreak havoc, or stalk the urban undergrounds and bring their own version of housecleaning to crime-infested slums.

Despite their bravery, skill and cunning, members of the Ghost Wheel Society often find themselves overruled and shouted down in Circles by more traditional factions.

Their "white man's ways" are not appreciated by many elders, even if their brash tactics win victories. To more traditional Dreamspeakers, the Ghost Wheel Society is a gathering of young warriors headstrong enough to tweak their opponents' noses but not yet wise enough to govern themselves. Members of the Ghost Wheel retort that the current climate shows that the time of discretion is past. Desperate times demand drastic measures, and the Ghost Wheel Society epitomizes drastic solutions.

RED SPEARS

Outspoken activists, these angry taun-ki seek revenge for the wrongs against their people. Many join with activist movements to lobby aggressively for the return of stolen lands, and practice eco-terrorism and "urban reform" — often at gunpoint. The shamans who left Horizon founded the Red Spears, and many of their descendants continue their vigorous legacy. Though they remain united with the Dreamspeakers as a whole, they want nothing to do with Council politics and care little for the other Traditions' views or members.



The Red Spears are enraged, often rightly so. They see themselves as warriors and chiefs, fighting for their rights with words, weapons and potent medicine. Many Red Spears harbor grave suspicions about the other factions, and regard them as ineffectual cowards and dreamers who have slept through the call to war.

FOUR WINDS

These sowadé spend most of their time in the Otherworld. Although they are born of flesh, they consider themselves more spirit than human. Wandering the spirit world naked of worldly goods, they bargain with Iwa and mortals alike, trading secrets for secrets. The medicine they learn this way is quite powerful; many of those who know them consider them only remotely human.

Some say the Four Winds spend too much time among the spirits. Their behavior is eccentric even by shamanic standards, and their passions match the mercurial ways of the Iwa. Those who venture into polluted lands seethe with inhuman rages, while those who dwell in glens become uncommonly calm. Most Four Winds find spiritual landscapes that suit them and attune themselves to those places, becoming, in effect, spirit guardians of those locations. Over time, most Four Winds forget their mortal lives and literally *do* become spirits. Many traditional guardians and ancestral friends are Four Winds reborn as Iwa — new spirits to refresh the old.

BARUTI

Mythmakers and teachers, the Baruti realize that many people have forgotten the old stories that once explained the world before scientific theories replaced them. Originating from the traditional African storyteller and spreading out to encompass those from other backgrounds, these Dreamspeakers wander throughout the world, collecting and disseminating the myths and legends of their own and others' cultures. Many act as lorekeepers for the Tradition, attending meetings of the Society of Dreams and memorizing (in archetypal form) the issues and decisions discussed there.

Healers of the collective unconscious, the Baruti remind both Sleepers and Awakened that all people are descended from heroes and are children of the natural forces. They are renowned scholars, tale-weavers, performers and promoters of intercultural harmony. As such, their words carry much weight.

CONTRARIES

More a way of life than a secret society, these hada dress in clothes of the opposite sex, walk backward, speak the exact opposite of their intentions, and live their lives in reverse. By doing this, they hope to accomplish several purposes. First, Contraries challenge peoples' expectations by acting in reverse. Those who would puzzle out Contraries' intentions must think beyond what they see and hear. Second, these sacred clowns bring laughter and happiness, knowing that people are stronger when united in good feelings. While comical, their actions are quite serious. In effect, the difficulties Contraries labor under are sacrifices for their people. Many Dreamspeakers admire the Contraries, honoring their dedication. Fully as many others see them as misguided lunatics who could better spend their time fighting more directly for Mother Earth. Listening to Contraries in the Circle becomes an exercise in patience. Those who would understand them must unravel what these reversed brethren *mean* from what they actually say.

RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

The celebration of the natural cycles, the giving of thanks and the petitioning of the Iwa for assistance comprise an important part of our lives, particularly where we remain connected to our cultures. Rituals create a link between the literal world and the symbolic one, the world of matter and the world of spirit, allowing us to communicate our desires in a language spirits understand.

Initiations serve as markers that separate one part of our lives from another. Birth is the most challenging initiation, second only to death, but between birth and death we undergo many changes. Puberty rites, weddings or other formal declarations of life partnerships, adoptions and passage into progressive stages of knowledge exist in most of our cultures, although many modern societies fail to realize their spiritual significance. For Dreamspeakers, Awakening is our greatest initiation, allowing us entry into the Great Dream. We see initiations as opportunities to change our names, even as we change the people we have been into things that are newer and finer.

We celebrate the ceremonies of our native traditions, such as the Ghost Dance and the Sun Dance among Native Americans, Kwanzaa among African-Americans, and the harvest festivals found in almost every culture. By reenacting the ancient traditions, we remember our connection to the Otherworld and reaffirm our place in the cultures of our tribes and families.

...

The spiders finished binding Michael's mouth, stopping his cries with silvered webbing. Tiny bodies danced across his face as the little ones spun their strands in his hair and crept across his eyelids. The elder gazed at him in disappointment. "Is this the best you can do?"

Michael strained against his bonds, trying to answer or get loose, but they remained as solid as steel cables. His eyes, bright with panic, darted around the cavern from the elder to the spiders to the walls to the hungry things waiting patiently for their meal to be prepared. What can I do?

The old woman sighed. "All right, I'll give you a hint, but you'll owe me for it: What are you?"

A Dreamspeaker.

"Half right. You're not one of us yet, though you might live to become one. Now again, what are you?"

A steelworker. An iron-dancer.

She closed her eyes. "No."

A Mchawk, a Native American. Jesus, I don't know!!

"Remember your dance upon the steel. Remember how you got here, and where you are. Now, for the last time," she said as the glowing spiders wove strands across Michael's vision, "what are you?"

He squeezed his eyes shut, fought for memories. Suddenly he relaxed as the answer came to him.

I am the Skyhawk, and I'm in the land of dreams.

Michael's body shrank and gathered, growing wings and talons in place of arms and legs. The webbing slackened and fell away as the reborn Skyhawk slipped easily through the strands, scattering the spiders across the floor. Their hungry brethren stabbed at the air with their mandibles and sharp legs, but the Skyhawk taunted them just out of reach.

I am the Skyhawk, and no dream can hold me. Not even the dream of the world itself.

The old woman smiled. "Now you just keep remembering that, and you might survive."

THE GREAT BATTLE

As Dreamspeakers, our greatest task is to bring about a future that redresses the wrongs done to our kin in this world and the other. Through the centuries, we have tried to teach right thinking. Our words have fallen like stones from the air, and we will waste no more breath. Now begins the great battle, for we are more than healers and teachers. We are warriors, too, and our weapons are many. If this dream will not accept our wisdom, we will dream forth another.

We have spoken. Now the time has come to act.





BEYOND THE DREAM

(EXTERNAL RELATIONS)

*As a child I understood how to give. I have forgotten this grace since
I have become civilized.*

— Chief Luther Standing Bear



On giddy newborn wings, Michael Skyhawk burst from the cavern and bolted into the sky. His exultant cry cracked across the steelways as he flung them behind him with a rapid flurry of his wings. Height was exhilaration, not a threat, and he climbed straight upward until the skeletons of steel seemed like stitches on a slowly healing wound.

The night sky stretched ablaze with luminous clouds and icy stars. Not since his days on the reservation had the sky seemed so expansive, and he dove headfirst into it like a cliffdiver into the sea.

If this is a dream, I don't want to wake up. I want to fly like this for eternity.

"If you're not careful," snapped his mentor's voice, "that's exactly what you'll do. But it won't be pleasant."

Michael wheeled. His surprised cry became the raptor's shriek. He searched for the source of the voice. Only distant clouds and stars shared the sky with him.

"Freedom is all well and good, and you should cherish it like warm fire. But don't forget the shadows on that fire's edge, little one, or you'll be drawn into them in time, and become like them. Nothing but a shadow, cold, dark and empty, hiding from the light."

"There are all too many shadows in our world, Michael Skyhawk, and this, too, you must learn. Our Path is old and wide, but as the bones of our ancestors show, we do not walk it alone. Someone put you on that reservation, boy, and their breath is still upon this world in ways you can't even imagine."

Looking down across the land, Michael saw a wash of glowing fog wrapped like tendrils around the steel mountains he had built. With the razor-sight of his new hawk form, he spotted figures in the mist. Some danced like maniacs, others brooded in contemplation. Some seemed like people, others like ghosts, and still others like animate darkness.

People. Lots of people.

"Not just people," the old woman warned. "Some are lots more than mere people...."

THE BREATHING NIGHT



Ho! Ho!

Ho! Ho!

All the waters are mine:

All the waters are mine:

Go away!

Go away!

Or I'll kill you!

— "Glooscap Fights the Water Monster"
(Micmac Indian Tale)

Dreamspeakers are both solitary and sociable. We walk the Umbral paths alone, searching out spirit teachers, totem beings and places to work our medicine. We meditate alone, lost in our visions and open to the life-pulse of the Earth. Each of us follows a separate call, and undergoes a change through a single, lonely trial by fire and initiation.

At the same time, we live within the greater arena of our families and tribes, and from there, we greet the world at large. Meeting one another beyond the flesh, we recognize our kinship and embrace our wise brothers and clever sisters. The Iwa acknowledge us as allies, and the totems pass on their guarded knowledge. For these reasons, we are never truly alone, but walk surrounded by kin both in the visible and invisible worlds.

Reaching outward as our lives' circles encompass others, we see that we are alone among many. Our fellows within the Tradi-

tions' Council accord us a place among them, though few understand who we are. Other allies, such as those of the Changing Breeds, bond with us, even while our enemies unite against us. Together, we shake the roots of the world, and the Sleepers hear our footsteps as they slumber.

WITCHES

We members of the Society of Dreams do not practice magick; we follow the Medicine Path, and if others choose to call it "magick," that is their concern. We make a distinction between ourselves and the sorcerers around us, and that is this: *Medicine* is a tool for healing and helping — a weapon when necessary, but most often an extension of one-who-dreams, of a man or woman who sacrifices an old life to follow the ways of God and the Earth. A witch or sorcerer seeks to bend the world to his or her will through magick. The two are not the same. Although we share similar tools at times, our vision is a purer one. Nevertheless, we share this world with witch-priests and science-sorcerers, and we must take them into account.

CRAFTS, ORPHANS AND SOLITARIES

Many shamans follow the old Paths so deeply that they refuse to recognize our own. We let them go their way so long as they do not hinder us in ours. Many of our brothers and sisters turned away from the Council, and we respect their decision. So badly have they





been beaten that they regard everyone as a threat to them now. Some, like the island folk called Kopa Loei and Bata'a, call us trespassers on our native lands. Sometimes we fight, but as a rule, we stay to our own roads. Others, like Hollow Ones or other, more mysterious figures, make trouble in the shadows. If we must respond, we do — with friendship if possible, in anger if need be.

OTHER TRADITIONS

Our companions are more predictable. Though we walk beside them, we recall that long ago, the sorcerers who formed the Council forced us all together out of ignorance and fear. Some have learned better ways in the centuries since, but many still hold to those first opinions. The darkness of our skins is like a barrier between us, and they all too quickly dismiss what we have to say. While we urge them to grow wiser, we no longer blindly believe that all our brethren are truly our friends.

The Verbena, Cultists of Ecstasy and Euthanatos are our usual allies. Though we differ in our approaches, we four keep the oldest traditions alive, and are the groups most deserving of that term. Our four ways accept the cycles of life, and while we may not trust some witches' motivations, their understandings are sound. We revere life like the Verbena, understand death like the Euthanatos, and broaden our senses to get a better view like the Cultists of Ecstasy. It is a pity that so many of these sorcerers seek power for themselves or wander in their own delusions; not a one of them does not bear some watching.

Still, they make strong allies and worthy friends, unlike the smug wizards of the Order and the Chorus, who would bind us to

their ways, or the spider-mages of the laptop and laboratory. While Hermetics understand the power of words, they fail to comprehend their true importance; the priest-kings of the Celestial order possess spiritual insight, but let it blind them to the light of other, older ways. As for the clever monkeys and their gadgets, the best I can say is that they understand their tools well but rely on them overmuch.

Unlikely allies, all. Still, many among us were once enemies also, and we joined together to pursue a common purpose. It is often said that one cannot choose his family, and the Council is our family. Someday, we may have to fight them, or at least challenge their fallacies; until then, we walk beside them and try to change their hearts. This world has seen enough bloodshed, and an uneasy cousin is better than an angry stranger.

THE TECHNOCRACY

*awoke this morning
to find my people's tongues were tied
and in my dreams
they were given books to poison their minds*

— Dead Can Dance, "Song of the Dispossessed"

The cleverest monkeys of all have captured reality and placed it in a museum where it dances to their tune. While some of their tricks have created good things, like strong homes and decent sewage, the wizard-scientists won't be content unless the world lies beneath their blanket. We hold these enemies of life and the spirit world accountable for destroying our families, tribes and customs. While we despise the agents of the New World Order for eradicat-

ing our cultural identities, revile mad explorers for mapping away our sacred places, and condemn machine-witches for perverting their own spirits, we save our greatest hatred for the Progenitors and the Syndicate.

Since the 1800s, the Society of the Twisted Serpents has sterilized our people, dashed them with diseases while withholding the cures, and tested new drugs in Africa and Asia. Their malice is exceeded only by the boardroom bastards who herd our people into cities, stuff them down mine shafts, sweep them with vice, and then mortgage their souls. Our people have given up their families, pride and heritage to work for drug cartels, world banks and trinkets. Our children run with guns in their hands, sell themselves as prostitutes, and die every day in diamond and uranium mines which hollow out the spirit of the world and stamp it into currency. We do not like these "shapers of a new tomorrow," and we hamstring them at every chance. Their wizardry confounds our ways, but new warriors among us have cultivated the spirits of plastic, steel and electric pulse. Soon, we will speak their language, too, and the plastic cards and disks that shore up this hollow magick will be more useless than dust. Then we shall enact our revenge.

MARAUDERS

We cannot fully condemn the Mad, for we know the ways of the crazed prophet. The Iwa touch the minds of the mad folk, and few of us would raise our hands against such god-inspired individuals. They see dreams as the only world, and that makes them a threat to us and ours, but most of them need counsel, not destruction. Their real mistake is that they try to speak the dream tongue as if it needed no translation. For this, they should be pitied, observed and interpreted, not slain.

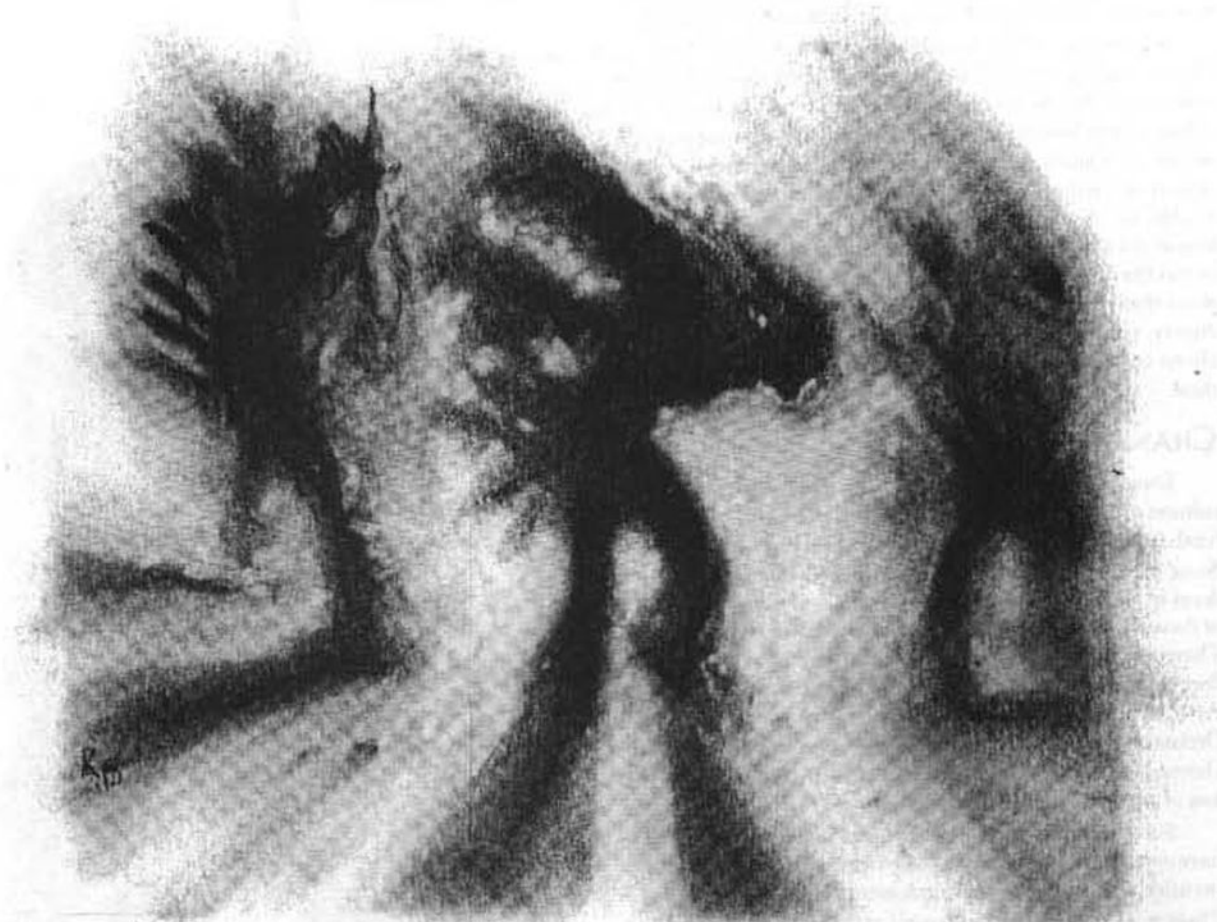
THE LOST ONES

Some beings, who seek the inner darkness, *should* be slain. The Nephardi, who give themselves utterly to the Path of Nightmares, revel in speaking words of destruction and unmaking to please their Infernal masters and gain power for themselves. Other monsters, vampires, deny the cycle of life and death, prolonging their existence at the expense of others and refusing to take their turn upon the Dreamwheel. Our allies among the Changing Breeds speak of fomori, who enter into unholy unions with spirits of corruption and destruction. Like our allies, we see such constructs as abominations which must be cleansed if the Earth is to be healed. Once, there was a place for such creatures; they have outgrown their role in the Great Dream these days, and like thorns, they must be cut down and cleared away.

CHANGING BREEDS

Shapeshifters, spirit crossbreeds born from the words of Grandmother and Grandfather, are the clearers of those thorns and the keepers of the Earth. The best of them wage an eternal battle against the Great Destroyer, which they call the Wym. Their gifts allow them to step physically into the spirit world, while their anger grants them mighty powers. Part animal, part human and part spirit, the Changing Breeds embody the ties we all once had, but have lost. In the old days, they were our teachers, our tricksters and our companions in battle. Now the Changing Breeds, like us, dwindle in number, but where we grow stronger, they weaken and die. It is our duty to help our near-kin when we can, and to continue their battle when they, like so many other legendary creatures, are





gone. Hear now the names of the changing ones, and know what they have given us:

- **Bastet** — From the great cats, we learned silence, stealth and swiftness. Pumonca the Cougar and Qualmi the Lynx still watch over us from their hidden places in the American wilderness. Balam the Jaguar protects the rainforest of the Amazon; her shrieks of rage echo like war cries in the spirit world. Bagheera the Panther, Simba the Lion and Swara the Cheetah guard the secret places of Africa. Khan the Great Tiger watches the forests of India and the mountains of Asia for the corrupter spirits and rends them to bits with his righteous claws. Long ago, we beheld the beauty of the cat-folk, learned their names, and passed their lessons to our children. We still do when we can.

- **Corax** — Raven holds an important place in the stories of our people. His children, the shapeshifting ravens, herald change (sometimes unwelcome, such as war and death) and fortune. Their shining eyes see secrets, no matter how well they are concealed. They have taught us to look for hidden things and to search the skies for signs of change. We do.

- **Garou** — Wolves have always carried messages between the worlds, and the Garou today bear a message that cannot be ignored. Mother Earth and Father Sky are joined in battle against those who would corrupt them. The werewolves who call themselves Uktena, Silent Striders and Wendigo have much knowledge to share with

us, and our warriors often join them against those who would destroy our common dream.

- **Gurahl** — The werebears were once our close kin. Bear is a mighty totem, and those children of hers who still walk the Earth are said to be masters of life and death. Now, all too many of them are gone, victims of werewolf rage and human depredations. Their doom is an ironic thing; of all the shapechangers, none loved humans so much as these giants of the Earth Mother. Their healing ways and fierce protective natures gave us examples to follow. Some of us seek them out in their hidden Realms and secret lairs, hoping to convince the few that are left to return to an Earth that needs them. If they will not come, we still owe them our thanks for what they have already done.

- **Mokolé** — Once in a great while, we encounter a dream so ancient it makes our elders seem like babes. We call these the memories of *Mokolé Mbembe*, the Great Dragon Kings who recall the First Days in detail. Once in an even greater while, a Dreamspeaker meets one of these venerable beasts. Let me tell you, it is not a meeting easily forgotten.

Imagine a tree, ancient and mossy. Imagine it with teeth, and eyes, and legs that carry it with slow determination. Give it a hunger for living flesh and a memory of the primal world, and this is a *Mokolé Mbembe*. In the deepest swamps and forests, they

dream their ageless dreams. Step lightly if you should ever chance to meet one. The Dragon Kings do not understand forgiveness.

• **Nuwisha** — The shapechanging children of the Trickster, Coyote, share the realm of dreams with us. Their playful, mischievous natures disguise the greatness in their hearts. Our legends tell of how Coyote braved the wrath of his brothers and sisters to teach secrets to humans, and his children still dare much in their protection of the Otherworld. Their boldness leads them into trouble, but their cleverness shows them the way out. It is easy to admire the children of Coyote from a distance; if you should meet one in the flesh, take care. Their pranks are much funnier to hear about than to endure, and the lessons they teach may cost you your dignity, possessions or even your life if you are not careful. It is always best to laugh with Nuwisha; a serious face is a challenge to them.

CHANGELINGS

Long ago, the invisible folk — called faeries in other cultures — lived among us as kin. When the world became too harsh for them, they retreated to areas where none could follow. Some tried to return to their ancient homeland, and found the doors to it had closed tight. Many humans who valued the beauty of these dream people offered their bodies as hosts to the survivors. These mortal hosts might have Awakened as we have, if not for their decision to link their bodies with the spirits of raw dreaming. As it is, they have Awakened in their own way, and share a Dreaming that even we find alien. We cannot condemn their choice, but we mourn both the passing of the invisible ones and the loss of our cousins to the "changeling way."

Some say there are those among our families and tribes who have opened themselves as messengers for the spirits of earthbound invisible folk, and they too underwent the "changeling way." Those who did are called the Nunnehi; they are the little people, the water babies, the rock giants and the cloud walkers our stories spoke of and our ancestors revered. They have preserved our dances, our songs and the oldest ways, and they have sustained the human tribes, even after their own tribes have vanished. They are dreams clothed in our flesh; treat them with respect.

• • •

Now Michael flew through the city, winging between the steel-boned structures, and peering in the windows and down the alleys at the living shapes within. Avoiding the grasping spiders along the webbing, he flexed his wings on currents of dream-air. He scanned the chilly blue streets, and was amazed at the colors of the night.

Are you still here, Grandmother? His mind-voice had acquired a formal, more respectful tone.

Only silence.

Silence and the voices of the street, the webbing and the wind.

THE IWA AND THEIR KIND

All objects and all creatures are alive. This is the first principle of Spirit medicine. Early people knew this, and lived with the knowledge that invisible beings of all kinds surrounded them. They learned to ask guardians of lakes for help when fishing, and to thank the spirits of fish for allowing themselves to be caught. In that way, everyone shared a part of Dreamspeaker medicine. Iwa could also





become angry, and in the distant past, people knew how to appease their anger through sacrifices and ceremonies.

Modern people have forgotten this rule. To them, animals and plants are virtually mindless and inanimate objects are just that — lifeless. Modern people no longer understand that the spirits of their ancestors remain close by; instead, they relegate them to a plot of ground or to some distant paradise or hell. Because the modern world denies the existence of the Invisible Ones, it has become deaf to the lessons those beings can teach. Spirits are the breath of life. We Dreamspeakers come to them to learn how to bring that life-giving breath back to a dying universe.

We remember our Invisible Brethren and know their names. Our prayers address them on behalf of those who have forgotten. Helping our people to understand and accept these Dreams-Made-Real is one of our greatest concerns. But not all spirits among the Et are the same. In order to speak to Those-Who-Are-Timeless, you must first understand who and what it is you are addressing.

As shamans, we are gifted with the knowledge of how to speak with our Friends Within. Our knowledge teaches us respect, helps us to know how to please the spirits, and shows us what we can ask from them in return. We serve creation, and through that, serve our spirit-kin. Because we do not treat them as entities to be commanded, the spirits are our friends and allies. Even those who do not care to deal with mankind rarely harm us, for they know they can express their dislike and we will leave. Our way is not the way of command, but of bargaining and persuasion.

NAMING THE SPIRITS

Hear now the many forms the spirits take. Understand their function, and respect their place in creation. Even the corrupters have a role in the Great Dream — they have simply overstepped their part. Know and understand that each type has a thousand differences within itself, and that each spirit has its own wishes and needs. Treat the spirits as if they were human beings. Our world is more populated than you can imagine.

• **Nature Spirits** — These spirits live inside natural objects and forces, and include the spirits of the sky, such as sun, moon, wind and thunder, as well as spirits of the earth such as rocks, mountains and rivers. Sky spirits such as Tirawa, who dwells in the heights of the heavens, and Orungan, the Yoruban sky deity, oversee the movement of weather patterns and the paths of the stars. Earth spirits, including Oya the Dark Harvest Goddess and the volcano spirit Pele, walk closely near the paths of humans. Nature spirits appear as bolts of lightning, clouds, watery beings or other fitting shapes, although some take on comely human forms when it suits them. Their temperaments fit their elemental functions; fire spirits are aggressive and passionate, water ones flow smoothly but strong, air spirits whisper and shift, and earth spirits speak slowly and plainly. Remember: The crackle of electrons and the dance of light waves have their spirits, too. If you understand their ways, they make useful helpers in the modern world.

• **Animal and Plant Spirits** — These spirits live within individual creatures and plants, and enjoy an even closer relationship with humankind. The Corn Maidens of Pueblo culture and the littler siblings of the great totem

spirits such as Raven, Hare and Otter seek opportunities to travel back and forth across the Barrier. Sorcerers call such animal companions "familiars," but we know them for what they really are — trusted friends and allies. Few Dreamspeakers go without such help. Our Path is lonely, and our burdens grow heavy without aid.

• **Human Spirits** — Most people's spirits remain close to the living world after their bodies die. Some do so to guide and protect their loved ones. These are ancestor spirits — the remembered dead. Others seek an opportunities to re-enter the world of the living through the bodies of infants born from their blood. The spirits of great leaders and heroes, such as Harriet Tubman, Crazy Horse and Martin Luther King, Jr. stay close so long as the living honor their inspiration. Some of these spirits appear in dreams as messengers or teachers, glowing with an inner light. Still other spirits remain as angry ghosts, calling out for revenge or seeking it themselves. Their pain poisons the world, but their vengeance may be just. Sometimes we avenge them, or find them new bodies for a second chance at life. Sometimes we send them away into Oblivion, the fearful darkness beneath the surface of the world where angry spirits punish themselves. Let the spirit make her case, then decide what to do. Just beware — the spirits of the dead often lie. Very, very often, they lie.

• **Time Spirits** — Some occurrences shake the world so strongly that their memories breed zeitzeists, the spirits of an age. Rising from human emotions, such spirits embody an era not perhaps the way it was, but the way we prefer to remember it. Even we Dreamspeakers admit that time spirits puzzle us. They appear to change form and personality according to our mood, and act in predictably eccentric ways. Not many time spirits appear to exist, but it is hard to tell where one ends and another begins. Such spirits wear many hats, and speak in many voices.

• **Totem Spirits** — These powerful spirit creatures take the form of particular animals, plants or natural things, but are much more than that. They are guiding spirits. Bear spirits take their forms and natures from Bear herself, while all wolves follow the lead of Wolf. Totem spirits offer protection, wisdom and companionship to those who know how to approach them. The Changing Breeds have a special bond with these beings, drawing inspiration from them and actively soliciting their aid and protection. Some of us share that bond and enjoy their patronage as well.

• **Paradox Spirits** — Reality has its own dream. Paradox spirits are its nightmares. When we disturb the sleep of the world, reality waves its hand to make us go away. Paradox spirits are the fingers, thumb and fist of that hand. They can and will crush us if you make too much noise or awaken the world too suddenly. Once you understand this, you can turn them against your enemies. So long as it is not *your* hand which darkens reality's nap, you can guide a Paradox spirit to wave away a witch instead.

A pity they aren't waved away often enough.

• **Dream Spirits** — All spirits are part of the Great Dream, of course, but some have a stronger connection to that Dream than others. The fae hosts call them "chimera," spirits created by imagination. We call them Muses, Night Terrors and other names. To those who only brush against them in dreams, these spirits are potent but not deadly. To those of us who venture into the dream world in bodies, they are as real as we. Treat with these imagination spirits as if they were madmen. Learn their wisdom, then leave.



• **Weaver, Wyrn and Wyld Spirits** — The First Dreams of Grandfather and Grandmother, these three entities crafted Mother Earth and Father Sky and spread their children across creation. Weaver is the potter, Wyrn is the clay, and Wylde is the fire that bakes the pot and breaks it. From the pieces, new clay arises. At least, this is how it should be, how it once was. Now the fire has crept across the earth, burning it away and leaving only ash. The potter has gone mad, and the clay refuses to take shape. In a rage, the potter flings the clay into the oven, and we all burn. Each of these grand spirits has its own brood, and each member of its brood has thousands of young. In the spirit world, you will see them — Pattern Spiders, Vortices, Banes and many more. Beware their touch, for they are all insane. In time, the potter, clay and fire will calm themselves or so we hope. If not, their rage and fire will consume us all.

• **Epiphings** — These mysterious spirits embody abstract ideas, myths, philosophical concepts and emotions. Many lack true individuality, but others have distinct personalities and unmistakable appearances. Our Council cousins call them "Umbrood"; to us, they are simply one type of spirit among many. Some are quite powerful, and build Realms of pure concept in the far spirit worlds; others simply float like balls of string, toying with our expectations and puzzling us with raw ideas.

• • •

The Skyhawk disappeared. Michael was Michael once more, and he was falling.

Slowly.

But falling.

He flapped his arms, but they refused to feather. His legs pumped without talons. He opened his mouth, and a human voice cried out.

"Oh, shiiiiitt!!!"

"Oh, hush," the old woman replied, her voice by Michael's ear. "Where are you?"

"A dream," he recalled sheepishly, as he floated down and finally landed in a clearing. "You've got to admit, though, it looked like that was going to hurt."

"Get used to pain, Michael Skyhawk," she returned. The steelworker looked around the clearing, but the old woman's voice came from nowhere and everywhere. "We all live in a lifetime going from hurt to hurt. If we're lucky, some pleasures come along to make the pain worthwhile. Or we at least get to choose what will hurt, and how much."

"And what's my choice?"

"You tell me." At one end of the clearing, the same cave he had been in earlier awaited, bright with spiders and deep with doubts. At the other, a scuffed deertrack promised a quick escape from the woods and the cavern. The mountains of webbed steel were gone, as were the shapes and shadows. This choice was his, and he was alone.

"I'm gonna regret this," he muttered as he strode toward the cavern, but the complaint came from the throat, not the heart. No, I'm not going to regret this. I won't let myself regret it. After all, how many people get this chance?

"Not many," whispered a voice as he entered the cavern and the shadows wrapped around him. "Not many ever do...."

SLEEPERS

I peeped the agenda

America

Surrender

Make it easy on yourself

Bow, to the wind of change

Change, with the changing wind

comin' in

like a prophecy

promise

a new reality

Giveitupgiveitupgiveitup!

— dadahdoodahda, "Son Talkin'"

The Council of Nine refers to mortals whose Avatars still slumber as "Sleepers," but we prefer to call them *sleepwalkers*. Only those who are truly Awake can truly sleep, and thus pass into the world of dreams. Although many of our people understand the old ways, only a lucky few ever experience the gift of true medicine. This gift is not free — we pay for it all our lives — but it is precious. Without it, the people of the world are blind.

Many of our kind understand the curse of that blindness. In ghettos, towns and reservations, our people drown themselves in anguish and disease. The blindness of greed plows the rich soil under and turns up worms for our children to eat. Many of us have had our fill of this banquet. Our mission in this sickly world is to dig in the dirt with our hands and our spirits, to retrieve the rich soil, plant in it, and bring forth a harvest of hope. If the rich blind men will not let us near the land, we will shove their plows down their throats. Our way is not one of violence — hate breeds hate, and we have seen the spirits of hate themselves — but if we have no other choice, we will take the warrior's way and hope for the best. Better, though, that we should offer the soil of the new dream to all who slumber, white and black, Indian and Oriental, woman and man, and that our gift should sweep the blindness from their eyes. The sleepwalkers are our brothers and sisters, too, and as long as we keep dreaming, keep talking and keep working together, the Greatest Dream of all ages may yet begin.

We have all spoken.

• • •

The old woman patted Michael's knee and chuckled. "My story's done, for the time being. It's time for you to go back and see what has become of you." The ancient Dreamspeaker rose to her feet and gestured for Michael to do the same.

Michael stood up and stretched, feeling the ripple of his sleep-stiff muscles. The clearing stood as he had left it, long before the cave and the walk and the flight. "What happened?" His tone was puzzled, confused, irritated yet curious. "I stepped off a building into thin air to get here, and I left here a long time ago. Where's the cave? Where's the building? Did I fall in that world? Or did I dream this whole thing?"

A chorus of laughs greeted the young Mohawk's question.

"Of course you dreamed it," the old woman replied. "That's what Dreamspeakers do! Where you end up when you leave us depends on how well you've learned to dream."

"Right." The word held resignation, befuddlement and humor. "I almost understood that."

"We'll soon find out," the mentor concluded. "I hope, for your sake, that you were listening."





SPEAKERS OF THE SACRED TONGUE (CHARACTERS)

A log thrown into the water does not become a crocodile.
— African proverb



...and Dreamspeakers thrown into the modern world do not become Virtual Adepts. Many outsiders question the shamans' place in the world today, calling their ways primitive and their magick obsolete. These denigrators have little understanding of the resiliency and eternal nature of spirit, or much knowledge of what Dreamspeakers are all about. Call them throwbacks if you will, but

these spirit workers adapt to the world around them. A very practical Tradition at heart, they do what works.

Dreamspeakers understand only too well where mankind has gone wrong. Though they stand apart as dreamers, they also live in the world and touch upon all the concerns of modern life. The following character templates present a few examples of how Dreamspeakers both fit the stereotypes and defy all attempts to pigeonhole them.

INNER-CITY SPIRIT DOCTOR

You will not be able to stay home, brother. You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out. You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip out for beer during commercials, because the Revolution will not be televised.

— Gil Scott-Heron, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"

Quote: *Don't tell me you're alienated. The world is what's alienated, and I have to bring it back.*

Prelude: Your roots lead back to Haiti and Africa. A child of the children of slaves, you sought freedom by becoming a mambo (priestess) of the Voudoun tradition. You dreamed of shaping a new world, and opened yourself to the spirits, letting them ride you. Your body became their "horse," your voice their voice. Now, the Iwa help you diagnose physical and emotional illness, and tell you how to help your neighbors, too. Voudoun minimizes life's pain, strengthens those who must carry on, and takes vengeance when necessary. It is the only faith for you, and you follow it well.

Now, all are angry. Those-who-have will never willingly surrender their positions and power. They laugh at the spirits while they plunder what's left of the Earth. The wrathful spirits themselves need healing. Neither the people nor the spirits will be denied any longer. One way or the other, the new world will come.

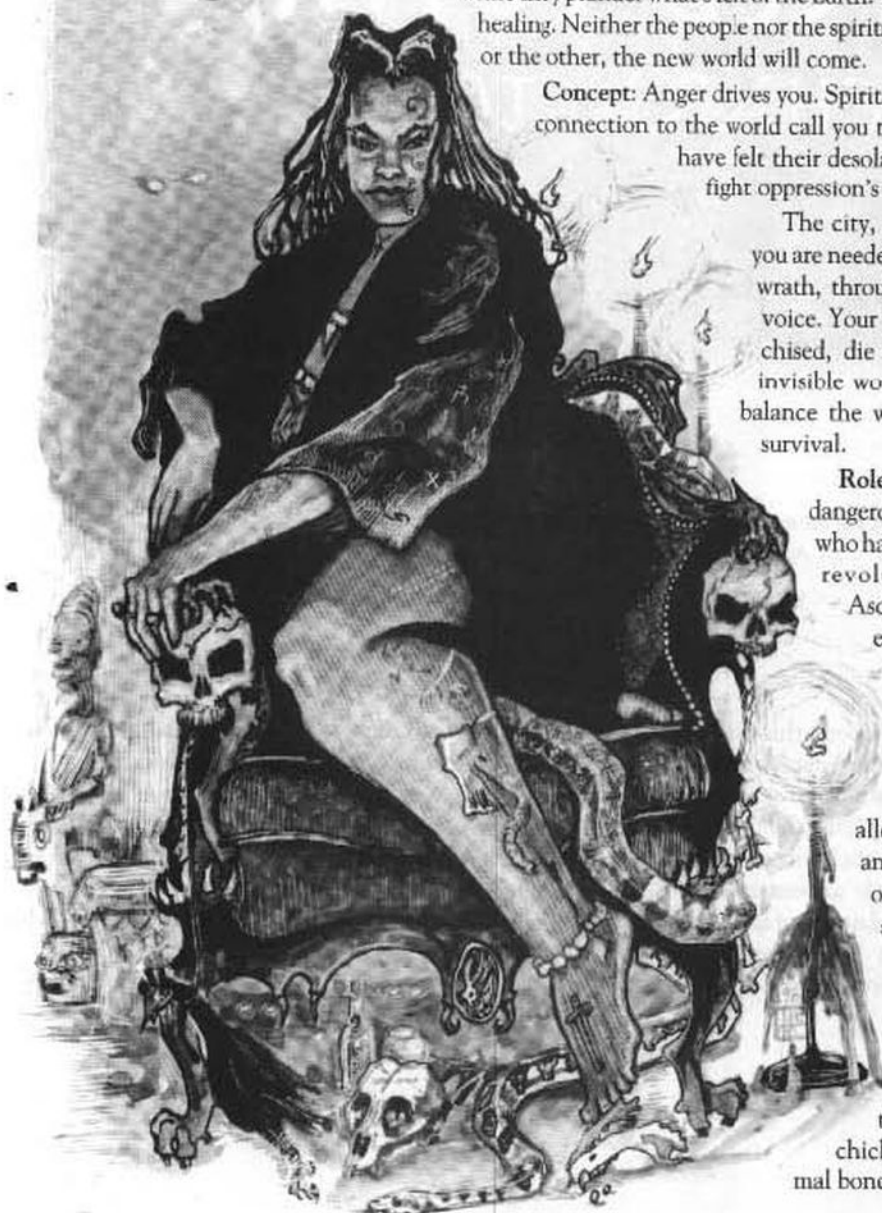
Concept: Anger drives you. Spirits wrenched away from their rightful connection to the world call you their voice. In the Otherworld, you have felt their desolation. A healer by nature, you now fight oppression's disease to wipe it out.

The city, where spirits are angriest, is where you are needed most. It's your job to placate their wrath, through appeasement or by giving it a voice. Your people, dispossessed and disenfranchised, die without their connection to the invisible world. You'll do whatever it takes to balance the world and to ensure your people's survival.

Roleplaying Hints: You are that most dangerous being: the peaceful individual who has been pushed too far. A committed revolutionary, you believe that Ascension is only possible once inequalities — and those who propagate them — are wiped out.

Magick: Your magick is rooted in the Voudoun traditions. You study Spirit, that you may know those who ride you. Life and Mind allow you to treat sicknesses of body and mind, and give you some control over those who will not: heed the spirits' lessons.

Equipment: Altar covering, candles, roots, herbs, flowers, powders, oils, photographs of ancestors and saints, incense, cigarettes and liquor to offer to the spirits, skin drum, snake, black chicken, skull, colorful clothing, animal bones, knife, fake ID and green card.





DREAMSPEAKERS™



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: CAREGIVER
Essence: PATTERN
Demeanor: DEVIANT

Concept: INNER CITY SPIRIT DR.
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●○○○	Charisma POWERFUL ●●●○○	Perception STATE OF HEALTH ●●●○○
Dexterity ●●○○○	Manipulation ●●●○○	Intelligence ●●○○○
Stamina ●●○○○	Appearance ●●●○○	Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●○○○	Do ○○○○○	Computer ○○○○○
Athletics ●○○○○	Drive ●○○○○	Cosmology ●○○○○
Awareness ●●○○○	Etiquette ○○○○○	Culture ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○	Firearms ○○○○○	Enigmas ●●●○○
Dodge ○○○○○	Leadership ○○○○○	Investigation ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○	Meditation ●○○○○	Law ○○○○○
Instruction ○○○○○	Melee ●●○○○	Linguistics FRENCH, SPANISH ●●○○○
Intuition ○○○○○	Research ○○○○○	Lore ●○○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○	Stealth ●●○○○	Medicine ●●○○○
Streetwise ●●○○○	Survival ○○○○○	Occult VOODOO ●●○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○	Technology ○○○○○	Science ○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○	Life ●●●○○	Prime ○○○○○
Entropy ○○○○○	Mind ●●○○○	Spirit ●○○○○
Forces ○○○○○	Matter ○○○○○	Time ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	Arete	Health
AVATAR ●●●○○	● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised -0 ☐
ALLIES ●●●○○		Hurt -1 ☐
INFLUENCE ●●○○○		Injured -1 ☐
○○○○○		Wounded -2 ☐
○○○○○		Mauled -2 ☐
		Crippled -5 ☐
		Incapacitated ☐
Other Traits	Willpower	Experience
DANCING ●●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
○○○○○		
○○○○○		
○○○○○		
○○○○○		



TECHNO-SHAMAN

*Your weakness, city,
Is that you have a soul.*

— Laurence Hartmus,
"City"

Quote: *Didn't you
ever hear of the ghost in
the machine?*

Prelude: Your people were almost annihilated when the Europeans came. Their ways were scorned, their religion belittled as superstition and heathen nonsense. Those old customs and beliefs are almost gone. Being a child of the modern city, you saw little to mourn in that. You had a good job working on the high steel as many of your people had done. Then your mentor arrived, disrupting your life, opening your eyes, and claiming your

allegiance for the Dreamspeakers. She showed you many worlds, and proved that the spirits live within every mortal thing — just as your ancestors had said all along.

The ancient ones walked within towering forests and atop sacred mountains. Now you journey through the stark landscape of glass skyscrapers, steel bridges and asphalt highways. The spirits within the structures and machinery of the modern world are yours to behold.

Concept: You are not meant for life in the wilderness, however much your Tradition enjoys the natural world.

Your dream landscapes are man-made ones of skyscrapers, sidewalks, cars, computers, televisions and subways.

These things have their spirits as well, and you hear their voices and see their pain. They have a right to exist alongside the natural spirits, and you interpret their urban dreams to others who just don't understand. If by doing so you can rally the city's spirits to your views, perhaps you can protect them from Technocratic domination.

Roleplaying Hints:

The world cannot return to the past. It can only move forward. Your vision is a future in which you co-opt the Technomancers' machinery and fully awaken the spirits within it. While others avoid technology, you embrace the Jagglings and Pattern Spiders as spirit kin. These spirits of pattern-making are the children of Grandmother Spider, whose webs wove together the world. You dance the rites known to your people for generations, but you do it to a modern beat.

Magick: You want to know all the Spheres so that you may flow easily from one to another. For now, you focus on Spirit, Matter, Correspondence and Prime. Except for the actual learning of the Spheres, you have pretty much been on your own. No one else quite believes your vision yet.

Equipment: Rattles, drum, feathers, hard hat, work boots, boom box, laptop computer, repair kit.



DREAMSPEAKERS™



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: VISIONARY
Essence: PATTERN
Demeanor: ARCHITECT

Concept: TECHNO-SHAMAN
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength BRAWNY ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●●●●	Do 00000	Computer ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive ●●●●●	Cosmology ●●●●●
Awareness 00000	Etiquette 00000	Culture 00000
Brawl ●●●●●	Firearms 00000	Enigmas ●●●●●
Dodge 00000	Leadership 00000	Investigation ●●●●●
Expression 00000	Meditation 00000	Law 00000
Instruction 00000	Melee 00000	Linguistics 00000
Intuition 00000	Research 00000	Lore 00000
Intimidation 00000	Stealth 00000	Medicine ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●	Survival 00000	Occult ●●●●●
Subterfuge 00000	Technology ●●●●●	Science ●●●●●

Spheres

Correspondence ●●●●●	Life 00000	Prime ●●●●●
Entropy 00000	Mind 00000	Spirit ●●●●●
Forces 00000	Matter ●●●●●	Time 00000

Advantages

Backgrounds	Arete	Health
ARCANE ●●●●●	● ● ● 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	Bruised -0 ☐
AVATAR ●●●●●		Hurt -1 ☐
DREAM ●●●●●		Injured -1 ☐
MENTOR ●●●●●		Wounded -2 ☐
00000		Mauled -2 ☐
		Crippled -5 ☐
		Incapacitated ☐

Other Traits

DANCING ●●●●●
00000
00000
00000
00000

Quintessence



Experience

DREAM THERAPIST

Every sickness is an attempt at healing and every healing an attempt to escape from the everyday neurosis of ordinary consciousness so as to arrive at a more subtle and, in the last resort, superhuman form of perception.

— Holger Kalweit, *Dreamtime and Inner Space*

Quote: *Don't tell me what you think, tell me what you dream. Better yet, let's dream together. Take a walk with me?*

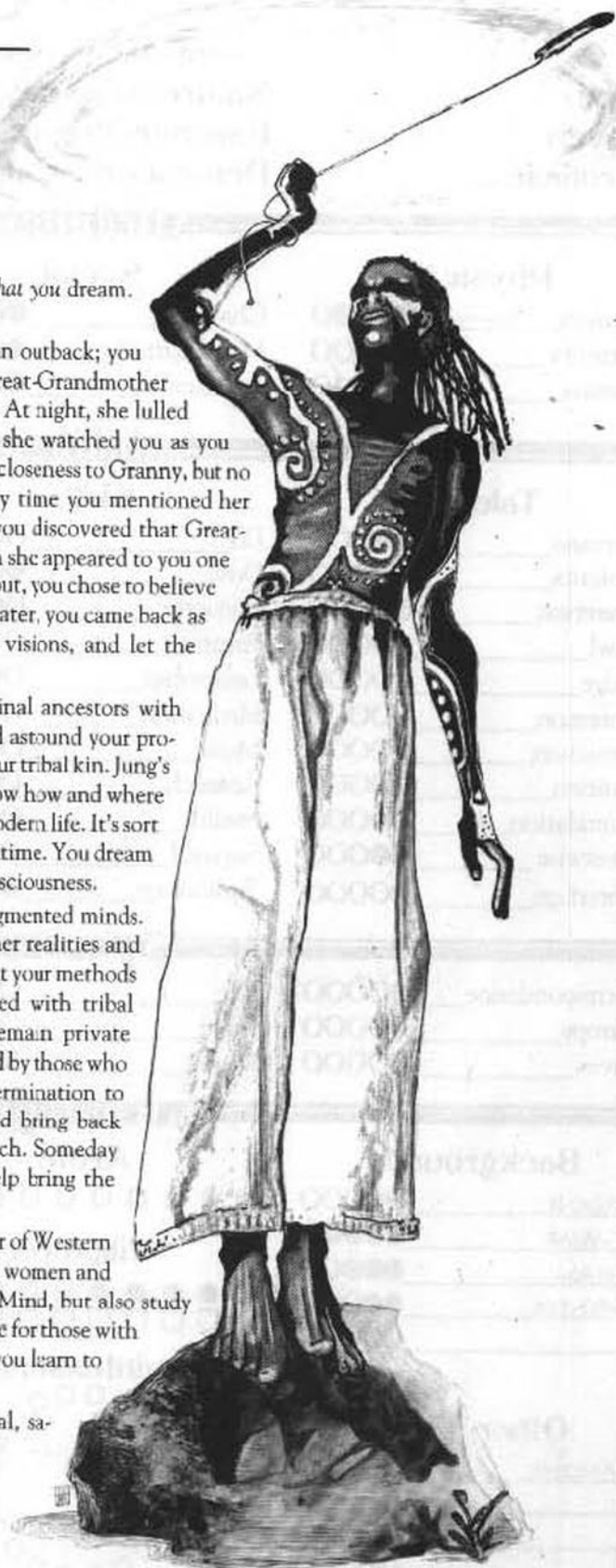
Prelude: Your ancestors lived in the Australian outback; you grew up in the city, relegated to an alien culture. Great-Grandmother remembered the old ways, and taught them to you. At night, she lulled you to sleep with her stories; during the daytime, she watched you as you played. You sensed your family's disapproval of your closeness to Granny, but no one explained the funny looks on their faces every time you mentioned her name. It wasn't until you were in your teens that you discovered that Great-Grandmother had died before you were born. When she appeared to you one last time and called you to come with her on walkabout, you chose to believe your dreams rather than your parents. Three weeks later, you came back as a Dreamspeaker. Now you help others find their visions, and let the skeptics be damned!

Concept: You meld the ways of your Aboriginal ancestors with modern psychiatry. The conclusions you've reached astound your professional acquaintances, but would hardly surprise your tribal kin. Jung's collective unconscious is alive and well, and you know how and where to find it. Most people have been overwhelmed by modern life. It's sort of a quest of yours to bring them back into the Dreamtime. You dream with them, and in dreaming, bring them to full consciousness.

Roleplaying Hints: You heal fractured and fragmented minds. To do that, you sometimes have to enter others' inner realities and bring their souls back from the abyss. Few would credit your methods (especially if they ever saw you naked and painted with tribal symbols during your sessions), so your healings remain private affairs. It matters little; shamans are always recognized by those who need them. Fewer still would understand your determination to enter the Dreamtime fully as your spirit animal and bring back those minds who have traveled too far for you to reach. Someday you'll solve the riddle of Marauders so they can help bring the world back to the path it was meant to follow.

Magick: Though you are ostensibly a practitioner of Western psychiatry, your magick is that of the Aboriginal wise women and men of high degree. You concentrate on Spirit and Mind, but also study both Life and Time. The Life Sphere will help you care for those with physical ailments, and Time will be necessary when you learn to exist within the Dreamtime.

Equipment: Medical bag, ocher pigment, crystal, savory herbs for burning, didgeridoo, drum, bullroarer.





DREAMSPEAKERS™



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: ARCHITECT
Essence: QUESTING
Demeanor: CAREGIVER

Concept: DREAM THERAPIST
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina LOUGH ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●●●●	Do 00000	Computer 00000
Athletics 00000	Drive ●●●●●	Cosmology ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Culture 00000
Brawl 00000	Firearms 00000	Enigmas ●●●●●
Dodge 00000	Leadership 00000	Investigation ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●	Meditation ●●●●●	Law ●●●●●
Instruction 00000	Melee 00000	Linguistics 00000
Intuition ●●●●●	Research 00000	Lore 00000
Intimidation 00000	Stealth ●●●●●	Medicine ●●●●●
Streetwise 00000	Survival OUTBACK ●●●●●	Occult 00000
Subterfuge ●●●●●	Technology ●●●●●	Science 00000

Spheres

Correspondence 00000	Life ●●●●●	Prime 00000
Entropy 00000	Mind ●●●●●	Spirit ●●●●●
Forces 00000	Matter 00000	Time ●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds	Arete	Health
AVATAR ●●●●●	● ● ● 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	Bruised -0 ☐
DREAM ●●●●●		Hurt -1 ☐
INFLUENCE ●●●●●		Injured -1 ☐
SANCTUM ●●●●●		Wounded -2 ☐
00000		Mauled -2 ☐
		Crippled -5 ☐
		Incapacitated ☐
Other Traits	Willpower	Experience
CLIMBING ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● 0 0 0 0 0 0	
PSYCHOLOGY ●●●●●	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	
00000		
00000		
00000		

Quintessence



Paradox

NOTED BRETHREN



Dreamspeakers revere and respect their ancestors, particularly those who have demonstrated their connection with the Great Dream through lives of sacrifice and struggle. Some living shamans have also attained a measure of prominence for their deeds and commitment. These are the stories most often heard when spirit workers gather for a tache, and the names which resound through the ages in the voices of the Iwa.

STAR-OF-EAGLES (FIRST CO-LEADER OF THE DREAMSPEAKERS)

Star-of-Eagles seemed destined for a special purpose, demonstrating an affinity with the spirit world that began in early childhood. His prowess as a hunter and his insight into the hearts of others made him almost certain to assume a position of leadership among his people, the Powhatan. He spent long hours studying spirit lore and herbal medicine with the elders. At night, he walked with the spirits, speaking with them in vivid and portentous dreams. His totem, which appeared to him in the form of a great eagle, frequently accompanied him on hunting expeditions, and Star-of-Eagles always offered the magnificent predator a share of the kill.

Many thought Star-of-Eagles would become a great chief, but his dreams told him otherwise. One day, he received a visitor — a strange pale-skinned woman who called herself Nightshade. Star-of-Eagles knew her on sight, for he had already dreamed of her coming. Nightshade convinced him that she was not a "witch" but a willworker who understood sacrifice and selflessness. She told him of lands where many lorekeepers, medicine men, seers and spirit travelers were planning a grand meeting to form a united tribe of "magick" workers. Introducing him to the concept of the Tradition mages, Nightshade invited him to come to Mistrudge.

Star-of-Eagles arrived at Mistrudge in time for the Second Tribunal. There he encountered spirit mages from the far ends of the world. When he met Naioba, the graceful, ebony-skinned wise woman of the Mo-Mo Kev Dreamlands, something blossomed in his heart — and in Naioba's as well. The two of them found that they had much in common despite their obvious differences. By the time Star-of-Eagles and Naioba assumed joint leadership of "Those-Who-Speak-With-Dreams," they had already recognized a soul-bond that grew into their destiny as lifemates. In 1456, Star-of-Eagles and Naioba formally declared their union before the Traditions in Horizon, home of the Council.

Eight years after their union, Naioba died, the victim of assassination by a Dreamspeaker *barabbi*. Despite his overwhelming grief, Star-of-Eagles rallied his Tradition to prevent the Celestial Chorus' attempt to convert Naioba's people to their own religious vision. He continued to lead the Dreamspeakers alone, returning to Horizon only when necessary.

With the other Tradition leaders, Star-of-Eagles blessed the First Cabal as they set out on their mission. After the broken and defeated survivors of that ill-fated quest returned to Horizon, Star-

of-Eagles gave freely of his personal power and his wisdom to repair the damage done to their spirits. When Walking Hawk — one of the surviving members of the First Cabal — requested to return to his people to warn them of the approach of dangerous times, Star-of-Eagles willingly sent him home.

Some say that when his time on Earth was over, Star-of-Eagles assumed the form of an eagle and flew into the dream world in search of the spirit of Naioba, and that he wanders there still, ready to assist others of his kind who seek his aid.

NAIOBA (WISE WOMAN OF THE MO-MO KEV DREAMLANDS)

Called to Mistrudge to attend the Second Tribunal which would forge the Council of Nine and unite the Traditions against their common enemy, Naioba traveled the dreampaths from her home in western Africa, certain that she would see wonders. Already known as a wise woman of the Mo-Mo Kev Dreamlands despite her relative youth, Naioba was a strong-willed individual who often spent long periods of time away from her tribe communing with spirits. The voices of her dead ancestors spoke to her, reaching her the mysteries behind the visible world. One of those remembered dead guided her to a meeting with Sh'zar the Seer and Ali-beh-shaar, both of whom invited her to journey to a great meeting of other practitioners of magick.

Naioba's heart rejoiced when she encountered the many other spirit mages who had made the arduous journey to Mistrudge. Her arms embraced her fellow sisters and brothers of the dreampaths, many of whom she had seen in the Otherworld. She reveled in the strangers she met as well, members of other Traditions who inhabited pale bodies and had hair painted like the sunset or the desert and eyes like the pale colors of the morning and evening skies. They fascinated her just as her own dark skin and exotic features awed them. To her, no one was a stranger, for all were one in the world of the spirit. She became the unifying thread that wove together the potentially hostile tribal shamans into one seamless tapestry, the family of Dreamspeakers.

When she met Star-of-Eagles, she recognized in him her true partner in love and work. Their marriage and the children she bore as witness of their love anchored the Tradition of Dreamspeakers in a deep-seated joy that shared itself with everyone they knew. As co-leader with Star-of-Eagles of Those-Who-Speak-With-Dreams, Naioba helped weld the disparate collection of shamans, medicine workers, babalawos and wisdom keepers into a union that reflected their common knowledge of Spirit magick.

Naioba's overriding weakness lay in her willingness to trust her fellow mages. Thus, she never saw the magick-charged knife of her murderer. That the Dreamspeakers did not dissolve in anger and self-recrimination proved a testimonial to the bridges of unity and solidarity both she and Star-of-Eagles had formed. At the request of Star-of-Eagles, the three children born to him and Naioba, thought by many to bear the seeds of Awakening, were adopted by other Dreamspeakers and raised in anonymity. Each year in Horizon, the Festival of Lights honors Naioba (the sun) and her children (the Realm's three moons).



Dreamspeakers, particularly those of Africa, remember Naioba as the Mother of Loving Spirits. Some walkers in the spirit world claim that they have met her there, still attentive to the needs of her people. Others insist that Naioba's Avatar walks the Earth today in the body of one of her children's children's descendants. Some say the tales portray Naioba as a woman too perfect to be truly human; the talekeepers respond, "Why should we believe that she was anything less than perfection? A dream dissolves when we try to grasp it in our hands for observation; so, too, do the legends of our heroes pop like bubbles if we question them too closely." For the moment, at least, the Dreamspeakers prefer to remember Naioba as a perfection, as a dream, rather than as a human being. Maybe some dreams are too important to destroy.

WALKING HAWK (SENECA MEDICINE MAN, DREAMSPEAKER REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FIRST CABAL)

Although Dreamspeaker lore remembers Walking Hawk for his part in the doomed mission of the First Cabal and for his eloquent warning to his people, one of this Seneca Dreamspeaker's greatest achievements preceded either of those deeds. Before the Europeans ever began the voyage that would bring the white races to the shores of the Pure Land, Walking Hawk had already crossed the Atlantic in a double-canoe made of elm-bark. That long and treacherous voyage to the shores of France and, ultimately, to Mistridge served as his formal initiation into the "new" Tradition of the Dreamspeakers, although Walking Hawk had listened to his dreams many times before.

Power dreams summoned this aging warrior from his homeland and drove him across the ocean. Few today understand the courage and belief necessary to sustain such a voyage into territory as unknown then as the depths of space are today. Alone and adrift on the currents of the Atlantic, Walking Hawk let his faith in the Great Spirit carry him to his destination.

Walking Hawk learned first-hand of the dangers presented by the newly formed Order of Reason and their allies, the Inquisition. As their prisoner, his sufferings hardened his heart against those unbelievers. The Seneca medicine man also gained an intimate knowledge, through his companions in the First Cabal, of the other Traditions. His insights into their strengths and weaknesses roused in him a compassion toward his fellow mages that was not always reciprocated.

Walking Hawk returned to his home transformed by his experiences among the Traditions and in the hands of their enemies. Though few contemporaries believed his outrageous tales of impending destruction, later generations, remembering — too late — his words, attempted to unite against the Europeans.

By that time, Walking Hawk had fully entered into the realm of spirit, leaving behind a body wracked by torture and a heart saddened by the dissension he saw among those of his own kind, and among all those who professed to believe in True Magick.

ADAMBARA (CLEVER WOMAN OF THE DREAMTIME)

Named for the spider whose webs connect her to the world beyond her body, Adambara grew up among the Aborigines of western Australia. She Awakened just after her rites of puberty, and began to learn the secrets of the Dreamtime. During one of her spirit journeys, she had a vision of the sacred lands falling to great beasts of concrete and metal. The spirits of the land, the Mimis who

dwelled in the Earth, and the *Turongs*, or tree-spirits, cried out as creation was ripped away from under them.

Terrified, Adambara awoke, only to enter another dream, in which a slender, dark-skinned woman with a loving smile and a tall, brown-skinned man with gentle eyes calmed her fears and spoke of a great mission. Adambara left her tribe and journeyed into the world of the white men, where she entered their schools and earned her credentials in ecology.

Today, she travels the world as a lecturer on the vanishing Australian wilderness, urging the preservation of her homeland and other endangered ecosystems. The power of her speeches has won many to her cause. Like the spider, Adambara works constantly at building her web of concern. Many who have heard her have discovered the Avatar within themselves and have joined the ranks of Dreamspeakers, the Verbena and other Traditions who share in the vision of the living Earth.

The Technocracy has identified her as a potent threat, and have sent their agents to silence her, but time and again she has slipped away from them into the Otherworld, where her many friends and spirit companions hide her from her enemies.

PAINTED HORSE (CONTRARY ENTERTAINER)

Painted Horse claims descent from various Plains Indian tribes, South American tribal folk hidden in the Brazilian rainforest, Yoruba slaves brought to America, Chinese who worked on the railroads, French sugar planters from the Caribbean and Irish immigrants fleeing

the potato famine. There may be some truth to his claims. An extremely handsome man of mixed blood, he stands almost six feet tall, with deep green eyes and a complexion that splits the difference between red and brown. His nose is broader than those of most Native Americans, his lips full, with high cheekbones and hair that was originally dark and wavy. It is no longer shining black, however, but a rainbow of colors, some natural, some not.

A poet, musician and storyteller, Painted Horse travels the entertainment circles, educating people in the ways of the Native Americans and shamanism. He performs dances and enacts rites in full costume and with many props, invites the audience to participate in shamanic healings, organizes Sun Dances, and lobbies for Native American rights.

He is also a Contrary. When not teaching or performing, Painted Horse wears women's clothes, says the opposite of what he means, refuses all food until after sundown, will not travel unless the sun is in the sky, and then sits facing backward in the conveyance unless forced to do otherwise (airline hostesses are notorious for insisting on proper behavior while in their planes). If asked questions directly, he asks questions in return. If a seeker comes to him truly wanting to learn, Painted Horse ignores her until she ceases to speak to him. Then he speaks nonsense rhymes until she can grasp the essential truth within them.

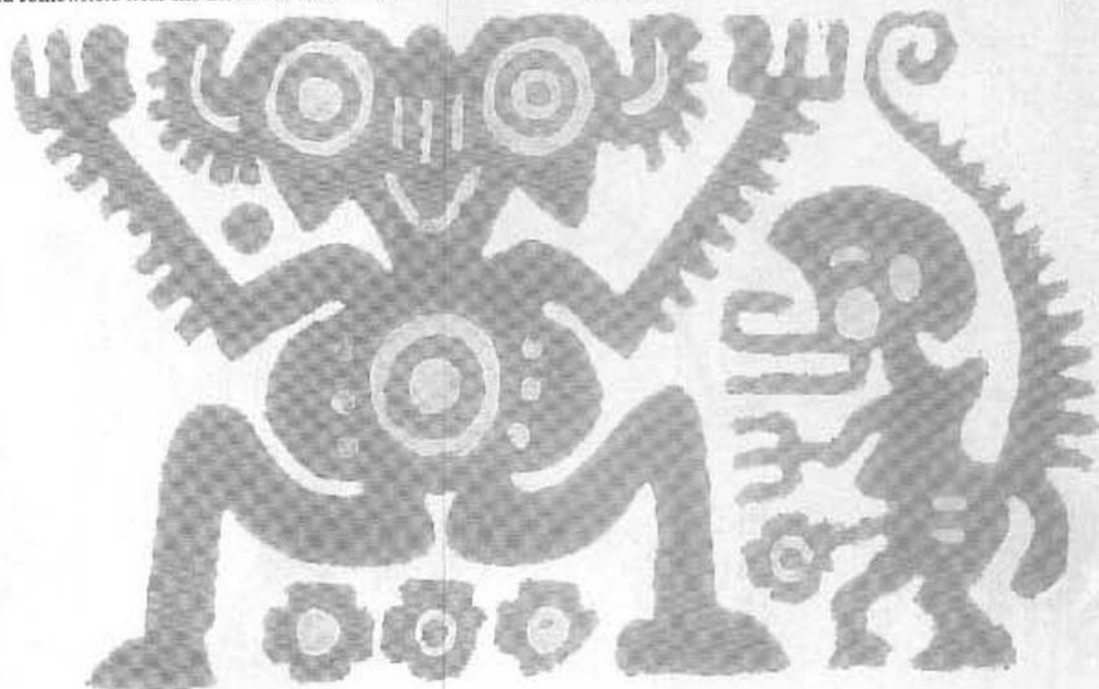
Painted Horse takes on Paradox in the form of coloring his hair. All of the 15 to 20 colors in his hair came about as permanent Paradox Flaws. Because he often lets the spirits speak through him and so regards himself as their "horse," he took the name Painted Horse.





The Technocracy hates him with a passion bordering on psychosis. Thus far, their agents been unable to "unmask" his tricks or to sabotage his performances. If they close a hall where he is scheduled to perform, he does a free show at the edge of town. Canceling his travel arrangements results in his walking out of the Umbra somewhere near his intended destination.

Because he always miraculously escapes from one scrape with the Technocracy, another with the Nephendi, and a third with Marauders, those who know him say that he is much loved by the spirits. Others claim he may actually be Coyote walking in human form. When asked, Painted Horse just smiles and walks away backward.





INSIDE THE DREAMWHEEL (DREAMSPEAKER MAGICK)

We are bound in the Sacred Hoop — humans, the four-legged, the living green things. Orbits within orbits, circles within circles, from the Great Hoop of the universe which, eons ago, dreamed itself into existence, to the blood circles within your own body.

— Crow Dog



All medicine arose from one place — the dreams of the shards left within all people by the Pure Ones, whom some call the Creative Ancestors. Dreamspeakers say that no one Tradition was first, for no Traditions existed when magick came into the world. Perhaps those who first mastered Life became the Verbena, but many also became Dreamspeakers, Akashic Brothers and members of the Celestial Chorus. No one owns medicine any more than one can own the land. Both are given in trust to Awakened and un-Awakened people alike.

To Dreamspeakers, magick and medicine, while similar, are not quite the same. Instead, they divide willworking into medicine and sorcery. Medicine, with its healing and restorative connotations, is the true province of the shaman. Sorcery implies the acquisition of power for its own ends, regardless of the consequences to the sorcerer or his surroundings. The shamans and their people have no love for the sorcerer; even if she stands beside them in battle, her presence makes them uneasy.

THE SPHERES



Just as there was no "first" Tradition, there is no Sphere more important than another. Each belongs to the whole — they cannot be considered individually without first considering them as a group. All are colors within the body of the rainbow serpent.

One figure represents this concept of no beginning and no end: The sacred circle, sometimes called the Hoop and known to many as the Dreamwheel. The circle is a perfect shape; it gathers all else inside itself. All people, all races, all animals, plants, rocks, seas and spirits, the wise and the foolish alike, have their place within the circle. Medicine also has its place within the circle.

Almost all tribal people celebrate and invoke the gods and spirits from within a sacred circle. Set apart from the world and outside of time, this circle is a place for raising power. Within that circle, other smaller circles exist, which mages call Spheres. Inter-

connected in circles of their own, the paths of power exist within the greater circle, but form a unique medicine wheel all their own.

Imagine a wheel with nine spokes, each leading to the center. The spokes support the outer edge of the wheel, but the center forms the joining place where the spokes become one. Call this the Dreamwheel, whose outer edge is the world Dreamspeakers see with open eyes and waking consciousness, and whose nine spokes are the nine paths of magick which touch the center of the dream. Within that dream lies the Odu, the seed of meaning. Simple, isn't it?

The names given below reflect one way of looking at the Spheres. Other Dreamspeakers use terms which conform to their cultural backgrounds. For example, Entropy, which some call the Spirits' Laughter, is called "the Way of the Crocodile" (a predator who is seen as an agent of fate) in Australia, and the Sphere of Forces is known in Africa as "The Breath of God." Regardless of the name, the Odu, or Sacred Word embodied in the center Sphere, remains unchanged.

Correspondence — The Great Dance

Others speak of Correspondence in terms of space. Dreamspeakers see it as a function of the Great Dance in which all things are interrelated and all things are one. In an individual, mind, body and spirit come together, each forming a part of one person. In a tribe, individuals come together to make up a people. Many tribes make nations. All are related to one another, all a part of the whole. So too are the animals, the spirits, the Umbra and the Earth, all a part of the greater whole known as the Tellurian. Correspondence merely calls out — one part to another — and reminds us that we were meant to be together.

Entropy — The Spirits' Laughter

What many call luck or probability, medicine people call the laughter of the spirits. The world was never meant to last forever, and all things within it change. Trees rot, animals die, even stones wear away in time. Everything has some weakness, some vulnerability. Entropy recognizes that decay is necessary if new things are to emerge. Only spirits remain eternal, and so, as all else falls to fate, they laugh.

Forces — Voice of the Thunderbird

Those who live close to the elements understand the spirits of earth, air, fire and water. They have performed rain dances, smoked the sacred pipe, given their flesh to the sun in the Sun Dance, and called the essence of the sacred stones in the *yuuipi* ceremony. Dreamspeakers approach the elements in a natural way, asking the spirits for help and thanking them for their generosity. Even so, medicine workers who understand the ways of nature can call upon appalling power in need. The Thunderbird does not forget his friends.

Life — The Cycle of the Green Corn

Concerned as they are with the things of the earth, Dreamspeakers know this Sphere almost as well as their birthright, Spirit. All the cycles of life are theirs to touch through an affinity they call the Cycle of the Green Corn. The name reminds them that life follows patterns of birth, growth, death, decay and renewal. All stages have their places in the Great Circle, and Dreamspeakers seek to celebrate each in its turn and make the transitions between as easy as possible.

Matter — The Heart of the Rock

The separation between Forces and Matter was one of the hottest topics of debate during the Grand Convocation. While

most people do not believe that inanimate things have souls, many Dreamspeakers see the thing as the spirit within it, forgetting that an equally strong physical side exists. That stabilizing portion of the inanimate, called "the Heart of the Rock," can be controlled through this potent medicine. Such Arts are controversial among the shamans, who often consider them an invasion of an item's sacred essence. Proponents of this Art point out that Inyan-Sha, the sacred red rock some call carlinite or pipestone, becomes all the more sacred when it allows itself to be carved into medicine pipes. So long as the spirit inside is honored, the form is unimportant.

Mind — The Dream of the Inner Self

Without conscious thought and will, medicine people can do nothing to effect the world around them. This Art allows a mind-healer to enter her patient's thoughts or dreams, discern his illness, and bring him to recovery. If he lies, she may discover the truth, and if he is mad, she might give him his sanity a fighting chance.

Mind skills have other applications. Although a skillful Dreamspeaker can enter the Maya bodily, a less-advanced one can drift into the dream world and leave her body behind through the power of the Inner Self Art. By strengthening her mind against intrusion, a young Dreamspeaker can battle a witch's possession attempts, or eject the witch from another host. When all other senses fail, the mind remains active; a skillful shaman can use that activity to see through other eyes. All in all, the Inner Self is a useful dream to learn. Many Dreamspeakers do.

Prime — Footprints of the Great Spirit

This power medicine recognizes that all beings are pieces taken from the shards of the Pure Ones. These creative forces also left behind footprints on the world, footprints filled with what many images call "Quintessence." Because all shards were originally one, Dreamspeakers call out to those other pieces, asking them to lend a little of their energy for medicine work.

Spirit — Speaking With Our Brethren

Outsiders call the Dreamspeakers "Masters of Spirit"; the shamans themselves prefer to think that they maintain a special tie to their invisible kin. Through this affinity, which all Dreamspeakers learn at the beginning of their training, they cross into the Otherworlds, honor the spirits, protect themselves, and awaken the slumbering heart of creation. Those who claim to have "mastered" the spirits know nothing of the true power of this Art, which ties all life together and teaches us that "all things are our brothers, and all of us are one." Other mysticks have noticed that Dreamspeakers glow with a special radiance when they travel in the Umbra, even more so than other masters of Spirit do. Perhaps this glow comes from the purity of their vision, a purity often lost in modern conceptions of the Arts.

Time — The Change of the Seasons

Medicine folk view the seasons as a cycle, changing again and again, moving through various forms, but always returning to what they were before. They view time the same way. To the shamans, time moves differently depending on where a person is and what she is doing. Some would call this a "subjective" versus an "objective" view of time. Hold your hand in the fire. How quickly would you like to remove it? Some among the medicine folk believe in the Dreamtime, a timeless time in which everything that has been and ever will be exists. Perhaps we are there even now, and this allows them to play with the entity we perceive as time.

SACRED OBJECTS

Dreamspeakers recognize how important ritual objects — foci — can be when working powerful medicine. Other, more careless magi might regard such objects as “props,” easily dismissed and discarded when “enlightenment” sets in. Most Dreamspeakers would be quick to point out how wrong such preconceptions can be. To a shaman, a ritual object is more than just a concentration aid; all objects have their own spirits, and those inside traditional foci have a long and illustrious history of mystic aid. As most Dreamspeakers will attest, a ritual object used with respect and reverence makes ordinary medicine more potent than the simple workings of a lone, proud shaman. It's never a bad thing to have help, even if it isn't “technically” needed.

Some Dreamspeakers also construct fetishes, items imbued with spirits, by coaxing new spirits to enter items. In almost all cases, such items are constructed with the consent of the spirit, who serves in return for some sort of payment or out of respect for the shaman. Although the following items are commonplace, each shaman chooses his or her special tools. Odd foci like graffiti, computers, books and weapons, while rare, find their way into modern shamans' rituals. Some Ghost Wheels and Contraries actually prefer technological tools to traditional ones. The times, as they say, are a-changin'.

- **Art:** Pictographs have survived from the earliest times and provide one basis for “sympathetic” magick. This is taken to its greatest heights by the sand paintings of the Dineh (Navajo), the spirit paintings of the Aborigines and the symbolic designs of African shamans.

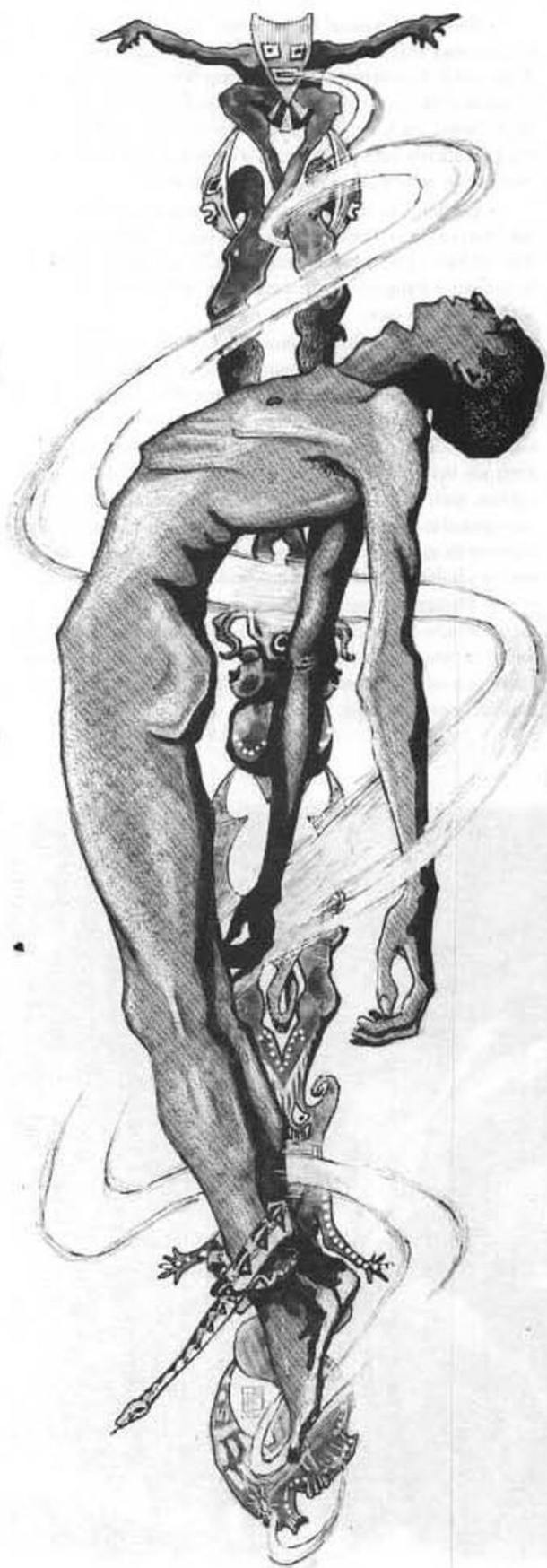
- **Bones and Animal Parts:** Many Dreamspeakers use bones as divinatory aids or fetishes. They also use feathers, fur, teeth, claws, tails and other parts of animals in order to petition that spirit for aid in their workings. These creatures are not sacrificed arbitrarily. Some are not killed at all; many shamans find an animal that has recently died. Those who are sacrificed know to what ends their bodies will be put, and give their approval.

- **Circles:** The sacred circle, in whatever form it takes, lies at the heart of many Dreamspeaker workings — particularly those that call for lengthy or communal rituals. Some circles consist of no more than a stamped-out dancing place, while others are drawn with the utmost care.

- **Crystals and Other Stones:** Though crystals have recently gained popularity, their resonant properties and healing powers have long been known to Dreamspeakers. Aborigines used to set small crystals into their skin so they would always have their power available. The might of the Earth rests within all stones, and many gems are believed to enhance certain medicines. Small, round pebbles, such as the one Crazy Horse wore behind his ear (which was reputed to protect him from bullets), are seen as symbols of the universe in miniature and often used in ceremonies designed to restore wholeness to that which is broken.

- **Elements:** Spirit workers sometimes use the elements as sacred objects. Such shamans focus their rituals through items like a dish of water, the smoke from lit smudge sticks, incense or tobacco, a small brazier or fire of sacred wood and a stone, or a handful of earth or clay.





- **Fluid:** Dreamspeakers know the power of water to cleanse and wash away evil influences. Many also use blood in certain ceremonies, especially those who practice Voodoo or other traditional African and Native American rituals. The blood shed often comes from animals (who have a small amount of blood drawn from them) or from the worker himself. Animal sacrifices (in which the animals are killed) are made for only the most serious undertakings, as this affects the animal's spirit as well as its body.

- **Herbs:** Certain herbs and plants are considered sacred, and their properties can be used to promote healing or clear the mind. Such plants can be eaten, mixed into brews, sprinkled around the area or burned.

- **Language:** Dreamspeakers all learn the true language of the spirits, which they call *Odu*. This is at once both a difficult language to master and the easiest to learn. That is because it consists of things that are spoken directly from the heart, truthfully, with no intention to deceive, control or manipulate. An example of such might be, "Hear me, friend Bear, and know that I honor you. Your strength and wisdom are needed to aid me in healing another. Look into my heart and see my promise to you that in return, I will protect those of your children whom I encounter in this life." The Iwa respect the shaman who can speak to them in this manner, often allying themselves to her or favoring her with less thought for what they themselves gain out of the partnership. They know that they at least gain friendship and respect.

The Order of Hermes claims to know the "true" language of spirits, a magickal tongue they call *Enochian*. Dreamspeakers say to them, "This is no true language of communication, but one of command. Be careful lest your controls slip, for you antagonize many powerful spirits with this playing at speech."

- **Mind-Altering Substances:** Spirit workers utilize drugs in much the same way Cultists of Ecstasy do: as aids to open themselves to greater possibilities. Shamans who employ psychoactives range from the Mexican *curanderos* (healers), who consume massive amounts of fiery liquor, to the Native American medicine men who use peyote in their visionquests, to the African witch doctors who chew narcotic roots to open their minds to spirit possession. These drugs aren't used for kicks; rather, they expand the perceptions past normal limits and open the mind into a more receptive state. Street drugs are considered poisons by the shamans, who often drag users into the Umbra for a quick peek at the spirits nearby. Few surer cures exist for casual drug use than a hard look at an Addiction Bane.

- **Movement and Dance:** Movement can be gentle swaying, gestures, facial expressions, walking, running, a series of steps defining a particular pattern, or an actual dance. Dancing may consist of a spontaneous personal dance or a highly stylized and lengthy traditional affair with appropriate costume, music and several other participants.

- **Music and Song:** Another powerful focus, music has the power to change the emotions as few others do. Rhythmic drumming, the shaking of rattles, chanting, humming and singing are all well-known Dreamspeakers tools. The Celestial Chorus may believe it knows the song of the One, but medicine people know the songs of the many.

- **Ordeals:** Pain, deprivation and danger are wonderful methods of focusing the attention on the problem at hand. They also serve as offerings or sacrifices of the body (which is the only thing

people truly own) to the spirits and God. Ordeals (whether fasting, sleeplessness or wounding) can also open the mind of the one who suffers, rendering that individual more fit to receive the wisdom or the aid of the spirits. Sitting Bull knew this, and carved 50 plugs of skin from his arms before the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

- **Words of Power:** Names of things, whether general or proper names, are powerful tools in medicine workings. Shamans may call upon spirits by name, seeking their aid, or they may try to heal sickness by re-naming it as something less dangerous. Certain words, often nonsense to others, are given to Dreamspeakers by their totem spirits, or come to them in visions. These words of power are sung to heighten the efficacy of medicine, as they are a sort of soul chant used to attune the shaman's very essence to her workings.

FAMILIARS AND TOTEMS

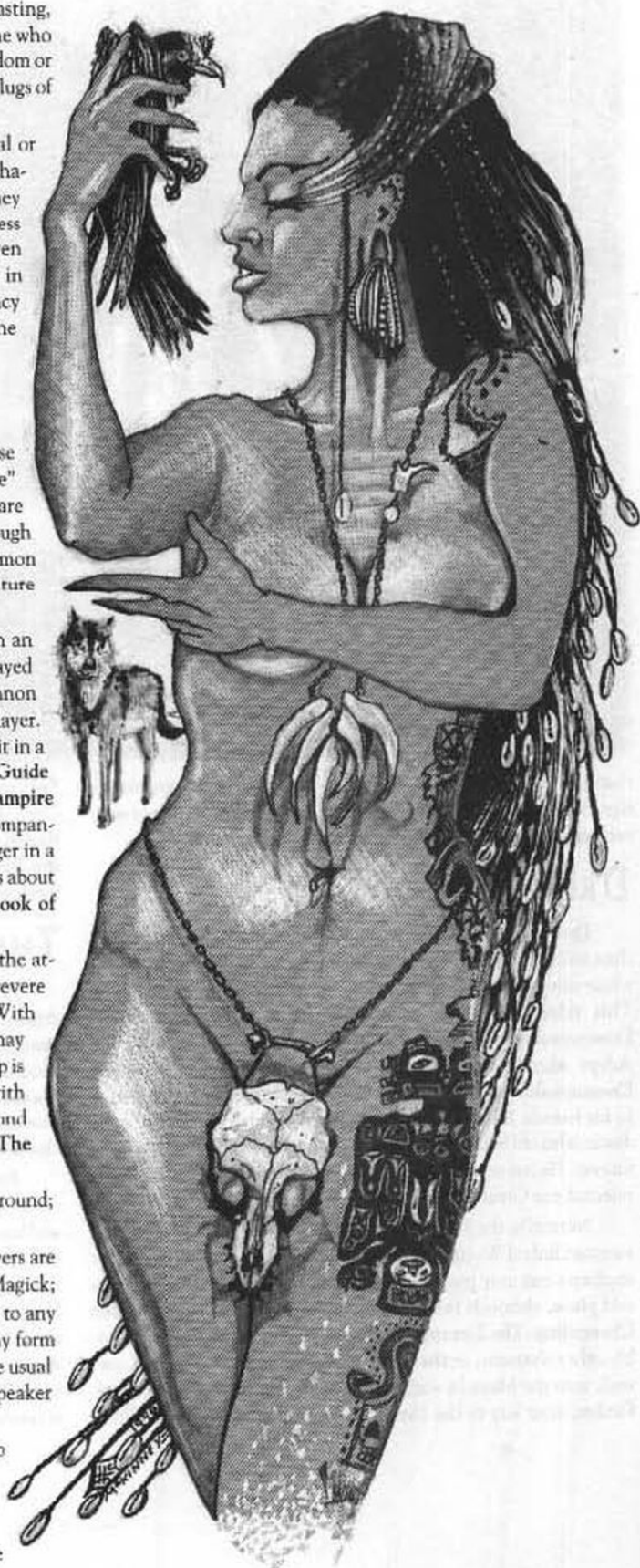
Animals and Dreamspeakers have a traditionally close relationship to each other. Whether those animals are "simple" companions, spirit familiars or totem spirit guides, it's a rare shaman who goes without any kind of animal nearby. Although hawks, horses, snakes, dogs, wolves, cats or owls make common companions, any animal that fits the Dreamspeaker, her culture and her personality is appropriate.

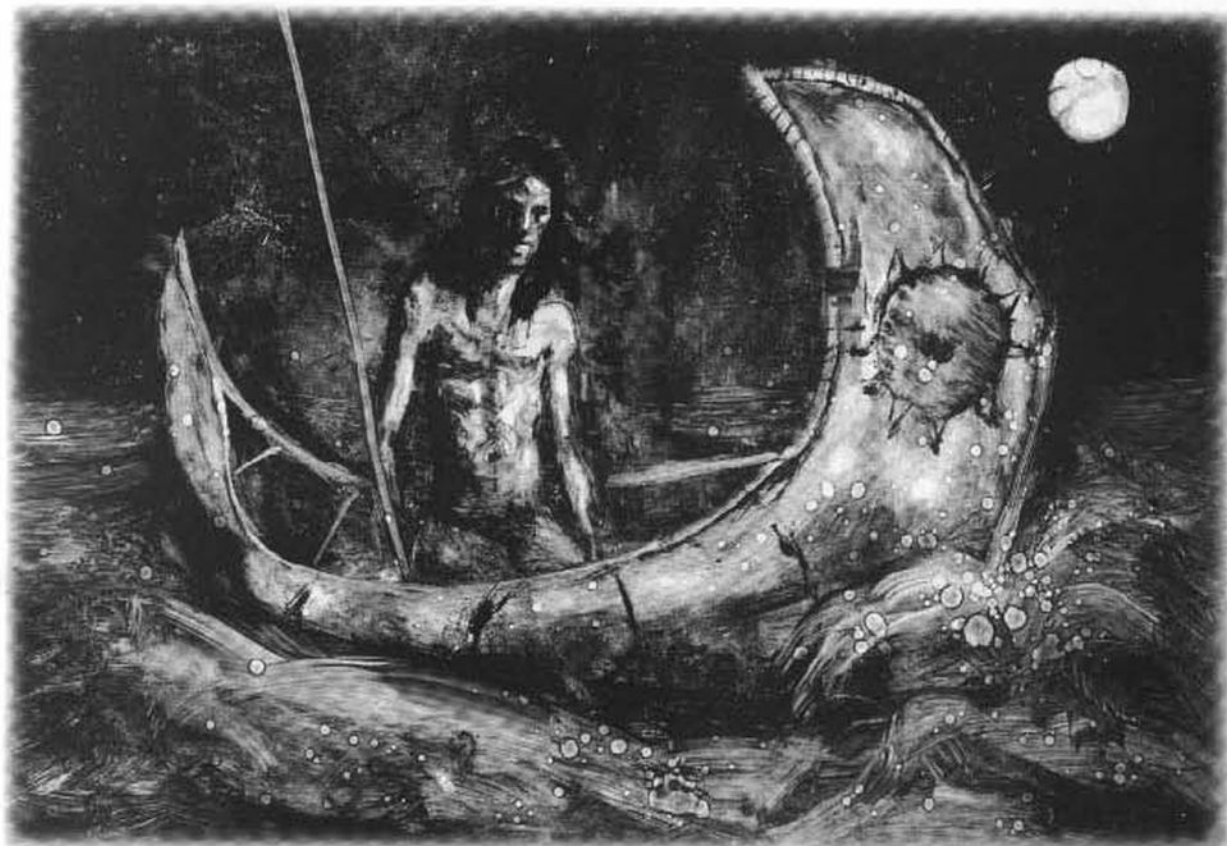
Most companions come to the shaman's side through an important episode in her life — an episode that should be played through as part of the chronicle. They're not just "cannon fodder" and should never be run as such by a Dreamspeaker player. Any shaman who treats her companion carelessly will lose it in a hurry. **The Book of Mirrors: The Mage Storyteller's Guide** contains statistics for a variety of animals, as does the **Vampire Players Guide**. A Dreamspeaker can buy unusual animal companions as Allies, although the difficulties of keeping, say, a tiger in a downtown apartment are the Storyteller's province. Details about familiars and their various abilities can be found in **The Book of Shadows** and **Ascension's Right Hand**.

- Unlike most willworkers, Dreamspeakers can attract the attention and favor of the totem spirits most shapeshifters revere (see **Werewolf**, **Axis Mundi** and the various **Tribebooks**). With the Storyteller's permission, a Dreamspeaker character may purchase the Totem Background. Although this relationship is special — these spirits don't often honor a "mere" human with their attention — it works in almost every way like the bond between a Garou and his chosen patron (**Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, pages 113, 259-264). The exceptions are:

- Each Dreamspeaker must buy her own Totem Background; there are no "pack totems" for mages;
- Dreamspeakers cannot learn Gifts. These static powers are the birthrights of Gaia's chosen, and do not mix with True Magick;
- The Totem's usual Renown bonus becomes a bonus to any Social Dice Pool used around Garou. For every point of any form of Renown, the mage gains one extra die for her Pool. If the usual Renown was one Honor and one Wisdom, the Dreamspeaker would gain two additional dice.

Totem spirits and animal companions are connected to a Dreamspeaker's spirit in an elemental way. Those ties should reflect themselves in the character's personality, her vision and her name — and names like Gray Falcon, Spotted Running Wolf or River Rat Smith suggest more





than just the animal beside the mage. There might be some future significance to the chosen companion, too. The spirits do not send such aid without a good reason or a worthy recipient.

DREAMWALKING

Dreamspeakers also share another important difference from their willworking kin: They can enter the Dream Realms in person, while other human travelers must arrive through astral magicks. This talent reflects a primal affinity that belongs *only* to Dreamspeakers who began their Awakened lives as such. A Virtual Adept who changes factions cannot learn this ability, and a Dreamspeaker who joins the Virtual Adepts cannot teach the trick to his friends. If he suffers a major paradigm change—that is, he discards his old beliefs in favor of a new faith—the talent goes away forever. He has rejected more than just a magical faction. He has rejected the Great Dream, and it rejects him, too.

Normally, the Maya Dream Realms lie in a Zone between the various Umbral Worlds, material reality and the other Zones. Most explorers can only project their minds, not their bodies, into this odd place, although faeries can enter and leave as they will (see *Changeling: The Dreaming*). Dreamspeaker shamans (and possibly other shamans, at the Storyteller's discretion), however, can walk into the Maya by stepping sideways with Spirit 3 medicine. Finding your way to the Dream Realms usually requires a Wits +

Enigmas roll, with a difficulty depending on the circumstances. Once there, the Dreamspeaker is as material as the denizens of the Realm, who are, in return, as solid as earthly creatures. See *Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds* for details about the Maya Realms and their inhabitants.

THE VISION

A Dreamspeaker's Awakening *always* takes the form of a dream, a vision (like that of Michael Skyhawk) that echoes throughout the rest of his life. Ideally, a Dreamspeaker player should begin her character during a Prelude which involves her Awakening vision; at the least, she should work out with the Storyteller what the vision was, when it was and how it affects her character's life today.

For a shaman, this First Dream is more than a story hook—it's an Epiphany that changes her entire life, destroys her old self, and leaves another individual in its place. The mentor, the Spheres, the rituals she knows—all these things are peripheral compared to the importance of the vision. Without a strong First Dream, a Dreamspeaker is just another mage; other shamans will quiz her about her vision, and if she does not have good answers or insights, they will dismiss her as a witch. And, political correctness aside, tribal societies are notoriously hard on witchcraft. In short, a vision is essential. All other details flow from that event.

MEDICINE (ROTES)



The dream is real, my friends. The failure to make it work is the unreality.

— Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters*

Many people mistake the form for the thing itself, the outward trapping for the inner spirit. Dreamspeakers avoid this mistake through their medicine. While they honor the old ways and remember the steps to the sacred dances, they prefer to create rituals anew each time they use them. This doesn't mean that they throw out what

works in favor of innovation; medicine people utilize whatever works in a given situation, but often personalize their rites, customizing them with elements that resonate with the energy of the moment. It does no good for a would-be shaman to ape the words and gestures of her teacher; the working must come from her, must be a part of her. Thus, Dreamspeakers rely on only a handful of standard rites (or as they prefer to call them, *rituals*), and alter them as they see fit.

Any and all of the Effects presented under the Spirit Sphere listing in *Mage* are common tricks of the Dreamspeaker's trade, regardless of the names they might be given in the book. Additional medicines include:

Spirit Cloak (** Mind, ** Spirit)

One of the first things a Dreamspeaker learns is how to dampen the bright glow that surrounds him in the spirit world. By shielding his aura and dimming its power, he can pass among the spirits without rousing an unusual fuss.

[Mind shields the aura, altering its colors if desired. Spirit Arts "turn down" the power of the glow, or shift it into another spiritual spectrum to disguise the Dreamspeaker's true nature. This has no effect on his "physical" appearance, but makes him less conspicuous than a shaman normally is on the Umbral paths.]

Trailblazing (** Prime, ** Spirit)

By laying down a spirit marker, a Dreamspeaker can leave a trail behind her in the Umbra. The mark, which often resembles a significant sign in the shaman's native culture, glows with a cold shimmer and resists any attempt to remove it. The mark does not carry into the material world in any way, so it's effectively invisible to non-Umbral travelers.

[The trail lasts for one day per success; Prime medicine fuels the glow. When the duration passes, the sign fades. The ritual itself is totally coincidental, and confers a counter-magickal block on the sign to protect it from tampering.]

Dreamcry (** or *** Correspondence, ** Mind, ** Spirit)

By conjuring a vision and sending it across great distances, a Dreamspeaker can call others for help. Most cries involve disturbing and symbolic dreams, but can be as straightforward as a mental "HELP" and a location in an emergency. A greater variation contacts several parties at once.

[Correspondence medicine crosses the distance as per the Range Chart; Mind passes the vision between parties, and Spirit "addresses" the message with a trace-bond or courier spirit that

leads the target of the ritual back to the shaman. Although it's fairly accurate, the Dreamcry vision is acceptable enough to pass as coincidental "psychic phenomena."]

Nightmare Dance (** Spirit or *** Mind, often with ** Correspondence)

An old trick from the slavery days allows a Dreamspeaker to send disturbing dreams against someone with whom she's displeased. By drumming up a frenzy and calling upon a Nightmare spirit, the shaman projects a fearsome image into her target's sleeping mind. Whatever dream he might conjure turns to blood and evil when the Nightmare Dance intrudes. While the medicine isn't deadly in itself, the lack of sleep can be if it continues....

[Spirit medicine calls forth the spirit of a Night Terror or Kid Fear (see *The Book of Worlds*) and asks it for a favor, which it often performs free of "charge." The Mind variant taps directly into the subject's mind and lets the Dreamspeaker twist it however she wants. Without Correspondence, the shaman has to be nearby to use this ritual; with it, it's helpful to keep a trinket from the victim — a lock of hair, a doll, a shirt, etc. — as a focus for the dream.

[Each night the shaman performs the Dance successfully costs the subject one point of Willpower. When he reaches 0 Willpower, the poor guy is a nervous wreck, and may be driven to unusual or irrational acts. Like most dream medicines, these eerie rites are coincidental.]

Healing Slumber (*** Life, ** or **** Mind, ** or **** Spirit)

By drumming up a trance, the shaman lulls a wounded person to sleep. During his treatment spirit allies and the Dreamspeaker herself caress the patient's wounded body, soul and mind. Whatever ills the Art can cure are repaired while the subject sleeps peacefully, unaware of the straining shaman who eases his pain.

[Several variations exist. A simple Life 3/Mind 2/Spirit 2 ritual cures the body like normal healing magick, and brings good dreams and positive spirit energy besides. More advanced medicines (Life 3/Mind 4 and/or Spirit 4) are necessary to cure mental illness, spiritual possession or both. The "acceptability" of this healing medicine depends on how severe and how obvious the injuries were and how quickly they were cured.]

Spear of My Fathers (*** Matter, *** Spirit, ** Prime)

By molding the stuff of the spirit world into solid form, a shaman can form weapons, tools, barriers or other useful things. Although the name given refers to a weapon passed down through generations, variations can create anything the Dreamspeaker has the time and skill to construct.

[See *Mage*, pages 187 and 217, for the particulars of the spirit-to-matter transmutation. Forming simple objects is easy; a single Arete roll at difficulty 6 handles anything spear-sized or smaller with no moving or complex parts. Larger or more complicated objects require extended rolls and possibly the mortal skills (Repair, Technology, etc.) that it would take to build the item in "real life." Like other Umbral medicines, this ritual is coincidental, and it lasts for the usual duration of a spell.]

AUTHORS' NOTES

Shamans are real. While it is fine to play one in a game, do not presume that reading this work enables you to call yourself a shaman. Their road is long, arduous and extremely dangerous, and certainly not to be undertaken lightly. Pretending to spiritual awakening you do not have is both insulting and foolish. Near-death experiences are nothing to fool around with. If you feel Called, we suggest you contact a tribal elder and discuss your feelings.

— Jackie Cassada & Nicky Rea

SACRED WORDS (RECOMMENDED READING)

Many collections of folk tales and myths from Native American, Meso-American, African, Hawaiian and Australian traditions provide a wealth of material for understanding the cultures from which Dreamspeakers come. These are available in the folklore or religion sections of most libraries. In addition, a number of other specialized books have served as inspiration and resource material for this book:

- **Black Elk Speaks**, as told through John G. Neihardt. The definitive work on shamanism, as practiced by a Sioux who was cousin to Crazy Horse and present at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. An excellent study of the sacred way.
- **Carnival of the Spirit: Seasonal Celebrations and Rites of Passage**, by Luisah Teish. Despite an overt appeal to "New Ager," this offers a multi-cultural method of infusing daily life and special occasions with spiritual and mythic undertones.
- **Crying for a Dream**, by Richard Erdoes. Lavishly illustrated, this book looks at the world from the point of view of Native Americans, focusing on their ceremonies and beliefs, particularly those practiced by the people of the Plains and the Pueblo.
- **Dreamtime and Inner Space: the World of the Shaman**, by Holger Kalweit. Drawing on interviews with shamans from many cultures, this portrays the relationship between shamanism and the world beyond, particularly the symbolic and ritual death-rites of shamanic initiation and personal experiences.
- **Hawaiian Religion and Magic**, by Scott Cunningham. An extensive study of Hawaiian magic, including kahuna, mana and religious practices.
- **Introduction to African Religion**, by John S. Mbiti. This debunks the idea that Africans worship their ancestors. Investigating the traditions of many African nations, it concentrates on the Creator-god central to African religious belief and society.
- **The Native Americans: An Illustrated History**, by Turner Publishing. A great general view of American Indian life, and a must-read for anyone intrigued by Native Americans and their cultures. A related videotape series is also available.

- **Pre-Columbian Religions** (Holt History of Religion Series), by Walter Krickeberg, et al. This scholarly, somewhat dry overview of the religions and cultures that existed before the arrival of the Europeans provides a great deal of "factual" (i.e., archaeological and anthropological) information, though a distinct cultural bias permeates the work.

- **Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact**, by Vine Deloria, Jr. The author of *Custer Died For Your Sins* debunks preconceptions about such topics as the Bering Strait migration and the evolution of the Earth and its creatures. Enticing and amusing, it's a tonic for those who take their science as part of a "no-salt" diet.

- **Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime**, by Robert Lawlor. This presents a detailed and respectful explication of the Aboriginal world view. It has at its heart a sincere attempt to understand a way of life which has too long been ignored.

Many semi-biographical accounts of modern shamans also serve to illuminate certain aspects of tribal medicine and holistic forms of healing. Among these are *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*, by Malidoma Patrice Somé and *Sangoma: My Odyssey into the Spirit World of Africa*, by James Hall. *Shamans of the 20th Century*, by Ruth-Inge Hellze gives brief biographies of contemporary mysticks, including a kahuna and a Haitian houngan. *War of the Witches* by Timothy J. Knab explores the dark world of Mexican curanderos.

• Inspirational Music Artists

Shamanism is more intuitive than intellectual. The following musical artists and collections offer a variety of songs and sounds that evoke the mood of the spirit-road, from urban anger to joy to mystery. Enjoy!

- * *Between Father Sky and Mother Earth*
- * Douglas Spotted Eagle
- * King Sunny Ade and Oneness of Juju
- * Mickey Hart
- * Native Flute Ensemble
- * R. Carlos Nakai/Jackalope
- * Rage Against the Machine
- * Robbie Robertson and the Red Road Ensemble
- * *Thunderdrums* (Scott Fitzgerald)
- Bill Miller
- Blood of Abraham
- Ladysmith black Mambazo
- Honor: A Benefit for the Honor of the Earth Foundation.
- Horselips
- Rusted Root
- Sounds of the Earth* (Steve Roach, David Hudson & Sarah Hopkins)
- Speech/Arrested Development

VABENA

Guardians of the Mythic Threads



Written by: Nicky Rea, Sam Chupp and Lucien Dark



In Memoriam: Matthew Korteling

*Here and now
Long and loud
My heart cries out
And the naked bone
Of an ankle says,
"Don't walk away!"
Reach out your hands
I'm just a step away.
How in the world can I wish for this
Never to be torn apart?
Close to you 'till
The last beat of my heart.*

—Siouxie and the Banshees, "Close to You"

Grimmy misses you, my love!

—Krista



Credits:

Written by: Nicky Rea, Sam Chupp and Lucien Dark
Developed by: Phil Brucato
Edited by: Heather Bryden
Art Director: Richard Thomas
Layout and Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles
Art: Mark Jackson, Matthew Korteling, Andrew Mitchell
Kudelka, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Lawrence Allen Williams
Front cover Art: Michael W. Kaluta
Front and Back Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles

Special Thanks to:

Mark "Chainsaw Surgery" Rein•Hagen, for his delicate ghost-writing.
Stewart "von Allmen's Express" Wieck, for taking the name before tying the knot.
Sam "Sticky Buns" Chupp for that sugary, lightheaded felling he always gets...
Ben "Vexological Economist" Monk, for his scintillating lectures on finance.
Staley "Toast of the Town" Krause, for juggling Elric, Sonja Blue, and the host of horrors.
Rob "Spoke too Soon" Hatch, for thinking that he'd put the games behind him.
Mike "Woody" Krause, a Natural Born Salesman.
Wes "She's not Jamie" Harris, for his True Lies girlfriend.



4598 STONEGATE IND. BLVD.
STONE MTN., GA 30083
U.S.A.

© 1994 by White Wolf. All rights reserved. Reproduction without written permission of the publisher is expressly denied, except for the purpose of reviews. *Mage: The Ascension* and *The Verbena Tradition Book* are trademarks of White Wolf Game Studio. All names, titles, characters and text herein are copyrights of White Wolf unless otherwise noted.

"House Diedne" is a copyrighted property of Wizards of the Coast. The mention or reference to any other companies or products in these pages is not a challenge to the trademarks or copyrights concerned.

Due to mature themes and subject matter, reader discretion is advised.

Authors' Special Thanks to:

Jackie Cassada for sharing her insights and proofreading again and again...

Wayne Peacock, my online friend, for keeping me abreast of *Mage* developments and sharing his "Edge" with me.

The Wednesday night gaming group (Carla, Beth, Sherri, Jim, and Tony) for playing through the weeks of unAwakened mages without powers, which had so much to do with how this was written.

Teeuwynn, without whose encouragement I might have chucked the whole thing and given up writing.



Contents

Between the Worlds: Samhaine Eve (Prelude)	4
Birth Cry: Winter Solstice (Introduction)	12
Chapter One: Never Again the Burning	16
Imbolc/Candlemas (History)	
Chapter Two: Blessing the Fields	28
Beltaine Eve (Culture and Politics)	
Chapter Three: Aligning the Spheres	38
Midsummer Night (External Relations)	
Chapter Four: The Fruits of the Tree	44
Lammas (Character Templates)	
Appendix One: Ancient Wisdom	60
Verbena Magick	
Appendix Two: The Center of the Wheel	65
Famous Verbena	

Between the Worlds: Samhaine Eve (Prelude)

Issues not faced annually at Samhaine may need to be faced at our ultimate death, when we might not be strong enough.

— Paddy Slade, *Encyclopedia of White Magic: A Seasonal Guide*



Black hair flying about her face, Deborah stood defiantly before the woman seated in the old rocking chair. She resented being dragged here to this old woman's front porch, where she wasn't even allowed to sit down. Arion, Thorn and Tanith formed a ring around her, forcing her into a face-off with the crone. What kind of shit was this? The severe, cold wind at the heart of the Berkshires cut through her light jacket. Frowning at the witch woman's question, Deborah sneered "What do I want out of life? That's a pretty lame question. How about wealth and power for a start?"

Mother Celene gazed at the younger woman, then slowly smiled. Neither she nor the others needed heavy coats. Their powers kept them warm, though the wind souged through the evergreens and rattled the windows.

She could read frustration and bravado in the girl's stance, as well as fear and anticipation. The young ones never guessed how much she knew just from sensing their hormonal and chemical balances.

"Be still," she whispered, "Listen. Look. Tell me what you hear and see."

To Mother Celene the vibrant greens, darkening blue sky, and orange-red sun that set the clouds afire formed a glorious

panorama. The wind, the scritch of branches against her house, even the soft scrape of Thorn's shoe on the porch step were clearly audible. Mother Celene waited, hoping Deborah would conquer her feelings and truly consider the question. If she didn't, Mother Celene would teach her to understand true pain and fear.

Deborah decided she'd had enough of games. Arion had promised her knowledge and power. Everyone knew he claimed to be a practicing witch. She should have known better than to come here with him and his weird friends — especially on Halloween. She was beginning to get really uneasy. That always made her angry.

"I don't hear anything but the wind, which, by the way, is freezing me to death," she complained. "I see you, a weird mountain top, and a grungy old cottage." She paused for breath.

"This whole thing was a mistake." She turned to Arion, "Take me home now." Summoning as much authority into her voice as she could, she willed him into obedience. She felt terribly vulnerable. Arion smiled. Thorn raised an eyebrow; Tanith laughed. Her fear escalated. Halloween. Witches. Shit. Why hadn't she realized they wanted her for a sacrifice?

Mother Celene tapped Deborah on the knee with her cane. Deborah almost screamed. This couldn't be happening.

"Pay attention!" Mother Celene commanded. "You claim you want power, but you will not essay the simplest task. How should I teach one who has no will to learn?"

"Who made you God?" Deborah's anger, and relief at hearing she was to be taught, not sacrificed, coalesced into defiance.

"Better to ask, who could make you a goddess." Mastering her own annoyance, Mother Celene stood and grasped Deborah's shoulder.

"Since you will not answer my question, I shall tell you what I hear and see."

Deborah's shoulder began to throb painfully where the old woman grasped it, but she felt powerless to remove the hand or pull herself away. Mother Celene's eyes stared into her own; cold sweat trickled down between Deborah's breasts and traced a line along her spine.

"I hear the wind, yes. But I hear much more besides. Your blood sings through your veins and pumps through your heart with a rhythm like the sea crashing on a rocky shore. Breath rasps through your throat and bellows through your lungs and rushes out again. I hear eyes blinking, hair growing, the sounds of food making its way through your bowels, and perspiration sliding along your body.

I see your shivering. Your eyes change colors and the pupils dilate in a face pale as milk with cheeks reddened by the wind. Uncertainty, fear, the very life that pumps within you is clear to me. I know more of you than you could possibly believe."

The pain in her shoulder had grown like a smoldering fire. Deborah fought to jerk herself away, moving in slow motion. How could a bony old lady be that strong?

"Hurts, does it?" the old woman crooned. "That's because I'm affecting your nerve centers directly. I could as easily stop your heart or send a blood clot into your brain."

Deborah looked at her with undisguised terror. As she struggled in panic, she felt her muscles lock and realized she was trapped.

"Please..." she whispered.

The pain stopped. She fell to her knees as her muscles were released from their paralysis.

Mother Celene lowered her hand and smiled. "That was only a minor working."

Deborah licked her lips. Shivering, but no longer from the cold, she asked, "What was that?"

Mother Celene stroked the girl's raven hair while gazing serenely at the sunset. "That," she said, "was power!"

• • •



The poet is... a semi-divine figure who by combining magic, mythology and poetry may significantly influence society.

—M. C. Flannery, *Yeats and Magic, the Earlier Works*

Teague changed into his bardic costume. He clasped his deep blue velvet cloak with a silver brooch, picked up his lap harp and examined his reflection in the mirror. The clothes and harp looked great. His thin body, pocked face, brown eyes and long brown hair looked like they always did. Mundane. He hated himself for being so ordinary. Of course, he might look a little better were he still healthy.

Stroking a melody from his harp, he cheered himself with the thought that at least his music wasn't ordinary. He loved the old Irish and Scottish ballads and songs, and so did the people at the Renaissance Fair. All summer he wandered about the fair singing and telling old stories. They paid him a little. He made up the rest in tips from the tourists. He was glad to be playing the special Autumn Fair they were holding in honor of Halloween. He could use the money.

As he drove to the fair site, he hummed a tune and thought about the boy he'd met yesterday. His words still buzzed in Teague's brain.

"Why do you waste your energies trying to recapture a time that is gone? Come with me and I will show you how to make those times come again."

He'd just stared, dazzled by the boy's good looks and flattered the boy had shown an interest in him. But Teague had thought about what the boy had said. He wasn't happy living in a world where poets and dreamers have no place. If the boy came to the fair again, Teague knew he'd go with him, wherever he took him.

Teague was in the middle of "The Elphin Knight" when he became aware of the boy standing quietly off to his left. Blond. Gorgeous blue eyes and a smile to die for. How could he have forgotten his name? Robin. Teague ended the song before he reached the last verse. The other fairgoers didn't seem to notice, but Robin smiled. When everyone else was gone, the boy approached. "Hi again," Teague said, and thought to himself, *Wonderful opening!* What happened to the great poet? *Nerves*, he thought.

Robin smiled. "Have you decided?"

"Decided what?" He knew what Robin meant, but stalled for time as he tried to sort out his true feelings.

"Please, do not play games. If you wish to know the truths of the past, if you wish to help make the world what it could be, you must trust me and come with me now. I will not ask again."

"Give me a few minutes to think about it, okay?" Teague set his harp down near a maple tree. Just a week or so ago, the maple had been ablaze with color. Now its cracked, brown leaves fluttered in the wind. "I need to be by myself. I'll be back in a few minutes. Is that cool?"

Robin nodded. Teague walked away from the fair site, moving off farther into the trees to clear his head. He knew

what he wanted to do, but would it be worth the effort? Somehow, he just couldn't believe there might be something better for him elsewhere. On the other hand, how much longer did he have left?

He didn't see them until the first one grabbed him. "Meeting another lover boy out here, faggot?" The boy who held him looked about sixteen. Dirty jeans and a sweatshirt, greasy hair. The one who'd spoken was older and wore a black leather jacket. The third held a tire iron. His eyes fixed on Teague with unforgiving hatred. A girl, probably no more than fifteen, was twined around Black Leather Jacket. She grinned as Teague tried to free himself from the armlock Dirty Jeans had him in. "Why'n't we do him all the way?" she said to Tire Iron.

"Nah. Let's make him blow all of us."

Dirty Jeans shoved him down on the ground. "I ain't no fairy," he said, "and he might have AIDS or something." *Good guess*, thought Teague as he desperately tried to throw Dirty Jeans off. Black Leather Jacket strode forward and raised his booted foot. "Hold his hand out," he commanded. Dirty Jeans grasped Teague's right wrist, forcing his hand onto the leaf-covered dirt. Teague screamed as Black Leather Jacket stomped on his hand, grinding it underfoot. He felt the bones snap as white-hot agony raced up his arm and exploded inside his head. Tire Iron moved behind him and smashed the heavy bar into his lower back. Teague vomited up the meat pie he'd had for lunch.

"Son of a bitch!" cried Black Leather Jacket, "The bastard rolfed on my boots."

"Kill him!" screamed the girl. Dirty Jeans grabbed his hair and began pounding a fist into Teague's face. Teague felt his heart shudder and skip a beat. As he floated toward unconsciousness, he saw Robin emerge through the trees. The others, intent on the beating they were giving him, didn't notice the slender blond boy. They did notice his voice.

"In ancient Ireland the person of a bard was inviolate," he called clearly, "Release him."

"Another one. Get him!" screamed the girl.

Then the sound began. As Teague slid into blackness, he heard a piercing, horrid noise and realized Robin was singing. His tormentors clutched their ears and fell to their knees as the raging sound climbed to an unearthly scream. First one, then another fell into fits as blood poured from their ears and noses. When all lay still Robin whispered one word; "Banshee."

When he came to, Teague's head was cradled in Robin's lap. He blinked several times, but still saw Robin's hair, now a brilliant crimson, lifting and thrashing through the air as though blown by gale winds. Robin noticed his gaze and said, "Paradox. What I did was vulgar magick. This," he pointed to his hair, "will stop in a little while."

Magic? Though he still hurt, Teague felt able to stand. The throbbing in his hand had lessened. "Watch it," he said to Robin, "my blood...I have AIDS."

"I know." Robin helped him up. "But you don't have to."

Teague looked at those who had beaten him. They were still breathing, but their faces reflected excruciating pain. "What about them?" he asked.

"They'll live. Of course, they will never hear again. The price for failing to hear the cries of those who are different. Now they themselves will taste that prejudice. Let's be gone from here. We have a world to remake."

Something stirred inside him at Robin's words — something that had always known this time would come — uncoiled and flexed its power.

"Let's go," he said. He linked arms with Robin and walked away from the fair, hardly noticing that his hand felt fine. No one noticed their going.

• • •

We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us.

— Chief Seattle

Jon awakened to the shrilling of the phone.

"Yeah?" he mumbled, trying to make out the time in his darkened room. He gave it up as a lost cause and listened as Frances talked. *Damn them.* Another section had been designated for clear-cutting. They'd be moving people in for the logging operation in less than three hours. Didn't those morons realize they were destroying irreplaceable old-growth forest? They had to know. His group had been demonstrating on the property for weeks. *Some of those trees must be over two hundred years old! Couldn't they even take a break for Halloween?*

"Okay, I'll be there in about twenty minutes," he told Frances and wearily pulled on the clothes he'd discarded only four hours ago. He was still exhausted, but running on the energy his anger provided. He was tired of playing by all the polite rules.

He went down into the cellar and emerged with the tools he'd need — a bag of huge nails and spikes and a couple of sturdy hammers. Spiking the trees in strategic places sometimes caused injuries to those cutting the trees when their power tools hit the spikes. One such accident was usually enough to deter the cutters or to slow down work enough that the job became unprofitable. The trees would survive and the loggers would have to move elsewhere.

A mist rose through the trees as the sun burned off the early morning rain. It was still drizzling a little. Jon had just hammered his last spike into a magnificent old oak when he heard the shot. He turned to warn Frances and realized her body was sliding down the tree trunk, trailing a smear of blood in her wake. Half her head was gone. Looking into the eyes of the two men whose rifles now pointed at him, he read the story of his own death there. No doubt it would be explained as an unfortunate hunting accident. He ran.

Tearing through the trees, weaving among them and praying that he could outdistance the men on his trail, Jon misstepped and tumbled down a hill and into a clearing. Scrambling to his feet and limping onward, he expected to be shot in the back at any moment. As he passed the outer ring of trees surrounding a great red oak, a strong hand reached out and pulled him behind a broad beech. His rescuer was a sinewy, bearded man dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt. "So, you have come at last. I am Jarrol, but there is time enough to talk later." With these words, Jarrol stepped in front of Jon and commanded, "Watch!"

Crashing through the trees to the open hilltop where Jon had lost his balance, the two men paused at the crest of the hill. One of them looked up as thunder rumbled overhead. The other said, "C'mon. We've gotta find that guy. Let's look down there."

Jarrol called out, "Go away. Tell your bosses this land is off-limits. Tell them to cut no more trees if they value their lives."

As the men raised their rifles and took aim, Jarrol thrust his arms toward the sky. As the bolt of lightning grounded into the metal of both men's rifles, the accompanying thunder deafened Jon.

When Jon came around, he saw that Jarrol had already carried one of the bodies down the hill to the red oak which formed the center of the grove. Reaching beyond him, Jarrol raised a sickle and slashed the man's throat. Blood oozed from the cut.

"As you have taken from the life of the forest, so you shall return it," Jarrol intoned. Then he turned to Jon and smiled; "Welcome home."

• • •

*What was blood and darkness in an animal
Grew in us to soul and continues
To scream out loud as soul. And it screams for you.*

— Rainer Maria Rilke, *Song of the Women to the Poet*

Kamaria closed her eyes and let herself drift along the moonpath in the water. The waxing moon shone down upon the girl named in her honor. She felt buoyant and graceful in the water as she never did on land. This late in the year, the water was cold, but she reveled in its feel. Waving her arms through the water, she visualized herself as she wanted to be. Not a crook-backed, hunched-over girl, but a tall, straight-limbed beauty. If the moon were only made of wishes....

Not that she didn't have pretty features. Velvet brown skin with no blemishes, deep brown eyes with thick, dark lashes and long, black hair worn in cornrows were her most attractive features; Kamaria had never been accorded the honor of being tattooed or scarified like the other girls of the tribe. Given to the missionaries the day after her birth, she had been taken from Africa six years later. They were always just "the missionaries" to her, and had given her religious tracts rather than love. While they had always



been kind, they were not people who felt comfortable with children — especially deformed ones.

Trying to swallow her bitterness, she looked at the moon and called out, "Moon, Sister, shine your magical light down and change the way I am. It's my Halloween wish. I want to be a runner. I want to leap and dance. I want to be perfected!"

"Why?" Kamaria almost leapt out of the water when she heard the soft, masculine voice. Looking toward the sound, she saw a sweet-faced boy of about thirteen. He sat on the embankment, elbows clasped around his knees, regarding her with an air of expectant curiosity.

"Why what?" she asked.

"Maybe I should have asked *how* you want to be perfected," he replied.

She was suddenly, horribly conscious of the hump rising up between the straps of her bathing suit. She climbed awkwardly out of the lake and made her way to the robe she'd left on the embankment.

"I was just dreaming," she mumbled. Then she was angry. And hurt. Nowhere was far enough away that someone didn't intrude and spoil her magical moments when she pretended she was normal.

He cocked his head to one side, studying her with a dignity no thirteen-year-old ought to be able to assume.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to anger you. I thought I could help."

"How?" She fiddled with the robe's sash as if she could distract attention from her hump that way.

"You were invoking Luna, weren't you? You know, goddess of the moon, patron of lycanthropes and shapeshifters?" He looked quite serious and she found herself responding to his lack of comment on her awkwardness or deformity. She even smiled a little.

"Yes, I guess I was," she confessed.

"Then you'd like to learn how to change yourself? Did you really mean it when you said you were seeking perfection?" His eyes picked up the moon's glow. She took a step backward, suddenly not sure if she liked this chance meeting by moonlight. Her African heritage called out to her, whispering of demons and shapechangers. Her longing held her from running from this strange boy with the moon-bright eyes.

"I want to be healed," she said, and realized she was crying.

He came to her and placed his hand on her twisted flesh. "Whatever you can visualize, you can do," he said gently.

As he spoke, he changed. The sweet-faced boy was now an older, sweet-faced woman whose eyes welcomed her.

"Come with me. You have a lot to learn, but you will find healing — and perfection."

Black hand clasped in white, the moon sisters left the sacred pool.

• • •

I am purified and free.

And I will not allow you to ignore me.

I have brought you a gift.

It is all I have but it is yours.

My name is "I am living." I am here.

— Anna Lee Walters, Pawnee-Otoe, "I Have Bowed Before the Sun"

It never stops, he thought wearily as the truck full of young men roared by. Those inside it screamed with laughter as a bottle smashed into the dirt a few feet ahead of him. *Damn fools! They should know better than to do this when tourists were crawling all over the rez. Or maybe that's what caused it*, he thought. *They keep us drinking and doing drugs or gambling. Half the tribe is ready to sell our sacred ground to the developers and the other half can't stand up straight for all the poisons in their bodies. Our children die from lack of basic medical care, but the tourists come to see the dances and our "Great Indian Heritage" every year. They never seemed to see the squalor, just the feathers and beadwork.*

Like that young redhead going into the souvenir shop. She was probably on vacation, seeing the sights and patting herself on the back for basking in all this "Native American Culture!" Harvest festival, hell. They didn't even have a harvest — they were just trying to cash in on Halloween.

Grieving for a time he had never known, Takoda raged at his own lack of power. At school, he had done well enough to qualify for pre-med, but lack of money or a scholarship closed the door to medical school. The spirit within him was silent; Takoda could not be like his grandfather, a medicine man.

His grandfather had tried to train him, but Takoda just couldn't see or hear the spirits. On his vision quest, all he saw were mental images of food and water. He tried to tell his grandfather that he "felt" the wrongness in people when they were sick or hurt, but he had no talent for telling which spirit had brought about the disharmony. Kohana had been a great man, the last great shaman of his tribe. He never berated Takoda, but the sadness in his eyes spoke clearly enough. Now the old man was dead and Takoda wondered why he stayed here.

Brakes squealed and a woman's scream was cut short by a crash. He ran toward the sound. The shrill, hysterical screams of a small child rose above the tinkle of breaking glass. The truck that had held the young men lay on its side. Several groaning figures moved nearby. A small car, half buried by the truck, was buckled into an accordion shape. One door was open and a little blond girl lay on the ground, screaming. He could see the bone protruding through her arm. A blond woman was trapped behind the wheel,

pinned in place by the front of her small car. Other people were running toward the scene.

Takoda had the urge to just stop and let others deal with things. What could he do that they couldn't? Then he moved to help. Most of the young men seemed shaken up, but not badly hurt. The gods protect those too drunk to feel pain, he thought. He turned toward the mother and child. Aside from her broken arm, the child looked fine. Then his eyes met those of the child's mother and he felt her pain and fear. She was going to die, and she knew it. Painfully, she stretched her hand out to him, an instinctive gesture that said, "Don't let me die alone." He reached for her hand, anger and helplessness washing through him, but there was another, smaller hand in the way.

The redhead he had seen entering the shop gently moved herself between him and the woman. She turned to look at him, green eyes filled with arrogant command.

"Get a crowbar or something and get her out of here," she snapped.

"Uh...it won't do any good," he whispered fiercely, trying to keep the woman from hearing him. "She's not going to make it. Especially if we start trying to move her around. Let her die with some dignity."

"She won't die, if you'll just get to work and let me do the same. I don't have time to argue with you. Just do it!" She turned back to the woman, clasped her hand and said, "Now just relax. You're not going to die. You feel cold from the shock. You aren't bleeding as badly as you think. Head injuries always look worse than they are."

Wondering if he could have misjudged the extent of the woman's injuries, Takoda called for help.

For the next hour, he watched the redhead and marveled as the garage crew twisted and pulled at the wreckage. The ambulance arrived. They took the child to the county hospital, but agreed that Takoda could bring the woman in whenever she was freed.

At last the crew lifted the woman from the car, revealing a long scratch down her right leg. The head injury the redhead had treated could hardly be seen. He helped her move to his grandfather's old car which was parked nearby. The redhead tapped him on the shoulder as he was getting in and said, "I'll meet you at the hospital."

She came up to him in the waiting room. "You're Takoda, right?"

He wondered where she'd heard his name. "Yeah. Who are you?"

"I'm an old friend of your grandfather's. He told me a lot about you. I was sorry to hear of his death. My name is Sarah, by the way."

"He never mentioned you to me..." he began.

"But then, he wouldn't," she finished. "Let's go for a drive. I think you have some questions and I may have the answers you're looking for."

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.



"Somewhere I can tell you about healers who don't have to be doctors or medicine men. Healers like me." She chanced a look at him and saw dawning understanding.

"That woman. She was dying, wasn't she," he asked, "and you saved her."

She nodded.

"Will you teach me?" He had never been good at acting humble. She laughed at the strain in his voice as he tried to simulate humility.

"That's why I'm here. But I won't take you with me if you believe you're going to fail. You gave up on spirits and you gave up on getting into med school. This is all or nothing."

I was right, she is arrogant, he thought. But she has true power and she thinks she can teach me. With grim determination he said, "I won't fail, but you'd better be damn good."

• • •

God is alive. Magic is afoot...

— Buffy Ste. Marie, "God is Alive, Magic is Afoot"

Magic is alive. The Goddess is afoot...

— several thousand Goddess worshippers

Aileen ran from the cemetery, the wind drying her tears. Behind her she could hear the voices of shocked mourners as her father called after her. Kathy was dead. Her twin; her sister. Confidante and other half. Murdered. So Kathy had sneaked out and gone to a dance club. Big deal. Was dancing such a sin that she had to pay with her life?

Aileen had often questioned the strict rules which guided her family's life, but she had never before examined her beliefs. Had Kathy "flaunted" herself? Was she "asking for it" when she wore a short skirt and high heels? Nobody deserved what had happened to Kathy. Mutilated, raped, murdered — wearing high heels just didn't qualify as a reason for that.

Her parents tried to explain: Kathy had made herself a brazen woman. Though they grieved for her, she had not been pure when she died and had lost her place as one of the chosen. Somehow, Aileen just couldn't believe in a God who only had room for a chosen few, or one who repaid a minor transgression with cruelty and death.

She kept walking, not really noticing where she was going until she reached the park. She almost left when she saw the women gathered there. Some of them looked like dykes. Others were dressed in skirts and peasant blouses. One was wearing a robe and some sort of silver moon tiara. They were dancing and singing, thanking the Goddess for all her blessings.

Yeah, thanks for nothing, she thought. She watched the women moving in a circle dance and tried not to cry. She suppressed the urge to jump into the circle and scream. Laying her forehead against a nearby tree, she tried to steady her breathing. When someone touched her arm she screamed and jumped back.

"Don't touch me," she snarled.

The woman with the tiara studied her tear-streaked face and nodded.

"Would you like to join us?" she asked. "We're about to have cider and cakes. You'd be welcome, sister."

Aileen lost it at the word "sister." The strange woman pulled her into an embrace and let her cry for a minute, then stepped back and said, "Pain shared is pain diminished. Let us help you."

Aileen allowed herself to be seated in their circle. She drank cider and ate a morsel of cake. She listened to them talk and haltingly told them her story. Their sympathy helped some, and she realized she was enjoying their company. As they packed up to leave the park, Stargazer, their high priestess, took her moon circlet off and handed it to Aileen along with a card.

"Here. You look like you need this," she said, "and here's my card. If you need me, just call — any time. The Goddess doesn't stick to office hours."

She realized how late it had gotten as she walked home. The gaily costumed children who had thronged the streets were long gone, greedily counting their Halloween spoils. As the dark closed in, she walked faster, trying to keep to well-lighted streets. A BMW driven by a handsome, well-dressed young man pulled up next to her. He rolled the window down and said, "Miss, you shouldn't be out so late all alone. Can I give you a ride home?" She looked him over. Short hair, dark blue blazer, a ready smile that showed his braces; he looked okay. At the far end of the block a grizzled man in a long coat stepped out of an alleyway and stared at her blearily. "Thanks," she said. When she was settled in, he pulled away from the curb. Then he snapped the door locks shut and pointed a gun at her.

"Just be cool," he ordered, "and you won't get hurt." He turned down a dark alleyway while she sat frozen, fear and shock whispering through her. He opened his door as the car rolled to a stop and grabbing her arm, pulled her across

the seat toward him. "Get out, bitch. Don't make me use this on you," he said, raising the gun slightly. She almost gave in. Then she remembered the strange abrasions the coroner had found on Kathy's body, bite marks which could have come from someone wearing braces! As he pulled her around and opened the trunk of the car, she screamed and turned in his arms, biting and scratching. He yowled as she chomped down on his thumb, then dropped her as she slammed the trunk lid on his other hand, the one with the gun. She ran as he struggled to pull his hand free. That was when she realized she still had his thumb in her mouth.

When she finished retching, she carefully picked up his thumb, wrapped it in her scarf, and ran the rest of the way home. Her father looked up from the television as she slammed the door behind her. Her mother emerged from the kitchen. Her mother's look of horror told her that the man's blood had drenched her face and chin.

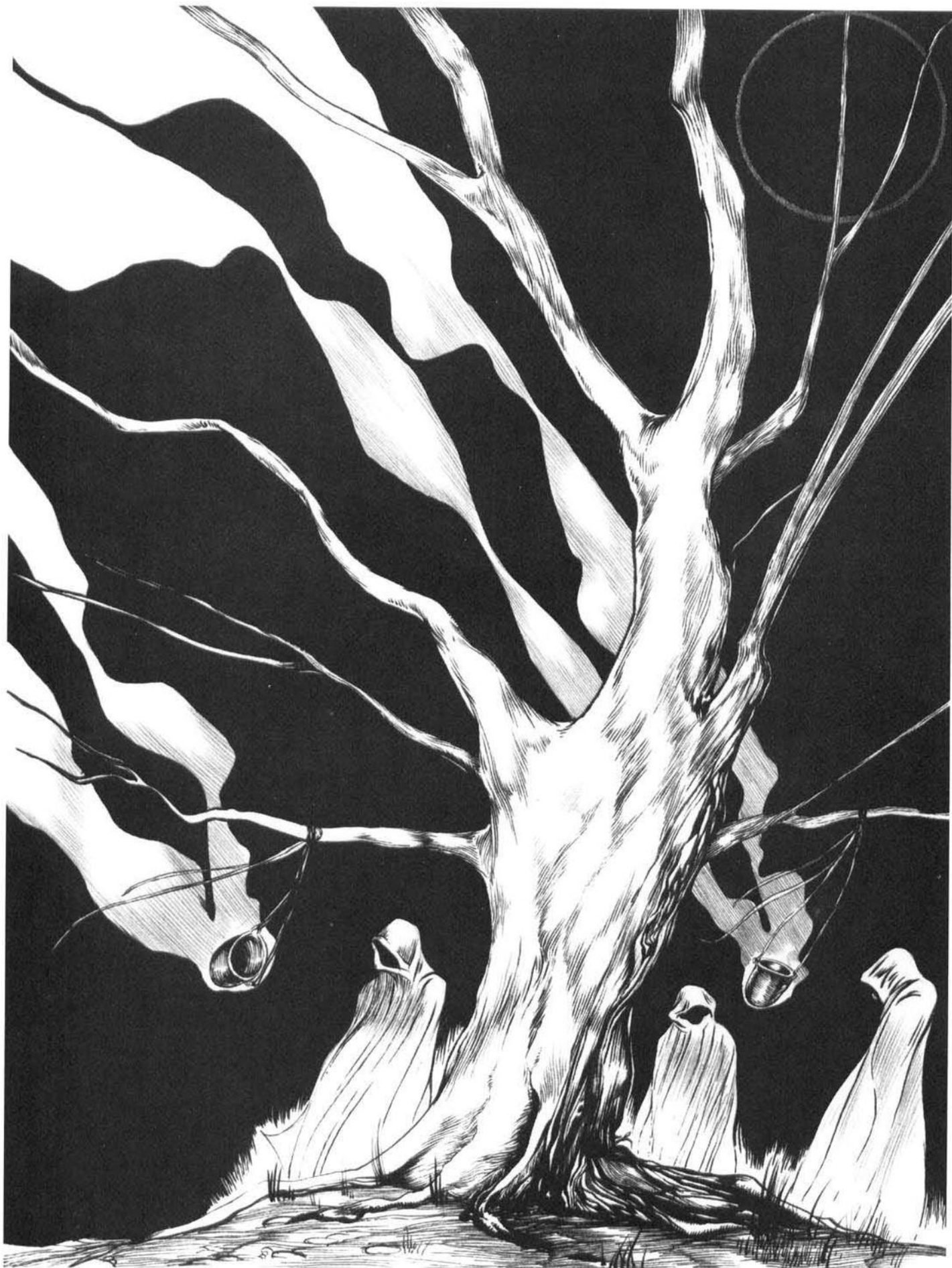
Her father came over to her. She thought he was going to wrap his arms around her and hug her. The open-handed blow to her cheek rocked her backwards. She stared at him in horror.

"In the name of God, what did you think you were doing today? You embarrassed both me and your mother in front of every friend we have. My boss was there. He thinks I have a lunatic for a daughter!"

Staring at the bruise on her mother's face which matched the one she would have, she backed to the door.

"Maybe he's right," she said, slipping outside. "Maybe that's exactly what I am." She slammed the door behind her and ignored his frantic shout as he called after her. Pulling Stargazer's card from her purse, Aileen brandished the severed thumb in the air.

"A Lunatic. Goddess nut. You betcha. About damn time."



Birth Cry: Winter Solstice (Introduction)

*Sure as the cock crows at morn
The world in stillness keeps
The secret of babes to be born*
— Loreena McKennitt, "Courtyard Lullaby"



Deborah awoke in darkness. Naked. Tied. The cold played over her body, hardening her nipples and raising goosebumps on her skin. Where the hell was she?

• • •

The gag cut into Teague's mouth as his head sagged forward. His hands weren't asleep, they were tied. He hardly noticed the cold. He always seemed to be cold these days.

• • •

Jon was pissed off. *Trust me, he says. Now here I am trussed up like a Christmas turkey.* Jon silenced his breathing for a moment and heard distant chanting.

• • •

The blindfold bothered Kamaria, that and her nakedness. Why were they doing this (whoever they were)? Tears of shame ran down her face. Why were they exposing her humped back this way?

• • •

Takoda tasted the remains of the drug in his mouth. He tested his bonds and worked at the gag. He was freezing. *Did I fail somehow? Am I unfit? Or is this a test, a vision quest?*

• • •

Aileen awoke screaming as her "friend" with the braces loomed over her. She screamed as he brandished the electric carving knife he'd used on Kathy. "Where's my thumb?" he roared.

Aileen awoke. Tied, gagged, naked, blind, she began to scream.

• • •

A sliver of light penetrated the blindfolds as others entered the shed. A woman's voice announced, "You are here for our Winter Solstice rites. Do not struggle. Trust and learn." Blankets were draped around them and they were walked out into the snow. Stumbling along, they were led in a circle, then pushed down into straw. Their blindfolds and gags were removed, and their bonds loosed. They

stared at a circle of lighted white candles surrounding gnarled tree. A woman dressed in white stood beside the tree, a large pile of straw next to her. An enormous red candle burned before her. Around the circle stood dark-robed men and women. At four points were set colored candles — yellow, red, blue and green. Next to each in turn stood a man in yellow holding a wand, a man in red holding a sword, a woman in blue holding a cup, and a woman in green holding a circlet.

The woman in white lifted her arms and spoke; "We stand in the sacred circle of the Mother, whose child will be born this night. Let us partake of her gifts."

She moved enough straw aside for them to see a ewe lying among the tree's roots. The ewe's distended belly rippled and she bleated with pain. The priestess motioned for them all to come forward.

Hours later, cramped and frozen, they stirred. The lamb which had struggled to be born turned to nuzzle its mother. The priestess' robes were stained crimson with the ewe's blood and soaked with her own sweat. She motioned them to go, saying, "The rite is ended. Go from this place freely and of your own will."

The others led them into the house. Frozen toes and fingers thawed and ached in the warmth of the living room fire. Warm clothing was brought for them and hot cider pressed into their hands. Delicious smells emanated from the kitchen. The feast was ready.

• • •

The priestess, no longer clad in her soiled robe, sat at the head of the table.

"Do any of you know why we just did what we did?" she asked.

"Do you mean birthing the lamb or kidnapping and torturing us?" Deborah demanded.

"It was a test." Jon said to Deborah. Takoda nodded; "Yes, a test, but also symbolic."

Aileen volunteered; "It was a rite to the Goddess." Teague nodded at the priestess. "I've heard that wisdom comes with listening. So..." he smiled, hoping she wouldn't be offended.

"Birth is a miracle," she replied. "It is the beginning of a new life. There is joy at such a beginning, but there is also pain and blood, tears, perspiration. The fluids of life. We can never know joy without sorrow, pleasure without pain, for one completes the other."

Each new life brings us another chance to attain Ascension. Each of you is a new child who holds the future of our Tradition in your hands. You have come from the womb where you were silent, blind, naked and tied to the umbilical cord. We have cut you free. Now you are new-born. Learn of us, and join with the Verbena."

Teague asked. "Where's Robin?"

"None of those who first found you and brought you to us are here," she answered. "I am Rhianna Flamedancer. I

shall be your teacher in the days to come. Do not worry. You will see your other friends again."

"They aren't my friends. They said they'd teach me power." Deborah challenged Rhianna.

Rhianna studied the younger woman. "I see. You're one of Mother Celene's?"

"She says she's the head witch, if that's what you mean."

Rhianna paused in thought. "Child, I would extend to you the chance to leave that one's Path. There are many differing Paths open to the Verbena. You need not choose one so filled with pain and violence."

Deborah sneered, "Why? What are you going to teach me, moondancing?"

"Screw you," Aileen heard herself say before she knew she was going to speak, "I 'moondance' as you call it. My sisters *care* about me. Just because you're twisted...." She broke off as Teague raised a hand.

"Peace. Pax. Enough. We aren't here to fight." He gestured for Rhianna to continue.

The priestess studied Deborah for another moment, then said, "Perhaps it would be best for me to give you a little background on who we are and what we're about. We'll talk after dinner."

• • •

Nature was changeable when the world was young and magic still at play.

— *The Enchanted World: Spells and Bindings*

Rhianna composed herself and began; "You may have learned parts of this before. Be patient. We will cover at least some things you don't know..."

You may have heard us called many things: witches, wiccans, pagans, new agers, druids, goddess freaks, and probably scores of others I can't remember right now. We are more and less than all of those. Some of us may espouse one or more of those philosophies, but we are something else independent of and beyond those realities. Some Verbena honor the Goddess, but not all Goddess worshippers are Verbena. And some Goddess worshippers might be surprised by how literally and savagely the Verbena among them believe in the old ways.

We most definitely are *not* Satanists! Most of us don't believe in Satan and, in any case, summoning and communing with spirits is not our primary Sphere of magick. Nonetheless, fools throughout history have insisted upon linking nature religions and magick with devil worship. Arguing with such ignorance is useless. I can only hope that changing peoples' perceptions of what is real and good will eventually eradicate that destructive and dangerous belief.

Now that I've explained what we aren't, let me explain what we are. We are the eldest. We remember when we sprang from the Pure Ones and created the magick that others would later adopt. We are the light and the darkness, the sacred within the carnal. We accept the agony inherent



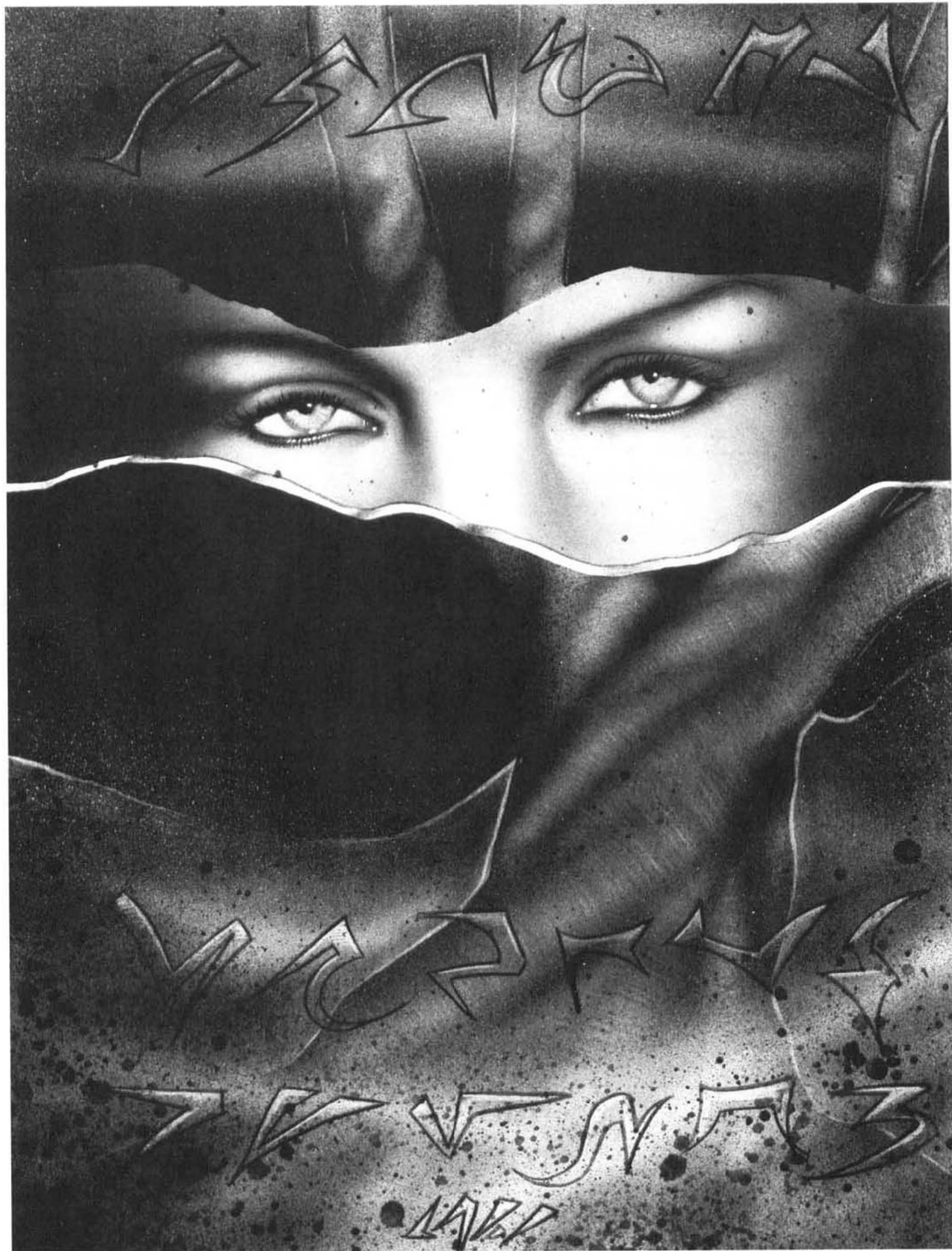
in the ecstatic and we welcome the great cycle. We know the wheel will turn from birth to death to birth again. Standing beneath the branches of our World Tree, we are the seeds from which new trees will grow. We are gardeners who water the roots and prune the branches that wither. We are the tree itself, each of us a root, trunk, branch, leaf or fruit. We are Life.

The Verbena are one of nine magickal Traditions. But only we hold the true knowledge of the nature of magick and reality. Through that knowledge, we can mold reality, changing the world and ourselves. The word 'impossible' does not exist for us. The other Traditions are joined with us because they, like we, do not accept the limitations imposed on us by the current consensual reality. While we do not always agree with one another, we *do* agree that we must stand against the evils of the Technocracy.

Paternalistic religions that declare women evil and strip us of power over our lives or bodies; the Inquisition; those who ushered in the Industrial Revolution with its brutal labor conditions and deadly smoke; those who pollute our rivers, contaminate our land, denude our forests; the warmongers; and the drug dealers — all are our enemies. Consider how alienated most people are from their bodies, how their minds are wrapped about with scientific gibberish disguised as ultimate truth. All this can be laid at the feet of the Technocracy. They would enslave us all to a static world ruled by their 'scientific laws.' Every day we work to liberate the world from the constraints of their worldview.

You must fight them by Awakening. Each of you has an Avatar, an inner self. When you become aware of and interact with that Avatar, you are Awakened. You can use your Avatar to learn magick. Sleepers, the majority of people in the world, are those who are unaware of their Avatars. We want to Awaken them all. That is Ascension. It is perfecting your understanding of the all. When someone reaches Ascension, everyone has a better chance of Ascending. Our lives are a journey we take to perfect ourselves.

Most Verbena undermine the Technocracy quietly, rather than force outright battles. We do not use the flash and bluster other Traditions embrace, but work subtly with the very essence of Life. Small changes grow and spread until they become the norm. The wheel turns. We survive and adapt, incorporate, and prevail."



Chapter One: Never Again the Burning Imbolc/Candlemas (History)

Verbena? Don't call me Verbena, boy. We could've just as easily been called Damiana, or Motherwort, or Valerian. Verbena is an herb that causes you to sweat and throw up. If you must call me something, call me Adept, or Wyckcae, or Aeduna. Or just shut up and save your sweet words for someone who gives a damn.

— Sam Haine, Verbena Master



Talien grinned and motioned the new apprentices to enter his jumbled bedroom and find seats on the bed, floor, or at the computer table.

"Actually, Verbena is the Latin name for Vervain. Romans used it to consecrate their temples. It was an ingredient in love potions and a supposed deterrent to witches.

The Christians thought it was used to staunch Christ's wounds as he hung on the cross. Verbena isn't rare and it's pretty plain looking, but people throughout history have relied on it as a cure-all, a miracle plant. Since we always get tagged as healers or herbalists, the name seemed appropriate. It doesn't work for everything, by the way. At least, not since the Technocracy took over.

I'll start by telling you I'm called Talien. That's not my real name, but then, names have power. Don't give your name away lightly."

"Yes, Obi-Wan," joked Teague.

"You have a computer?" Jon asked.

"Yeah, why not? I use it to organize my Book of Shadows, such as it is, and to keep my historical facts straight. Did you know there's a pagan BBS on the net? A lot of us black sheep like to get together in our own virtual reality and reclaim a few of the old Mythic Threads."

"Black sheep?" Kamaria looked interested.

"Yeah. Technopagans, like me. Most of the others don't consider me a true Verbena. They're convinced I'm an undercover Virtual Adept spying on them. But they certainly don't mind how organized I am, and they let me teach history. That's my real function. I'm a bard, a loremaster."

"So get to the point." Deborah stared through him.

Talien made a mock bow. "As you command, lady fair, but since it is the festival of Imbolc, I implore you to let me do so in honor of the Earth Mother. You may not have noticed yet, but the days are lengthening and spring is near. The Celts used to honor Brigit, goddess of fire, fertility and poetry at this time of year.

Just to confuse things, tomorrow is Candlemas. It's a Roman celebration in honor of Demeter. They used to light candles for her because she sought her daughter Persephone by candlelight. If you don't know that story, you'd probably better go back to Mythology 101. I like to think of both rites as a search for truth. Kind of like the tarot card with the hermit holding up the lighted lantern. Anyway, since Imbolc is associated with enlightenment and truth, what better time to teach you what we know of our past. So let me begin..."

"About time," spat Deborah, followed by a "Shhh," from everyone else...

"Let me say this: what you will hear is the truth as I know it. I will not willingly lie to you. My words mean nothing and everything. What you are about to hear is a lie. When you understand that, you will know what it is to be a mage.

We Verbena are the oldest Tradition. The Dreamspeakers are our closest cousins among the Traditions, but they were born from the fringes of our magick. We knew the original Pure Ones in their unsullied form. The Pure Ones gave the gift of blood and flesh to humanity, and shapers of their kind took on flesh and blood to guide the newborn living beings. These Bodhisattva-like Avatars mated with their charges, and the blood of the Pure Ones was mixed with that of humanity. From that wild blood, which spread across Africa, Central America, Europe and Asia, came those who today follow the path of shapeshifting through magical manipulations of the body."

Living Time: Visions



*Minna loushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.*

— W. B. Yeats, "The Cat and the Moon"

She stretched her rippling muscles and stood, jaws gaping as she caught their scent on the wind. They would be here soon, tracking her. Beastwoman they called her. Man-eater. Panther-goddess. Still, for all their cleverness, they did not know which woman she might be. She entered the sliding shadows of the jungle. Her green-gold eyes changed as her dark-vision found focus. The purity of her grace, her insistent hunger, and the thrill-fear of the hunt merged into an ecstatic whole. I am the divine huntress, her inner voice said, and we are one. The blood which caked her jaws bespoke the primordial, carnal nature she had chosen to embrace.

The beaters moved through the forest, clashing spears and whirling chewed leather noise-makers. They hoped to drive her before them so the warriors of the tribe could battle her on ground of their choosing. She leapt upward along a slanted branch and disappeared into the lower canopy. As they passed beneath her, she snuffled, tasting their blood scent and sweat. The clashing hurt her sensitive ears. Annoyed, she clawed at the branch.

As the chief tracker stopped and examined the claw marks on the slanted branch, she focused her will and began the transformation. By the time two of the warriors began climbing the tree, spears thrust before them, she was a glorious flash of color ascending on new wings. By the time they reached the

branch where she had lain in wait for them, she was back at the river with the other women. She stood tall, lithe and proud, while her changing eyes laughed.

• • •

"Kamaria?" Talien was waving a hand in front of her face as the others stared curiously. "Are you alright?"

No, I'm not alright, she wanted to scream. My perfect panther body, my wings, they are gone! I am here, alone. I am deformed. No primitive voice sings within me. She hunched over and tried to hide her back against a pillow.

"I'm fine," she answered.

"Well, some people say I'm boring, but that's the first time I've ever knocked someone out at the very start of a lesson!" Talien smiled. But his eyes spoke to hers and said, "I know you, panther-goddess. I see the truth of you that you do not yet know."

Aileen stroked her hand and whispered, "If you don't feel well, we could do this another time."

Kamaria nodded, touched by her kindness.

Takoda stared at her. *She had a vision*, he thought. *Does she know how lucky she is?*

"If we're through coddling her, can we get on with this?"

Jon glared at Deborah. "Were you born a bitch or did you have to take lessons?" he asked. Teague strummed a note on his harp and said, "To continue...?"



The Roots

*I heard an old voice say
'Don't go far from the land
The seasons have their way
No mortal can understand.'*

— Loreena McKennitt, "Courtyard Lullaby"

"To continue. From the blending of Pure Ones and humanity came the Wyck. The Wyck, who could bend fate and shape life to their choosing, were the first, Primordial Verbena. Great shaman who needed neither food nor sleep, who didn't know death, and who could heal afflictions with a touch, the Wyck often wandered into a human encampment, stayed a few days, and left again to live apart. It was said that those who crossed them died soon thereafter. Verbena tradition holds that the Wyck brought the gifts of fire, planting, wine, calendars and even written language to humanity...

In the civilizations of Sumer and Egypt, and later in Athens, Rome and Constantinople, fertility religions arose. Known as mystery cults, most had similar stories or common threads. These stories told of life, death, and rebirth or renewal which bespoke a kind of immortality. In Egypt, Isis gathered the severed parts of Osiris to restore him to life; in Greece, Dionysus' death and rebirth as the son of the fertility goddess Semele sparked an orgiastic cult in which wild dancing, overindulgence of every kind, and free-flowing drink led to an inevitable "re-creation." Children born nine months after these revels were considered to be under Dionysus' special blessing.

I spoke of Demeter and Persephone's story that explained the renewal of Spring. The Romans honored Cybele, a fertility goddess associated with the moon, change and flux. She had three aspects — Maiden, Mother and Hag — and her counterpart, the god, changed as well. He won the hand of the Maiden and became her consort, then was sacrificed and his body laid out by the Hag. Finally, he was reborn as a son to the Mother from his union with the Maiden. In those days magick was not yet confined, so who is to say the stories were not true, the god-beings not real? Who is to say that sacrifices made to those gods in times of scarcity did not work some sympathetic magick to bring back the sun from its winter sleep or revitalize the earth with living blood?

• • •

She crumbled the clods of earth between her fingers and looked up at the elder. The people stood patiently, just at the edges of the field. Holding their pouches of seeds and their planting sticks, they awaited the decision of the priestesses.

The elder extended a hand and helped her stand. "You know what must be," she said.

The younger woman nodded her head, and they walked back to the people.

"Not today," the elder said, motioning them to disperse.

Tilting her head back to gaze at the clear blue sky, the younger priestess made a quick prayer to the Goddess to send rain. The land had lain without moisture for far too long. Usually the spring rains came early. This year, no clouds had covered the sky all spring. Grass and trees, bushes and the few crops that began to bud were all brown and withering. They had almost exhausted the few, weak streams and ponds nearby. They would need to know soon if they had to abandon their home and search for a new one.

The chieftain stood a little apart. He waited until his people had gone, then turned to the elder priestess.

"Mother?"

"Something has upset the balance," she replied, "We have been too greedy. We have not given thanks to the Mother, and we have been lazy."

He nodded. "I will tell them that we must all go without food and water today. Perhaps the Mother will hear our plea."

When he was gone, the elder turned to the younger priestess and said, "He is a fine man."

"He is your son," she replied.

"And a good husband to you," the elder woman continued.

"I will always honor him." The elder searched the younger woman's face for signs of her feelings. When she was satisfied that the sadness she found was matched by determination, they returned to the village.

Though they had eaten and drunk nothing throughout the day, priestess and chieftain celebrated the Mother's love that night. She clasped him to her, running her hands along his muscled body, tasting his sweat mingled with hers, as their bodies moved as one in the ancient dance. When she felt he was satisfied, when her magick told her that she now carried his seed within her, she pulled forth the ritual knife and slashed once, then again.

The young priestess rose. Clad only in her long, brown hair and her husband's blood, she grasped the bowl which had caught most of the hot blood and ran to the fields. Reverently, she danced and sprinkled the blood over the lifeless ground. Over the stony earth she passed and sang and screamed her pain.

Blinding light illuminated the fields. The blood-drenched woman danced and laughed, then knelt and wept as thunder rolled across the sky and rain began to fall.

• • •

Aileen's crazed laughter was followed by a scream. Tears ran down her face. Talien silently handed her a tissue. Deborah snorted in disgust. Teague moved to put a comforting arm around her.

"I...saw myself. Like in a dream when you aren't yourself, but you know it's you." Aileen almost whispered. She was shaking. "I killed my husband. I had to, to end a drought. It seemed so sensible at the time. I mean, it sounds horrible, but it worked."

"Hey, you can kill them all for all I care," smirked Deborah.



Kamaria ventured, "That's what happened to me. Like a dream, but not a dream."

"A vision," said Takoda.

Jon stared at Deborah, silently daring her to say anything more, but she gave him a superior smile and leaned back.

"Don't be too surprised at your reactions," soothed Talien. "You may be beginning to commune with your Avatars and get glimpses of a sort of universal shared consciousness, or you may be experiencing your past lives."

"Reincarnation?" asked Aileen.

"Why not? Not too long ago, you didn't believe in magick either. Also, don't underestimate the power of a true bard. There are certain harmonic frequencies and voice tones which can cause visions or hypnotize a receptive subject." Takoda sat forward attentively.

The Shaping of the Tree

With one wish we wake the will

Within wisdom.

— Dead Can Dance, "Song of Sophia"

"We were talking about fertility religions. Similar themes can be found in the old religions of India, Central America, and North America." Talien glanced at Takoda. "Your Mother Earth, Father Sky, and Rainbow Woman, to name a few, are all part of the same pattern. What is a rain dance but a fertility rite? Who is the Mayan maize god but the Corn King, the consort of the Goddess?"

The Wyck raised their children to follow the path of the Pure Ones. These mages, whom the Tradition called Aeduna, were the priestesses and priests of their cultures. They were counsellors, midwives, healers, apothecaries, astrologers, record-keepers, arbiters and philosophers: they argued with Socrates and established the secret Bacchanalian blood cults and the Eleusinian mysteries. Through their position in society, they held political as well as social power, and their mystical abilities enabled them to influence long-term policy. Since royal blood was traced from mother to child, and the Aeduna were the record-keepers, they were able to prune a royal family tree or direct its seed in a profitable direction.

At some point, the Dreamspeakers split from the Verbena. Where we saw Life to be revered in all things, Dreamspeakers saw the spirits of the natural and supranatural world. Those of us among the Verbena who pray to the Goddess pray to our inner vision of the creative and destructive force of the Tellurian. When we use the Sphere of Life, we manipulate the energies inherent in all living things. To Dreamspeakers, the Goddess is but a greater spirit and the life within living things proves that each is inhabited by a spirit. It's a subtle difference, but an important one.

Most Native Americans follow the way of the Dreamspeakers. Almost all end up as shaman, medicine men, or witch doctors. All of them have one thing in common — they deal with the spirit world. Before the Inquisition, the differences between Verbena and Dreamspeaker were not always apparent, and even today, there are strong ties between the two Traditions.

During the early dark ages, the Aeduna became wanderers, their old temples and ancient knowledge lost, their political clout dwindled. They began teaching anyone who had the barest glimmer of the Blood, spreading their knowledge and wisdom through a runic system that served as a guide for mnemonic enhancement. Despite these runes, most knowledge was handed down orally through lorekeepers.

Several Wyck had spent much time in what would later become Scandinavia. During the Norse, Saxon and Angle invasions of the area now known as France and Britain, the Verbena's ancient Wyck roots were nourished as Viking and Celtic beliefs, rituals, stories and practices merged. This mingling began long before the invasions themselves; during the Roman occupation, many Aeduna crossed the seas on both sides. When the cultures themselves crossed swords, long after the Romans had gone, the roots of our Tradition were watered with blood..."

• • •

The sea lashed the coast, raging at the cliffs it could not climb. He stood at the end of the promontory waiting for inspiration. They would come soon. He must be ready. The warriors were adorned. The rites had been performed. Weapons lay close at hand. All was in readiness except for him.

Gray skies lowered over him, flowing with the brisk, cold wind. The smell of the coming storm overpowered the scents of salt spray and sea wrack. He pulled his mantle closer and began to chant.

The gray standing stones which served to tell of the movements of the stars towered over him. The wind whipped and thrashed about them, and whispered incantations in its sighing voice. Head bowed, he stood beneath the capstone in the center of the circle. Leaves blew around him and soft rain pattered on his head as thunder grumbled distantly.

"I hear you, old ones," he said quietly. "I know your secret names and the patterns of your growing. I have learned the ancient lore and the wisdom of my elders. I have studied the battles and memorized the verses. Why can I not make my own? They all depend on me, now. The old ones are all gone. The last of the great druids has surrendered to death and I am the only lorekeeper for my people. I am the last."

The young bard wept for a dying world, but when he came down from the sacred stones, he smiled and touched the warriors' shoulders in reassurance. Moving to the king, the bard blessed him. They were ready. From across the hills, they could hear the enemy marching, clashing swords on shields as they moved forward in their ordered rows.



He gave the signal and the warriors started forward. He moved ahead, and began to chant. As he saw the invaders, all fear fell from him.

In the old days, it often chanced that the strength of one bard's verses was sufficient to cause the other to surrender or agree to a truce without a battle. These cowardly Romans did not know enough to send their own bard to meet him, so the challenges could not be given properly. They lacked knowledge of the old ways and profaned the ground upon which they walked. The verses he hurled at the Romans blackened and felled them as they marched. For every one he killed, another stepped forward. Battle was joined, and he sang:

We are the inheritors, the wise, the Aeduna.
Into our hands Life has been given.
We, who know the seasons.
We, who guard the secrets.
Our learning is as old as earth and sea.
We are fire and water, earth and air.
Our blood is of the sacred Blood of the Wyckcae.
We shall spill blood this day, ours and our enemy's.
Blood
Blood which is water
Water in the ocean
Ocean-birther life
Life that lives
In blood.

His ecstasy ended as the short, broad sword pierced his heart.

• • •

Teague gasped and sat forward. The sheer power of the vision both repulsed and thrilled him. Deborah stood up and headed for the door.

"Call me when we get back to business," she said. Aileen patted Teague's back. Kamaria squeezed his hand.

Jon shrugged apologetically. "Wonder who's next?" he said.

"I will be," Takoda breathed, so quietly that no one heard his wistful longing.

Talien stood up. "That's it for now," he said. "You need time to digest what you've heard. We'll meet again tomorrow."

• • •

They gathered in his room the next morning. Kamaria smiled at Deborah and said, "I've been thinking about my vision, and you know what?"

"Do you think you're speaking to someone who cares what you think?" asked Deborah.

Kamaria continued, "I said, do you know what? I don't like your attitude, girl. Lay your tongue on me again and you just might find you've caught hold of a panther. Fair warning."

Jon looked both surprised and pleased.

Talien stood up, "Enough," he said. "We have things to do. If you have difficulties with one another, leave them outside this room..."

The Melding of the Arts

Trees so tall and proud

Forest so grand

How much longer will they stand

Will they stand

— Maire Brennan, "Voices of the Land"

Back to history. We ended with the merging of the ways. So. There was a sharing of old knowledge with new. Hermetic influences from Rome and Greece and the highly ordered Qabbalistic influences of the Hebrew peoples merged with the Verbena craft.

The result of this exchange of wisdom was that the Aeduna and the Wyck merged to form the Wyckcae of Italy, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, France, Britain and Ireland. All across the land the shared wisdom of the runes, the forms, the spells, the charms that had been passed down for generations now were given to a new kind of Verbena — the old wise woman in the woods who offered herbs for sickness and who drove away dark faeries, the cunning man who knew songs for the hunt and could carve arrows straight so they would pierce deep. Like the Wyck, these wise people knew about healing and life. Like the Aeduna, they were midwives, record-keepers, rememberers and arbiters. Many more traditions sprang up as magick grew and changed and adapted to new environments. We developed several disciplines of magic, which would later be called 'Spheres:' Forces, Matter, Mind, Prime, and Correspondence were all important, but we were most concerned with Life, for without Life, none of the others are possible."

• • •

The tree towered above him, its gnarled roots trailing down the embankment like grasping fingers. He washed himself in the clear pool that fed its roots. He lay back in the shallow water and gazed at the intertwining branches overhead. They stretched and yearned in all directions. Absently, he picked up an acorn which had fallen into the pool and thought, "I have not felt this young in many seasons."

When he felt cleansed and at one with the world, he stepped from the pool. The attendants were there to drape soft cloth about his body. A simple robe was all he needed. He held the acorn as he walked toward the sacred grove, weighing its life potential. Smiling, he let it drop, whispered "May you arise to shade my son," and entered the grove.

His brothers were waiting for him. Moving forward, he clasped them in turn, greeting and thanking each for attending the festival. They sat. Each took a barley cake, symbolic of the bounty of the land, and ate it. They washed it down with barley beer, then all stood and formed a circle.

In the center of the circle, the great oak, lifetree of the tribe, held reign. At the tree's foot a young man, strong-limbed and



handsome, thrashed in the throes of fever and cried out as the wise ones came near.

He knelt down beside the young man and placed a hand upon his brow. "Be still, my son," he said, "You will not suffer long now." He turned to the others. "I am ready."

They tied the rope about his neck and threw the other end over a sturdy branch. He looked at his brethren for the last time. "For the life of my son," he said and closed his eyes. They pulled the rope until he hung from the tree; they then chanted for the renewal of life. As he jerked and kicked, two grabbed his flailing arms and slashed them with their sickles. His lifeblood ran down, splattering the wise ones, the tree and his son. As the blackness took him, he thought he saw a golden light streaming from his own body to the body of his son. Content that his sacrifice would be enough, he whispered one word; "Awaken."

...

Jon opened his eyes when Aileen poked him. "Fall asleep?" she asked.

"Was it another vision?" asked Takoda. Jon nodded.

"So why aren't you screaming like everybody else?" Deborah asked. Takoda scowled at her. "Do you never think of anything but pain?" he asked. She looked away.

"I was a willing sacrifice. Somehow, I was transferring my life to my son, who was dying. But it was symbolic too."

Teague asked, "Do you want to tell us the whole story?"

"Do not," said Takoda. "The vision is yours. You must interpret it and use it to guide your life."

Kamaria nodded her agreement. "Keep it for yourself. If there is a need to share it, tell it to us then."

Talien smiled. "You're learning," he said. "Even within the Verbena, there are secrets we all keep. We don't all agree with or confide in one another. Even within cabals there are personality clashes, and no one but a fool gives away all her secrets. That said, let's continue..."

The Burning

When will I see

An end to destruction and woe

— Clannad, "Anam"

During the Inquisition, the Wise were nearly wiped out. There were only five covens left after the Burning Times. Two of those were Gardeners, the others split off and formed the other Circles. One such, the Twisters of Fate, were a radical fundamentalist group that went back to the Tradition's Primordial roots. They had help from a Wyck. To save the Tradition, the Verbena finally began Awakening Sleepers who were not of the old Blood.

As the church gained more converts and power, the Verbena were forced underground. Before the Burning Times, if someone accused a neighbor of witchcraft, the burden of proof was on the accuser. Also, before the church equated Herne the Hunter, or Cerrunos the Stag, with the devil, no one had any reason to condemn someone for



being a witch. That just meant she was a pagan or a Goddess worshipper, and might be able to brew herbal remedies or make the cow start giving milk again. Though they had lost their position as spiritual leaders of the people, the Verbena were still highly respected as healers, herbalists, midwives, and experts in agricultural matters.

The Burning Times let loose a horror of false accusation, torture and death unlike anything even dreamed of by the old ones who had practiced blood sacrifice as a sacred ritual. The blame for this goes to the Order of Hermes and their 'grand experiment' of living openly in covenants. Splits within the Order led to practices that convinced the church that all mages were demon worshippers. We blame their folly for bringing the Inquisition down on us, but save our greatest contempt for the Celestial Chorus, who in their arrogance ignored the death cries of their fellow mages. Many Verbena went to the gallows or the flames to protect others from persecution. Other victims of the fires were simple people who knew nothing of magick, but had angered a neighbor or owned land the church could steal after it had condemned them for heresy and witchcraft..."

...

Though the pain had mercifully receded, her head still swam. Was she floating? Mayhap her tormentors had the right of it; she was a thing accursed. The coarse shift slid over her still-bleeding body where the lash had torn her flesh. Her crushed fingers throbbed in sympathy and she awoke enough to realize she was being carried. She felt the fear and hatred of those who had gathered to bear witness to her death.

She had once believed the Inquisitors would come to understand that she was innocent. But long since then she had despaired of telling the truth and confessed to whatever they wished to hear. They said she was a witch and would hear nothing else. She had never imagined that such pain and indignity could be inflicted upon her. In the end she had signed their foul confession. She would have signed anything. When she recanted, they had raped and tortured her again until she made a new confession. In her agony and delirium, she knew she had named others — equally innocent — now doomed as she was.

The stake loomed ahead. Piles of wood lay around it, awaiting the torch to set them alight. The hooded one stood nearby. Set upon her broken feet, she would have fallen had not the hooded man put a hand out to steady her. He lifted her upward to the stake and bound her hands behind it. He pulled a rope around her legs and locked the chains across her, binding her firmly.

The grim Inquisitor who had broken her body read her death sentence; "For that this woman hath been found guilty of witchcraft and consorting with Satan and the demons of Hell, and whereby she hath recanted her confession and refused absolution, then do we condemn her to that flame which shall consume her soul forever. Amen."

Had she recanted again? She couldn't remember. She thought for a moment on the evil of those who would condemn the gifts of the old ones. The flames were kindled, and the crackling fires rose

all about her. Her screams mingled with the roar of the flames as her skin blackened and burst, showering her with her own lifeblood. Her eyes burned in their sockets. As the ropes which bound her hands and feet burned through, she danced in wailing agony

Held fast by the chains of ignorance and greed which bound her to the stake, Deborah shrieked her agony and rage.

...

Deborah lay on Talien's bed. Panting. Shaking. Dry eyed. *Never again*, she vowed. The others stood over her, their white faces showing shock. She smelled burnt hair, and noted with some surprise that Rhianna was there as well. Crackling bolts of energy radiated from Rhianna's fingers and eyes. Everyone except Talien stayed well away. Even he was careful not to touch the bed where Deborah lay.

"Why are you here?" Deborah croaked. Her whole body ached. She realized Talien was holding her hand. Now that she could track her surroundings, she saw scorch marks on the wall and felt soggy blankets under her.

"What...?" She looked to Rhianna. Rhianna frowned at Talien. The energy bolts gained power and zapped out toward him. He leaned away.

"Our bard has many powers," Rhianna began, "not least among them the power of suggestion. You imagined yourself somewhere else, didn't you?"

Deborah swallowed painfully. Her lungs still seemed blackened from the smoke. "What did I do?"

"You set yourself on fire," Talien mumbled.

Deborah shook from the memory of the flames, but said nothing.

Rhianna spoke; "I believe you have an old soul and a powerful Avatar, Deborah, but one that was horribly and painfully denied its time in your past life. Perhaps that is why you are so negative in this one. You lash out; you destroy. I hope you can learn and grow this time around. We will do all we can to help you reach Ascension. For now, Talien and Jon will carry you to your room. You need to rest."

The priestess shooed everyone out, saying, "Tomorrow, Talien will finish your history lessons." She looked at the young bard and added, "Without the visions, Talien. Understood?" Subdued, he nodded. She didn't see Takoda's face.

...

Rebirth

The group met again the next morning in the kitchen. All were quiet and thoughtful.

"We won't go into too much more detail," Talien said, "Especially since I'm pretty sure most of you know a lot of the rest..."

"Okay, here it is. During the Renaissance and the Age of Reason, the Verbena formed many secret groups and re-established family traditions. In many cases, Verbena were lost to the Tradition as they gathered into family groups



rather than covens. Even today, there are still people who discover their heritage when they attend a Wiccan ceremony or stumble upon descriptions of "superstitions" their family has kept alive for centuries. Many Mythic Threads, those ties to the mythic world which mages protect and keep alive, were allowed to slip during this era because of the secrecy engendered by the fear of persecution. Scientific knowledge gained ascendancy as old myths and legends were "disproven." As the memory of the Burning Times grew dim, Verbena became more bold, remaining secret but growing powerful again. Many still believe that Protestantism was the Verbena's strike against the Celestial Chorus (though no one will admit it). On the plus side, Verbena didn't have to work very hard to understand how to do coincidental magick: we'd been working 'behind the scenes' for centuries. After all, simple things like the gifts of fire, agriculture and writing have affected humanity in a major way.

During the Industrial Revolution, the Verbena realized their secrecy had cost them the war for reality, and that the Technocracy was on its way to making the world unfit for living beings. Modern Verbena could see the value in some technological devices and had no trouble incorporating sanitation, vaccinations, indoor plumbing and other conveniences. To them, the question was not whether technology itself was evil, but whether it was used to promote life or to degrade and destroy it. Many Verbena fled the Gardeners of the Tree because they couldn't hold to such rigid traditions any longer. This led to a fracture between the Gardeners and all the other Circles that is still healing today.

Many of us have found places within the ranks of various occult groups. Gardenerian (as distinct from our Gardeners of the Tree) and Alexandrian Wiccan groups, the Rosicrucians, the Order of the Golden Dawn, Dianic Goddess worshippers, modern Druids, New Agers, crystalmancers, holistic healers, Native American medicinesocieties, African witch doctors, Tantric practitioners, Chinese herbalists, and even the Masons have had Verbena among them at various times.

Today we are hunted by the Technocracy. Their view of reality has become so entrenched that whenever we use our magick openly, we are assaulted by Paradox. Disbelief is a powerful force; try conjuring a dragon in a subway station if you don't believe me. Still, we make inroads. We plant seeds of ideas and let them germinate. We work for environmental concerns, hoping we can save enough to bring about a new Mythic Age. Some among us claim we will never succeed until we all agree to a set way of doing things; I say diversity is good for us.

The sun is shining. The snow is melting. Go outside. I'm through talking."

The others drifted out. Takoda still sat at the table, staring at his hands.

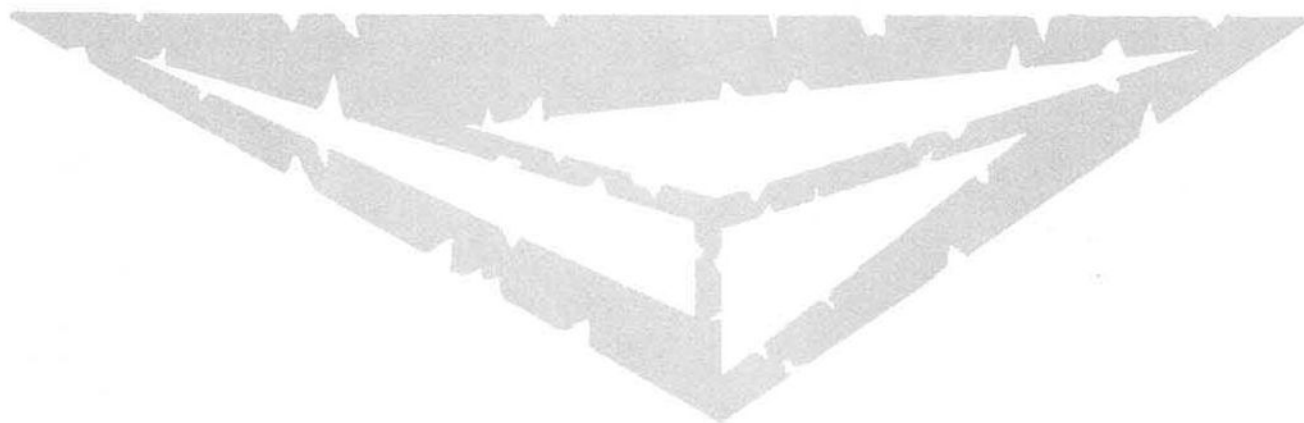
"Despite what she said, I can't do it for you." Talien spoke quietly.

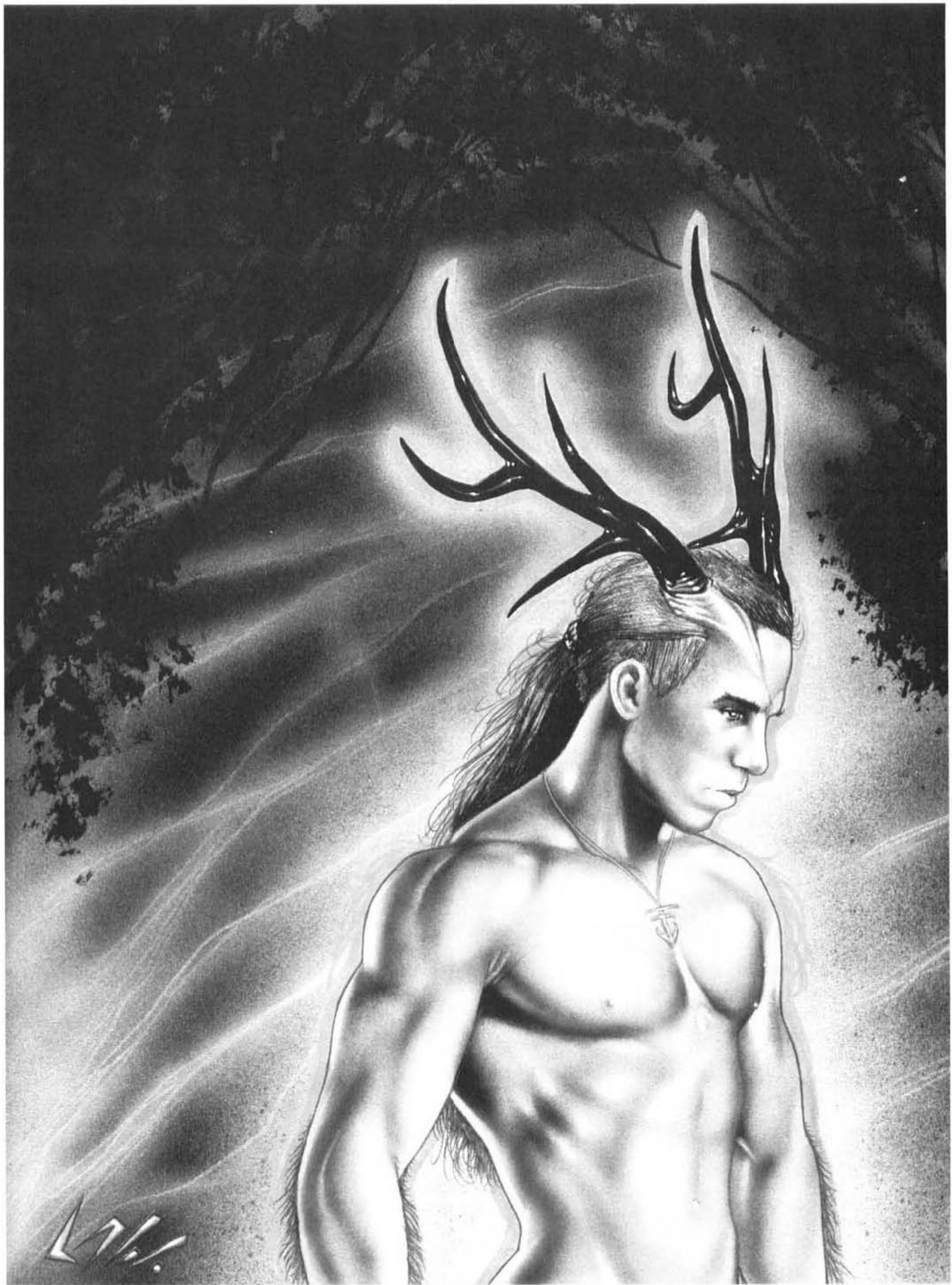
"It isn't your fault. The lack is in me." Takoda sighed, "I couldn't even see visions the time I tried peyote."

"I'm sorry." There was true regret in Talien's voice.

"I guess I'll have to settle for what I do have." Takoda tried to smile as he stood up. "After all, I can see health, and I need no vision to teach me that." He nodded to Talien and went outside.

The bard watched until Takoda, whose name means "friend to them all," was lost to view.





Chapter Two: Blessing the Fields Beltaine Eve (Culture and Politics)

*Bonfires dot the rolling hillsides
Figures dance around and around
To drums that pulse out echoes of darkness
Moving to the pagan sound
— Loreena McKennitt, "All Souls Night"*



Lindara is perfect, Kamaria decided. From Jon's and Takoda's reactions, she guessed they thought so too. Lindara's graceful body, evident health and exotic features compelled attention. It didn't hurt that she was dressed in top-flight gothic punk gear.

"The others are busy preparing for the rite. I'm going to explain a few things about us that you might not have picked up on yet."

"Like what?" asked Jon. He seemed nervous.

"Well, I'm not sure you've been told what the Verbena try to accomplish nowadays. Do you know about the factions within the Verbena? Has anyone mentioned the tenth Sphere?"

"Tenth Sphere?" Teague looked intrigued.

"You're jumping ahead. I'd rather start with what the Verbena do, rather than what we are."

Deborah spoke, "We know what we are, we've been told at great length. Can't we skip the history of paganism thing and get to the party?"

Lindara smiled; "Sure, go ahead." She motioned toward the door.

Deborah hesitated for a moment, then, afraid to back down, got up and left. The others looked at the floor or each other. Teague shook his head.

"If she doesn't want to know what I can teach her, I'm not going to force her to learn. Screw her, she'll make it or she won't. The rest of you, listen..."

Influence: Mythic Threads

Pass the word

Pass the ladle

Pass the plate to all who hunger

Pass the wit of ancient wisdom

Pass the cup of crimson wonder

— Jethro Tull, "Cup of Wonder"

In the Mythic Age, magick helped shape the world. Our wills created whatever our minds could conceive. The Technocracy changed all that. The other Traditions have a skewed picture of what we want. They think we're trying to bring back the Mythic Age. They're wrong. Let me set the record straight.

The Verbena aren't interested in bringing back the Mythic Age...that wouldn't be productive. We *do* want to establish a new Mythic Age in our own paradigm. It's important to guard and defend old Mythic Threads, since they're the seeds for the new ones. We believe that they're still there, but if no one remembers what they once were, there's no way to recreate them. The Gardeners of the Tree are the most fanatical guardians of the old Threads. My own group, the Lifeweavers, believe we can empower the Mythic Threads by finding them within ourselves and bringing them to fruition.

Verbena influence can be seen in the rising popularity of crystals, tarot cards, faeries, psychics, vampires, werewolves and medieval fantasies. The Syndicate makes shitloads of money from these crazes, but they do so at the expense of their Technocratic brethren (which plays into our hands nicely). Of course, the things they commercialize are diminished. Sleepers rarely encounter the truth behind most of the occult and fantasy items they purchase. Nonetheless, enough of them believe in such things — or wish they believed in them — that our desired reality is never wholly destroyed or forgotten.

Every instance of a true Mythic Thread in existence today is important to building a new reality. We fight for them all, hoping they'll blossom into an anchor for our reality. For example, if a unicorn was discovered sleeping in some remote area, we'd send as many initiates as we could to guard it and lead it to one of our Horizon Realms. By the way, this *does* mean the Verbena are a little close to being Marauders, but I guess that sort of goes without saying.

There aren't an awful lot of us, and we don't tend to show off our power. Most of us find flashy magick distasteful, although we'll use a vulgar magick effect if we have to. Our way of doing things is to conceal our movements and link our principles to compatible ideas proposed by others. The Verbena managed to turn the Pharmacopeist's birth control pill into something that empowers women; we continually work to ensure that women have control over



their own bodies. Our spies within Technocracy laboratories warn us of impending moves and will one day use their positions to destroy the Technocracy's stranglehold over medicine. Along with our allies, we war against those who destroy the earth. Any questions?"

Festivals

"I'd like to know a little more about Verbena society and meetings," Aileen asked.

Jon absently put his arm around Kamaria's shoulders and seemed surprised when she flinched. "Stop that. There is nothing wrong with you," he whispered fiercely. She slowly relaxed as Lindara began speaking again...

"Verbena still organize themselves around the Wheel of the Year. Once it was purely agricultural — having to do with the seasons and harvest. Now it's as much symbolic as anything, though the Gardeners of the Tree, the Moon-Seekers, and some of the Twisters of Fate might disagree with me. We have a number of meeting times which correspond to old pagan festivals.

You might expect me to begin at the beginning of the year; we tend to think of starting at the end. Naturally! We're mages, we don't have to do things logically. One of the Gardeners talked about it once in terms of "working." He said in order to perform a magickal working upon something or someone, you first had to clear out the old garbage. You don't make a dancing circle without clearing out the sticks and stones that might bruise someone's feet, and you don't start the new year or begin a new work without bidding goodbye to the old one. Besides, it's all circular anyway. The end is the beginning. For whatever reason, we begin by ending, so we begin with Samhain.

Samhain is held on October 31st, which most people call Halloween. Despite the spelling and the Verbena who calls himself Sam Haine, the word is from Gaelic and is actually pronounced "sah-vun." Originally, it was one of the four great fire festivals that marked the year. Though it's a nature festival, it's also the time when the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead is thinnest. The Verbena believe strongly in reincarnation, in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, and we look during this time of year for the rebirth of one or more of the old ones, the Wyck who first shared the blood of the Pure Ones. That's why we traditionally search for apprentices at Samhain. Those who can't attend the Great Gathering keep the festival in their own circles. We're always doubly on guard at Samhain as well, since our enemies know it is one of our most important gatherings. If you Awaken and become a part of us, you will be taught the way to Winter Castle, one of the four secret Verbena Horizon Realms, so you may celebrate with us there.

Winter Solstice occurs on December 21st or 22nd. This is a time of new beginnings, time to introduce our new apprentices to our Tradition. We invest our hopes for the

future and for the preservation of the ancient Mythic Threads in our new apprentices. Winter Solstice is usually a minor meetingtime for us unless we have new apprentices to welcome.

Imbolc and Candlemas are both held in February. Imbolc is celebrated on February 1st and Candlemas on the 2nd. These are other fire festivals, revolving around the re-awakening of the earth after the winter. We also see this time as the re-awakening of knowledge and of dormant Mythic Threads. At Imbolc, many honor the Maiden, the first aspect of the goddess, who bears within her the seeds planted the previous Beltaine. It is a time to share our Tradition's history with apprentices. Imbolc serves as another of our major meetings. Spring Cottage Horizon Realm is open to those Verbena who can find their way to it.

The Vernal Equinox, which usually occurs on March 21st or 22nd, is a minor festival. This is the time when dark and light share the day equally. Usually we meet to celebrate with one another. If there is great need or unfinished work from our Imbolc meeting, we get back together in a prearranged place to discuss things at this time.

Beltaine, the festival we're here to celebrate tonight, is also known as May Eve. It falls on April 30th and is the third great fire festival of our calendar. This is the time when the Young Lord fights the old one for the Maiden's hand. He then plants the seeds within the Maiden which will come to fruition at Imbolc. Beltaine is a time for ridding oneself of a problem by taking something that symbolizes the problem and throwing it into the fire. It's a time for overcoming obstacles that we've inadvertently placed in our own paths. Beltaine is our time for letting intuition rule. The word "intuition" means inner tuition, or self teaching, and we work to find strands of the Mythic Threads buried inside ourselves at this time of year. This meeting is usually held at Summer Grove, our third Horizon Realm.

Summer Solstice, on June 21st, is another minor meeting, usually held only among circle members. The modern Druids feel differently, and meet at Stonehenge for the Summer Solstice. This is the longest day of the year, and it marks the inexorable turn of the wheel back to the second half of the year.

Lammas or Lughnasad falls on August 1st or 2nd, and is the fourth great fire festival of the year. It's a harvest celebration, the time when we assess what we have accomplished during the preceding months. Lammas is usually the time we harvest what we have wrought in our apprentices. It's a time for Awakening their Avatars and initiating them into the Tradition. It is a most important meeting, since the Verbena make plans for the future at Lughnasad. Autumn Circle, the last of the hidden Horizon Realms, is used for this meeting.

The Autumnal Equinox, which falls on the 22nd or 23rd of September is another time of equality. The sun loses its potency, as the darkness overtakes it and the days shorten. Circles often schedule meetings to discuss upcoming events at the Autumnal Equinox. Traditionally, it served as a festival to mark the last of the harvest and clear the ground for the spring planting. I like to think of it as a time to dispense with old business and clear away dead wood.

That brings us back around to Samhain and the waning of the year again. We've followed the wheel of the year as it turned, but we haven't returned to the place where we began. We've changed and grown and learned all during the year..."

Lindara looked at her watch. "Just about right as far as the timing goes. The celebration is about to start. I'll see you all outside. I want to change into something more comfortable."

...

Challenge

Deborah clutched the butcher knife she had stolen from the kitchen. Humiliated and angry at being so easily dismissed, hating them all, but wanting desperately to belong, she had retreated to the barn. Unbidden tears dripped down her face as she used the knife to cut shallow lines across her wrists. MAYBE I SHOULD JUST KILL MYSELF, she thought. Hunched in the straw, Deborah cut patterns, runes of power Mother Celene had taught her. She licked the blood from one wrist, while drawing a wavering circle of blood with the other. If she only knew whether she wanted to make herself popular, to punish the others or to become powerful, she might be able to work magick. Within her something snarled, demanding its freedom. She washed away the coagulating blood with her tears. NOT YET, she thought...

...

The fire leapt and crackled. Sky-clad dancers imitated the flickering movements, flowing around the circle. Each cast a small bundle into the fire, jumping and shouting as the flames consumed the packages. Kamaria moved as well as her crippled spine allowed, longing to feel again the power she had known as a panther-woman. They had given her a chaplet of flowers and she wished she could be graceful enough to wear it with honor.

Suddenly he was by her side, rough hand at her waist, hot body pressed against her, trapping her next to him, his horned head towering above her. She looked around for help. No one else noticed, or made a move to help her.

His hot breath tickled her ear; "You are the one. I choose you as my mate. You of the humped back and the dancing eyes." She tried to pull away. "Why do you resist me?" he asked. "Did you not come here hoping to be chosen? I see beyond that which you despise in yourself. Did you not know that in the elder days, such as you were

thought to be great seers and wise ones? You are not cursed, but gifted." He spun her in the air, catching her effortlessly.

The others had stopped and stood watching them. They still made no move to help. Perhaps they did not know she wanted to resist.

"Help me!" she screamed. Aileen started toward her, but was pulled back by a member of the circle Kamaria didn't know. She couldn't see Takoda or Deborah across the glow of the fire. Teague looked as though he would help her, but two men stopped him. Jon was nearest. No one stopped him as he ran across the clearing to her.

"Put her down," he commanded her captor.

"I will fight you for her," came the reply. Jon studied the man's bulging muscles and hoped speed and agility could win the battle for him.

"No, he'll kill you!" Kamaria shouted at Jon. Privately, Jon agreed with her assessment.

"I don't think so," he said.

The horned stranger put Kamaria down, shrugging off her attempts to scratch his eyes and knee him in the groin. Two women placed hands on her shoulders and led her away.

The men circled, searching for openings. Jon fought defensively, luring his larger opponent closer to the fire. The stag man moved after him. After several backwards movements, Jon rushed in and punched the stag man in the abdomen. The stag man swung a fist and clipped Jon on the side of the head. Jon's blow seemed to have no effect. The other's fist knocked Jon back. Wondering if his jaw was broken, Jon moved farther out of reach. He almost fell over a large hummock of grass. Keeping his eyes on the stag man, he carefully stepped around it.

The stag man raced forward, clearing the hummock with an impressive leap and landing on the far side of it face-to-face with Jon. "Stay where you are. Do not run from me again," he commanded.

Jon straightened up from his crouch and faced his death. The stag man started to move toward Jon.

Deborah sprang up out of the covering of leaves and grass that both men had taken for a hummock. "Bastard! You goddamned bastard! This is just the same as everywhere else," she screamed. Slashing with the butcher knife she had considered using on herself earlier, she hamstringed the stag man's left leg. He screamed as he fell, dark blood spurting.

"Deb, no!" Jon rushed forward and just managed to pull Deborah off the stag man before she gutted him. The others moved toward them as the stag man thrashed in pain.

Jon stood before the fallen stag man; "Get up and fight me."

"I cannot," came the pain-filled reply.



"Then you've lost and I claim the maiden for myself." *Did I just say that?* he wondered.

"It is your right. I release her to you. May you have joy in your union." The stag man sat up and placed his hands on his wounded leg. As the flow of blood ceased, he seemed to grow smaller. As his stature diminished, his muscles flexed and changed, flowing to other areas of his body. His features grew indistinct and he removed the horned cap from his head. A moment later, Jon realized he was looking down at Lindara, who sat in the grass massaging her leg. She looked up at Deborah and said, half admiringly, "You really are a bitch, aren't you?"

...

When the others had left, Kamaria returned to the fire and found Jon poking at the embers with a stick. She still wore her chaplet.

"Jon? I'm here."

"You don't owe me anything," he said, and laughed a little; "I didn't even defeat him. Go kiss Deborah if you want to reward the champion."

"I want to be with you."

"Here?"

"Here."

Removing her light robe, she folded herself down until she was half lying in his embrace. He ran his hands over her, even caressing her hump. He felt her tears drop onto his hands as he pulled her around in front of him and gently stroked her breasts.

"Tears," he said. "Don't tell me, they're the water of life." She laughed and reached forward to cup him with her hands. "I think I can find something that deserves the title far more than tears," she teased. He gasped as her fingernails slid along his length. Moving her legs to lie atop his, he pushed forward slightly. She maneuvered him inside her. They moved together, hands, lips, and sex pulsing, seeking, wanting, knowing.

Slick with perspiration, gasping, skins ruddy and attuned to pain and pleasure, the Young Lord and the Maiden danced the eternal, ever-changing renewal of life as the Beltaine fire died.

...

Branches and Leaves

*Never lose the faith
From your faded heart
Never lose desire
To break the chains.*

— Maire Brennan, "I Believe (Deep Within)"

They gathered in the living room after the Maying at dawn.

"I see we're all waiting for my entrance," boomed the short, white-haired man as he sauntered in. His scraggly



beard was full of food particles from breakfast and a drop of syrup had stained his shirt. "Good. I like attentive students. My name is none of your business, but you may call me Bear, it being as good a name as any." He beamed at them.

"Now before you bother me with questions, I'm getting started. You've heard the Tradition's history, beliefs and practices, but you don't know squat about the divisions. Listen up...

There are four main groups or types of Verbena. Not that there aren't about a zillion variations, but in general, these four are pretty indicative of what we're about. Follow me so far?

First there are the Gardeners of the Tree. They're Pattern folk. You've learned about the four types of Avatars, right? Well, the Verbena types sort of match those. Simple, right? Anyway, the Gardeners feel that if you aren't of the Pure Blood, you aren't a real Verbena. Of course, those fools would have let the Tradition die out during the Burning Times rather than sully their lily whites by taking in non-blooded mages. They keep to the rules and try to make everybody follow their structure. They'd have a fit if meetings weren't held on the old festival days. Don't really accept other types. Funny thing is, most of them are from the old Aeduna. Got messed in with the Greeks and Romans and stole a bunch of stuff from astrologers. Even got into runes. So they aren't as unsullied as they'd like to believe. If you think of the Verbena as a family tree, they're probably the trunk.

The Twisters of Fate are sort of neoprimitives, if that makes any sense. The first Verbena were primordial, in touch with the original essence of everything. They were the Wyck who shaped fate, life and civilization, and were some serious healers. In a lot of ways, they were the ones most associated with fertility goddess worship. More like shaman than anything else. Some blended back in with the Aeduna and probably gave those folks the notion they should become the guardians of the Tree of Immortality. So the Twisters of Fate are the roots of the tree. They split off from the Gardeners, some say under the influence of one of the original Wyck. For the most part, they're so secretive, they don't get involved.

The Moon-Seekers are our Questing Avatars. Who knows what they're into? They worry that the Pattern folk don't accept them, and they seem inordinately concerned with following the old ways. The old new ways, I mean. A lot of them are Goddess worshippers, some are just neopagans. Some claim to be priests of Thor. Lots of them work with crystals, some swear the chakras are the key to everything, and I know of one gypsy fortuneteller who uses palmistry and magick to discover illnesses in her customers. One old man I know moves from town to town searching out potential Verbena and marking them for our first-contact people. They're the fruits of the tree, the acorns, or maybe the leaves.

Lastly, there's the Lifeweavers. They're the Dynamic Avatars. They just plain don't give a damn whether anyone accepts them or not. Always off on their own projects and beliefs. Lifeweavers don't abide by tradition — they take anyone as an apprentice and ignore the festivals and meetings whenever they feel like it. A lot of them are shifters. They alter themselves to have the best possible body they can, to be the best dancer or climber or singer there is. They claim they're trying to find the limit of what's natural. Man, woman, child, dog, old, young, in between. They don't care. I've always thought we should get them to assume the shapes of some of our Technocracy enemies and wreak havoc among the foe. Maybe they do, who knows? They're the branches of the tree, moving out and away from the rest of the Verbena, but still part of the whole.

Now don't get me wrong. Nobody gets locked into a particular group just because of her Avatar. If you have a Questing Avatar, there's no reason you can't join up with the Pattern folk if you feel more comfortable with them (assuming they accept you, of course). These are just general divisions, and they're pretty broad categories. There are other groups, too. Lots of them. Most are small circles or cabals not linked to any of the larger groups. Those include folks like Mother Celene's Avengers, the Druids of the Glade, and the Bardic College. I see some of you belong to those groups already, or will once you've Awakened. It's possible to hold membership in one of the smaller groups and still receive instruction from or have contact with a larger one. Whatever keeps the Mythic Threads alive! Next question."

"So, the main philosophy of the Verbena can be summed up by saying they work to protect the Mythic Threads?" asked Jon.

"Well, that's a part of it, but there's more to it than that. Preserving Mythic Threads is a means the Verbena use to achieve a reality modeled after their own conception of what reality should be. Verbena seek Ascension through a sort of tenth Sphere. That Sphere is Self. The Verbena believe that knowledge of the Self can bring us to Ascension and can take others along with us. This isn't what the Akashic Brotherhood mean when they experience their innermost selves, because they're only talking about the mind. Verbena view the entire Self as deity — mind, body, lusts, experiences and all. It isn't self-glorification, but becoming part of the All. Life in all its creation is guided by the inner Self. 'Do as thou wilt' isn't too far off the mark, but the phrase should be 'Be as thou wilt.' Alan Watts said, 'the outline of your body is the inline of the universe.' We don't just stop *being* at the edge of ourselves, we fold into the space around us, mold it to us, and are molded by it. We're part of it all. When we understand that fully, we'll reach Ascension, and when one Ascends, all may follow. That's why the Verbena spend so much effort locating and training potential mages. The Ascendant Self may be one of

you. Or it may be one of the blasted Virtual Adepts for all I know. Of course, Verbena aren't letting *them* know that! If you don't understand all that, don't worry. Most of us don't either." Bear laughed.

Teague broke in, "You mentioned that the Lifeweavers will take anyone as an apprentice. How do the others choose?"

"I think what you really want to know is 'how were *you* chosen?' correct?"

"Yeah."

"There are four ways the Verbena choose apprentices. They examine people touched by their Mythic Threads. New agers, people who are already involved with magick in some form — even if the magick they're studying is complete bunk. Some Verbena choose based on a person's Avatar. Some become Verbena by right of blood. Most of those become Gardeners of the Tree, since the Gardeners are the ones who trace the Wyckan bloodlines through generations. Lastly, some are chosen because they are in pain. The pain might be physical, caused by some imbalance or infirmity, but it might be mental or emotional. Often candidates are chosen because they have some sort of blockage which prevents them from living a full life. You can stop looking around at one another now. We can all pretty much figure out why each of you was chosen. The reason you were picked doesn't matter any more. Learning what the Verbena have to teach you and moving beyond that are the important parts. Then of course, there are the Lifeweavers. A lot of them choose an apprentice because she's pretty or he has an interesting voice or because they happen to be standing outside in the rain at 2 a.m. Nobody can fathom why they choose someone."

"What about the Horizon Realms? Where are they? What are they like?" Aileen asked, a bit dizzied by the mage's rapid-fire ramble.

"I'll give you a little teaser, but you aren't really supposed to know about them yet." Bear chuckled and continued...

The Seasonal Realms

"You know that Horizon Realms are pockets of other realities located in the Umbra. Well, the Verbena maintain four semi-secret ones where they go to meet and conduct the business of the Tradition. These particular four aren't ones the Verbena created. They're fragments of the old Mythic World, shards the Verbena found floating in the Umbra and built on. Some say that Lilith placed them there and keyed them to Verbena magick so no other Traditions could reach them..."

"Lilith?" Teague interjected.

"Don't interrupt!"

"Sorry."

Bear continued: "The first one, Winter Castle, is a small white medieval castle set in an idealized winter



landscape. You know the old line from *Camelot* about the snow never starting until after sunset and stopping at exactly the right height to be interesting rather than a nuisance? Well, that's sort of what it's like. White deer and rabbits roam around, squirrels chatter at you, winter roses twine around a boxwood maze, and a dark forest silvered with snow hovers nearby. In the castle courtyard, there's an old oak with bare branches. It's crimson red. Sometimes I think that oak is the only color in the whole landscape. Mostly though, it's all very pastoral and perfect. Of course, you don't want to go off into the woods by yourself. They're dark and full of secret things.

Spring Cottage is just that, a pretty little shingled cottage set into the most wonderful garden imaginable. Blooming and budding trees form a ring around the house and shower people with petals when they walk beneath. The smells there are marvelous! There are lots of little animals there, too, and they all seem to be busy cooing at one another and mating. It reminds me a little of Disney's *Fantasia*. I swear I saw a centaur there once, but I was pretty blasted at the time, so I may have imagined it. Of course, if you imagine stuff while standing on top of a Node, who knows what you might get? Also, there's the well. It's a dank, overgrown thing that's utterly lightless at the bottom. You can drop a light in, and it goes out. I've only known one person to go down into that well, and he never came back. Stay away from it unless you want to search out the darkest part of yourselves.

Summer Grove is a large grove of sacred oaks which surround the biggest World Tree you've ever seen. There isn't much more to this Realm than the grove itself, but it spreads out and differentiates into birch and beech, hawthorne, apple, elder, maple, even cherry trees. There's a pond that has sleek, silvery fish in it and everything from bears to chipmunks come visiting when people are there. The Lifetree of Summer Grove is supposed to be the adopted form a Pure One. It talks to those who listen hard enough. Personally, I think it's some old Wyck. Of course, it could be the fey folk playing tricks on us. Don't ever take any path out of the grove except the one marked by the standing stones. That path is the gateway in and out of the grove. Taking another path leads you into the forest, where you get twisted and turned in all different directions. Some folks have been trapped in the byways, as we call them, for days, and counted themselves lucky to get out at all by stumbling back into the grove.

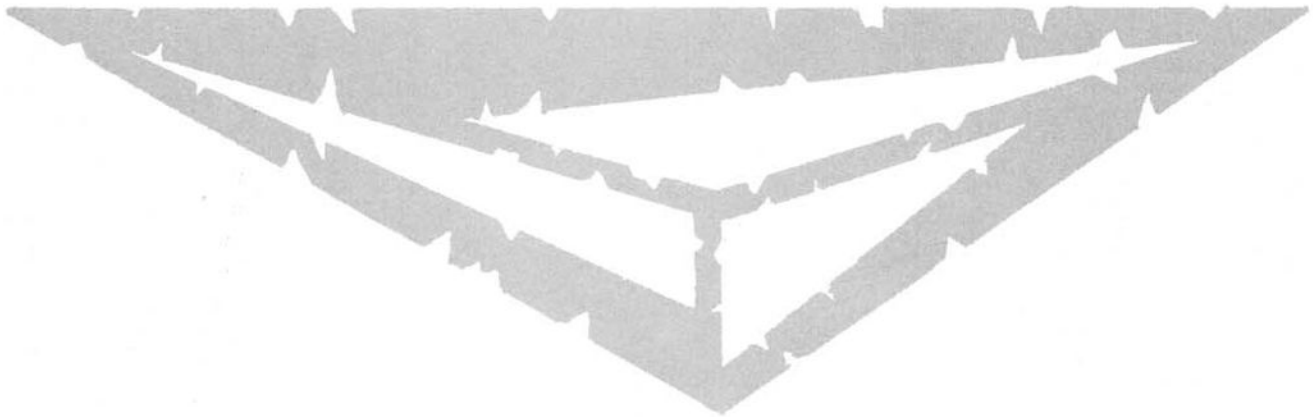
Autumn Circle is a large, cleared dancing area centered around a flat stone altar. The altar is circular, but has a hole in the middle. A World Tree grows up through the hole and shades most of the area. It's autumn there, and the tree has the most brilliantly colored leaves I've ever seen. The circle's edge is formed by a ring of trees. Outside that is a mossy greensward filled with toadstools. Some say a

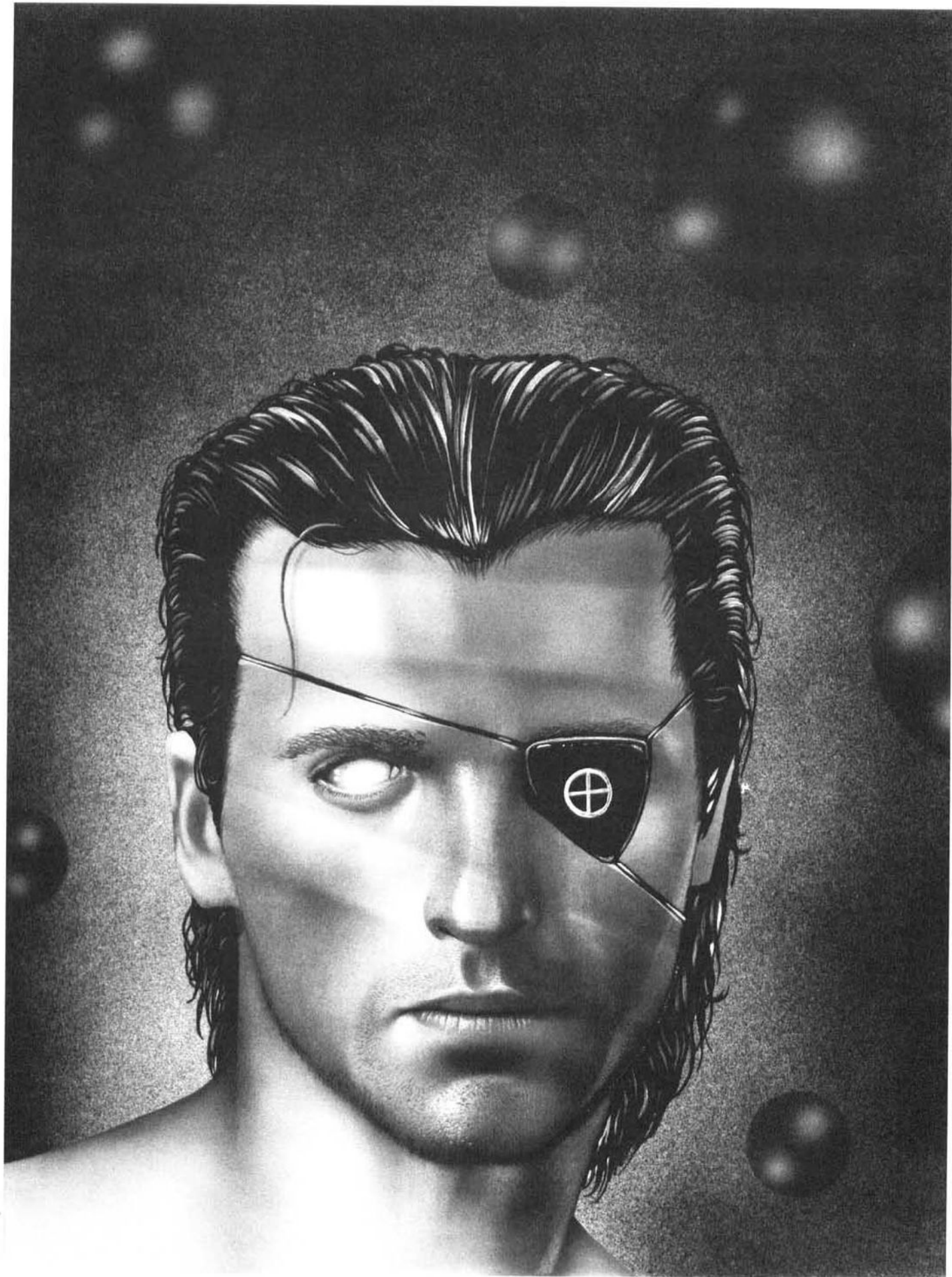
person can have visions by eating one of the toadstools, but I think," he said, looking at Takoda, "they'd just give you indigestion. A couple of unicorns are rumored to live there, but I've never seen them. They say there are pools located beyond Autumn Circle which lead to other worlds...

That's it. No more questions. Hope you weren't expecting to Ascend right here and now. Have a good festival."

"Wait a minute. Which type of Verbena are you?" asked Aileen.

He turned back in the doorway. "Who says I'm Verbena at all?" he asked. He closed the door quietly, but they could hear him chuckling as he moved off down the hallway.





Chapter Three: Aligning the Spheres Midsummer Night (External Relations)

*If she floats then she is not
A witch like we had thought
A down payment on another
One at Salem's lot.*
— Nirvana, "Serve the Servants"



Below them, the lights of the city glowed. From the seventeenth floor, the marina looked like a fairyland. A slight breeze cooled the man and woman standing on the balcony.

Deborah turned to Talien. "Who are all these people?" she asked.

"Mostly people we know from other Traditions. We're throwing a private party here before a bunch of us go on to Horizon, the main meeting place, for a Midsummer Night revel. Why, do they seem strange?"

"Just different. I guess I'm feeling a little out of place here."

"Here?"

"Back in the city. I got the idea that the Verbena are pretty much a country sort of thing."

"We're anything we want to be. Mostly it's the Gardeners and the Twisters of Fate who are rural. The Moon-Seekers set up wherever they feel comfortable, while the Lifeweavers do whatever they do wherever they happen to be. Not all of them even keep a World Tree, you know."

Jon and Kamaria stepped out onto the balcony. "Hey, it's a lot cooler out here," said Jon. "Are you guys keeping that a secret so you don't have to share?"

"Well, not with you anyway." Deborah quipped. She seemed to be less hostile since the Beltaine celebration, as if she had purged some part of herself. Now, though her words were cruel, there was a certain lightness to them that told Jon she was joking.

"If you don't like the company, you can always jump," he retorted. She laughed.

Teague stuck his head out through the sliding glass doors. "Hey, has anybody seen Takoda?" he asked.

"He's gone." said Talien.

"Gone? Gone where?"

Aileen pushed past Teague. "Yeah, he left last night. He said he had something important to do."

"And they just let him go?" asked Kamaria.

"Why not?" Talien replied, "He's not a criminal or a prisoner. We don't force people to join, and the Verbena aren't for everyone."

"But he knows so much..." Jon said.

"Nothing that can really hurt us. I doubt the Technocracy knows anything about him. He isn't Awakened yet." Talien looked down at the shimmering water. "I don't think he found what he was looking for here," he said. "But let me take this opportunity to give you the lowdown on the other Traditions and a few other things besides..."

Council Brethren

See that woman in the green dress? She's built like a martial artist and probably is one. She's Akashic Brotherhood. The Akashic Brotherhood puzzles a lot of Verbena. We don't understand their tendency to place the mind above all else. Still, many Lifeweavers have learned a lot about their bodies and the pathways of the Lifeweb from the Brotherhood.

Now, that man in the white suit practically crackles with suppressed energy, doesn't he? Get the feeling he wants to stop the more lurid aspects of the party? Tense, tense, tense. Our relationship with the Chorus was shattered in the Burning Times, and yet many Verbena feel it's time to make peace with them."

A long-haired man in black leather stumbled onto the balcony and almost fell over the rail.

"Whup! Jon, Teague, hold him up will you? Let's settle him on the couch. He's a little far gone even for one of the Cult. We get along pretty well with the Cult of Ecstasy folks — until some fool brings up philosophy or history. We've worked with them since Roman times, and we learn a lot from each other, but mostly we feel that the Cult folks act like irresponsible children who've never grown up.

The woman over there is an Australian aborigine. She's a Dreamspeaker of course. There's a tremendous amount of respect between the Verbena and the Dreamspeakers. We've always been allies and probably always will be. Still, we feel they're too focused on the Other World. They need to pay more attention to this one. Also, a lot of us are really irked that so many of the other Traditions think the Dreamspeakers were the first mages, when they weren't.

Look at the guy in gray near the refreshment table. He's Euthanatos. I wouldn't drink the punch after he's been near it, that's for sure! Just kidding; everyone thinks the Euthanatos are out to kill everybody. Only the Twisters of Fate get along with them. Otherwise there's a considerable amount of opposition against the Euthanatos, even from the Moon-Seekers and Lifeweavers. Still, it's amusing to





how often the elder Verbena agree with the elder Euthanatos when the Council of the Traditions meets.

Yeah, there they are. See that group over there all dressed in torn-up black clothes? The ones with the weird hair and the jewelry. I thought they might crash the party. They're Hollow Ones. The Verbena have a hard time seeing the Hollow Ones as a Tradition. We've have seen their kind before — unfocused young mages who think they know everything. They seem unfocused, but those kind of mages helped the Verbena reestablish themselves after the Burning Times. The Gardeners don't like them one little bit, but the rest of us are actively trying to recruit them, not that the Hollow Ones give a flying fuck about us!

Look, it's an arbitrageur disguised as a mage! Actually, she's not too bad an example of the Order of Hermes. Ever since Roman times, the Verbena and the Order of Hermes have enjoyed an on-again, off-again relationship. For a time, some Verbena even joined the Order's experimental House as the Diedne...that was doomed to failure. The Order resents the Verbena because they believe we stole some of their "wisdom" to fuel the renaissance of Verbena magick after the Burning Times. Still, it's a chicken-or-egg argument; a lot of the Order of Hermes' basic beliefs, and their whole system of non-formula magick, were based on the Verbena's exploratory, shamanistic style. Aside from anything else, we still blame them for calling down the Inquisition with their excesses.

See the guy over there? Looks pretty normal, doesn't he? You'd never know that he watches *Weird Science* like it was a graduate program in experimental physics, would you? He's a Son, all right, one of the Sons of Ether. They're Technomancers, and the Verbena don't like Technomancers much. Only the most liberal Moon-Seeker or the most dynamic Lifeweaver will deal with the Sons of Ether — although they are usually intrigued by anything a Verbena is willing to show them. The Sons are constantly trying to re-create the Verbena's traditional magick with their devices — shapechanging, rapid healing, and so on, and they refuse to call what they do 'magick.' Most call it 'Science' instead. It drives the Gardeners crazy!"

"There's my date," he said, pointing to an intense young woman with short black hair. "She's a Virtual Adept. Actually, a lot of Moon-Seekers have fallen in with the Virtual Adepts because of their flexibility and cutting-edge magick. The Gardeners can't stand them, of course. Some Lifeweavers have found ways to walk into the Digital Web and many have formed covens online. I think I mentioned something about this before..."

The Others

"Who is that?" asked Kamaria, pointing her chin at a svelte dark-haired woman in black and red.

"Ah! Interesting isn't she? Feral grace, I call it," said Talien. "That's Calantha. She's a Garou. Her tribe is known as the Black Furies, and we've been loosely allied

with them, mostly on ecological issues, for some time. They suffered the same persecutions we did during the Burning Times. There are other tribes of Garou, what most people call werewolves. I've heard we have some dealings with a couple of the others. Except for those few, though, they're supposed to be savage and unpredictable. I've also heard they kill mages who snoop around their holy ground."

"Werewolves? Next you'll tell us there's a vampire at the party," laughed Aileen.

"There are vampires, you know," Talien remarked; "Most Verbena hate them. They seem foul to the Gardeners and the Moon-Seekers. Still, some Lifeweavers I know are fascinated by them. One of them even claims she hangs out with vampires from time to time. She excuses herself by telling me their blood is pure Quintessence. Maybe she uses it to power her shapechanging. I don't know about you, but I'd rather not deal with bloodsuckers, if I can help it. I need my blood myself, thank you. We do have at least one thing in common: the Inquisition still hunts both of us. Those bastards call themselves the Society of Leopold now, and we try to stay as far away from them as we can. They burned us once. Never again..."

Do you believe in ghosts? They believe in you. Lots of people know how to call the dead, but I'm not sure they enjoy it once they do. Wraiths often visit the Dark Umbra on Samhain eve. I have no idea how they feel about us, but I'd be real careful around dead folks if I were you.

The Fey still dance around the corners of our nice settled little world; Verbena have had a love-hate relationship with them for centuries. Mostly we don't trust each other. The Primordials used to trick them into lots of agreements and truces. The Fey are attracted to our life energies, I'm told, though I've never met one myself. I really don't know if they're dangerous or not, but from all the old stories, I'd suggest a good deal of caution and a quick wit when dealing with them..."

The Enemy

"What about the Technocracy?" asked Jon. "Aren't they mages, too? Why do they hate us so much?"

"The Technocracy may be our most dangerous enemies. They are mages, but work toward a totally different reality than we desire. They want complete order and control of everything. Naturally, we want to impose our own version of reality instead. It's a hate based on radically different ideas vying to create the ultimate reality in the same space. Luckily, they seem as disorganized as we are, or at least, they don't all agree on a single road to domination of the Tellurian. This isn't the best place for it, but let me give you a quick overview of how we deal with each Convention — that's what they call their Traditions..."

Let's start with the Progenitors. They're probably closest to the Verbena, except what we enhance, they corrupt by claiming to 'better nature' through genetic program-



ming and manipulation. A few Moon-Seekers tried to reform some Progenitors and bring them back into the fold, but wound up sucked into the Technocracy instead. It's not a far jump for them. The Pharmacopeists especially suck these Verbena right in. Remember, you've been warned.

Iteration X believes we should all be half machine. They want to cyber us up and link our brains in with artificial intelligence. HIT Marks are the cyborgs Iteration X makes and sends out to kill their enemies. Verbena can sense the Life pattern inside them, though. Iteration X hates — and I mean *hates* — the Verbena, and the Verbena love to wipe them out...anything that unliving and cold is an abomination!

Then there's Big Brother. That's the Convention called the New World Order. We're constantly running into the N.W.O. They want to brainwash everyone into being a robot. I'm told we started the health craze as a direct assault on their mental hold on the masses through television. Pissed them off! Watch out for the Men in Black.

There's always the fun guys in the Syndicate. They've made a lot of cash selling 'new age' crap to people. Most Verbena hate to see this, even if the Gardeners of the Tree believe the patsies should get what's coming to them. Several Verbena have found themselves in the unenviable position of having to 'disprove' some of the Syndicate's claims, thus weakening any Mythic Threads which may still be in the Tapestry's weave. These guys are scary. Beyond the thug level, nobody knows who they are or how to reach them. They can destroy you without ever coming face-to-face with you.

Last are the Void Engineers. Most Verbena didn't like it when humanity landed on the moon. We want to keep the moon a thing of mystery; the scientists want to demystify it. Of course, I've heard it said that the moon landing changed the Void Engineers — now they work for space exploration as a sort of saving grace for humankind. The Moon-Seekers might know. They've occasionally worked with the Void Engineers to learn more of the deep Umbra. On the other hand, many Void Engineers work to discredit some of the fundamental elements of the Verbena's belief system, especially things like astrology, the phases of the moon, and the Wheel of the Year.

That's just a thumbnail sketch, of course. You're all free to like anybody you want to and hate anyone who pisses you off. Make your own assessments. You might even find out the people you love to hate the most are your fellow Verbena. Life's a bitch..."

• • •

The sun beat down mercilessly on his dehydrated body. His eyes swam. His parched throat cried out for moisture. The whistles the elders blew couldn't reach him where his consciousness had gone. Blood coursed down his body. One of the rawhide thongs skewered through the skin and muscle of his chest had ripped through his flesh. The other was still attached, its shortening length almost pulling him off the ground as he danced. No one from his tribe had performed a real sundance for a generation at least.

He danced, chanting and weaving in the scorching sun. As the chill of evening began to work its way across his blistered face, his grandfather approached.

"It is time now to pull the tether free," Kohana said.

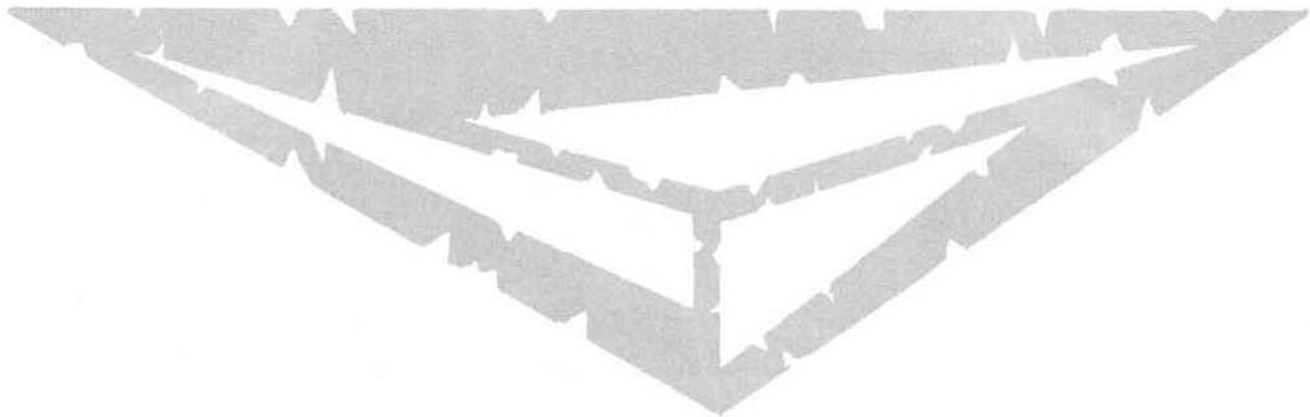
Grateful his ordeal was over, Takoda leaned back against the skewer. It began to tear through the skin of his breast. Soon he would be free of it. Then he reconsidered.

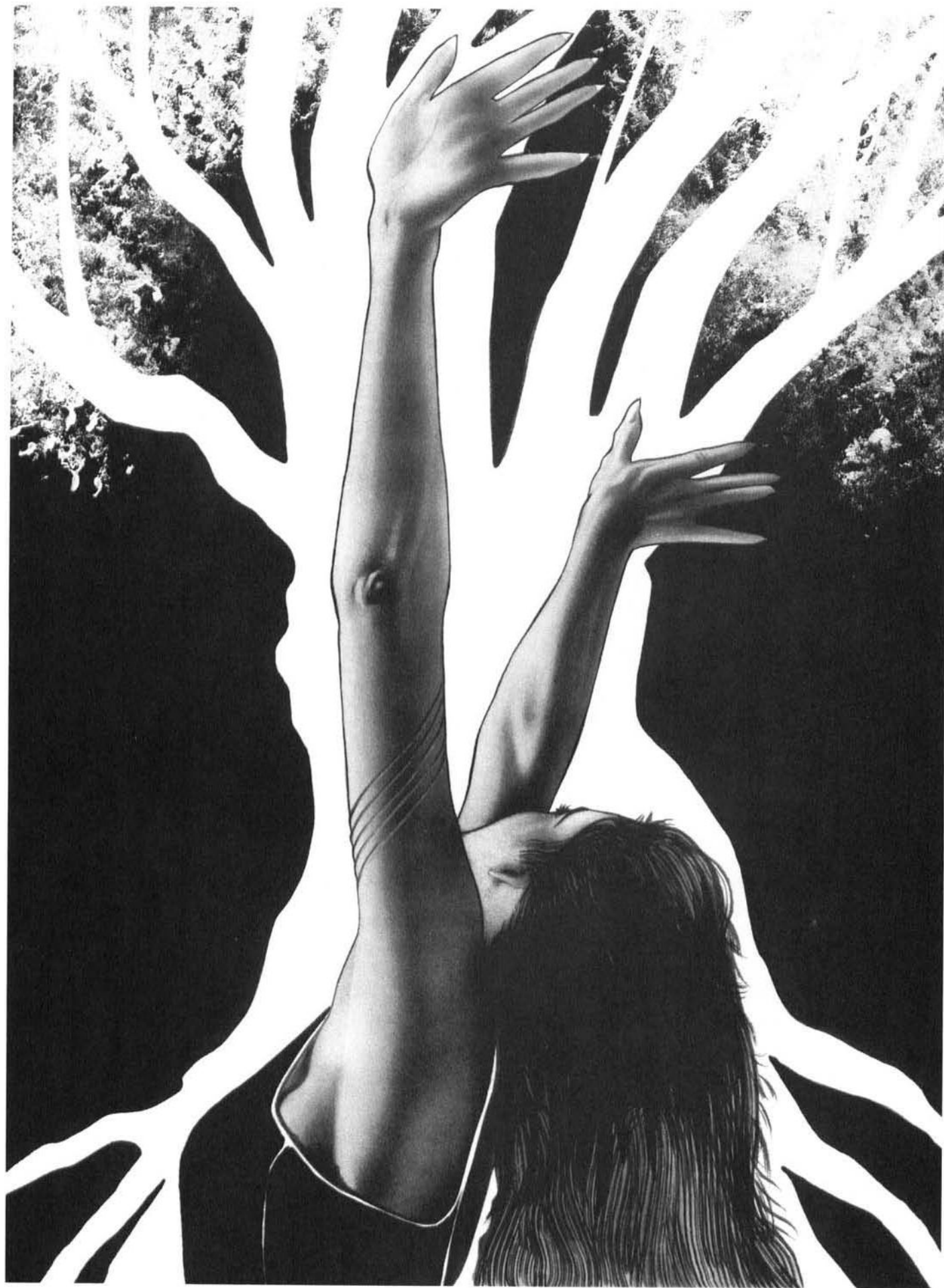
"No, Grandfather," he said sadly, "This is my last chance. I must have a vision or my life has no meaning. You of all people should understand."

"I understand," the old man sighed and sat down next to Takoda. "I will wait until you have your vision. Do not take too long, though, for my bones are old and brittle and I cannot wait outside all night."

Takoda called for some of the elders to light a fire so that his grandfather would be kept warm. He felt strengthened by the old man's presence and renewed his dance. His grandfather seemed so proud. Takoda was so happy he jerked too hard in his exertions. The remaining thong ripped out and he fell. He crawled to the fire and sat across from his grandfather. Together they shared a pipe and talked of visions and healing.

It was only as dawn arrived and the elders carried him home that Takoda remembered his grandfather had been dead for a year.





Chapter Four: Fruits of the Tree Lammas (Character Templates)

*Defying their leaders
Holding out for free will
The strong dare to echo
Nothing can stop
Nothing can stop us now
Up against the wind
Old ways up against the wind.*
— Maire Brennan, "Against the wind"



The car had been trailing them for some time before they noticed it. They'd come to town to purchase last-minute necessities for the Lammas feast. But they couldn't return to the covenhouse with a strange car on their tail. Cutting through stores and emerging onto other streets hadn't worked to throw their pursuers off the scent. Even mingling with crowds and threading in and out of clubs hadn't sufficed.

"Damn. They're good, whoever they are," Teague said.

"Too good," said Jon, the only one of them who had dealt with pursuit by government agents.

"Maybe we should split up," suggested Kamaria, "That way some of us could lead them on while the others went for help."

"Screw that. If you're too afraid to confront them, I'll ambush them at the next traffic light," offered Deborah.

"There may be a reason they've only followed us so far. They might be waiting for us to split up so they can pick us off easier," remarked Takoda. He had returned soon after the sundance, at peace with himself and determined to become a healer.

"Do any of you have an idea who they might be?" asked Aileen.

"Nope, but they have to be using some kind of magick to keep up with us," said Teague.

"Well, we need to do something," snarled Deborah.

"Look for a phone booth," Jon said. "I'll call the covenhouse and tell them what's happening."



"Great, then we just wait for them to come bail us out," grumbled Aileen.

"Do you have a better idea?" asked Kamaria.

They found a phone booth on the next corner. Jon placed the call. All of them could hear it ring and ring on the other end.

"How can nobody answer?" asked Takoda. "There were at least twelve people there an hour and a half ago." He was afraid to volunteer what he actually thought—that somehow the Technocracy had found them, and that he and his friends were the only ones still free.

Another black car screamed around the corner and drew up opposite the first. Four doors from each car opened, spilling out men in black suits and mirror shades. All of them held guns.

"Hold it!" one shouted. "Anybody moves and you all die."

"Let's live through this, folks," murmured Teague, "They obviously want us alive. We can always try to escape later."

• • •

They awoke in darkness, each remembering the sting of the needle. Hoods covered their heads and handcuffs restrained their arms behind their backs.

"Take that one first," a gruff voice said, and Teague was carried out. He called out to the others, "Be strong."

They took him to a small room and questioned him relentlessly. Who were his friends? Where was he first contacted by the Traditions? Who taught him? What had he learned so far? He answered none of the questions. His captors seemed strangely unconcerned by his refusal to talk. No one threatened or touched him until the questioning was over. Then the head Inquisitor stood and said, "He is an unrepentant witch. As he chooses to die thus, we have no more business with him. May God have mercy on his soul."

Two Inquisitors stripped him and bound his legs back beneath him so his ankle ropes were tied to the handcuffs. He was carried outside and chained atop a rough bundle of wood. More ropes were passed through under his bended knees, forcing him to back-straddle the pyre and securing him flat against it. His muscles screamed in protest.

Five more pyres were ranged around the courtyard; blackened areas showed where others had already burned down to ash and ember. The charnel smell of burnt flesh assaulted him. They'd already killed his friends from the covenhouse, then. His captors checked his bindings and left him to his thoughts.

The scene was repeated five times as the others were brought to the courtyard and chained in place. The Inquisitors stood, one next to each pyre. Clad in robes and carrying lit torches, each of them asked once again, "Will you forswear your witchcraft and join with us to hunt others such as yourselves? You may still be saved."

When they determined that none of the young unAwakened mages would willingly betray the Verbena, the Inquisitors pulled the hoods back over their victims' heads.

Soon the only sounds were the crackle of the flames racing through dry wood and the screams of those the flames consumed. Searing pain and choking smoke engulfed them as they writhed atop the pyres, desperately struggling to escape. And suddenly Deborah was free. She coalesced her will into a raging primal form and launched it at the chains that bound her. They snapped and her handcuffs fell loose about one wrist. She pulled free the rope which bound her legs and thrust the hood from her face. And there was no fire.

All around her she saw the others writhing and screaming, bucking and twisting away from flames that did not exist. An Inquisitor stretched up a hand to help her down from the pyre, and she saw he was Talien. Her Avatar snarled for her to rend and tear, but she thrust it down and slid down off the pyre.

Then Takoda broke free, and Kamaria. Jon, then Teague, came down from the pyres, the light of Awakened Avatars gleaming in their eyes. Aileen took the longest. Her shattered, insane shrieks rent the air for a full ten minutes. As Rhianna at last moved to release her from her imaginary bonds and illusory flames, Aileen finally Awoke.

No flames lit the night, nor were there other blackened areas. The pyres were just bundles of sticks; their bonds nothing but string. The new initiates were given fresh robes and led inside where a feast awaited them.

"What would have happened had any of us been willing to sell out the Verbena?" asked a subdued and shaken Aileen.

"Then you would not have been Awakened. Nor would you be accepted into our company now. Let us leave it at that," answered Rhianna, "Now it is time to celebrate. We meet for Lammas, called Lughnasad in honor of Lugh, who was slain and resurrected. Lammas is a harvest celebration when we give thanks for what we have gained during the year. You have passed from death into a new life as Awakened beings. Soon it will be Samhain again. The Wheel will have spun its course. The new year begins with the closing of the old. Your new lives begin with the shedding of the old. Tonight you will choose your names in magick. We bid farewell to all of you, and bid you welcome."

...

Earth, water, fire and air

Met together in a garden fair

Put in a basket bound with skin

If you answer this riddle, you'll never begin...

— The Incredible String Band, "Koeoaddi There"



Avenging Witch

Still the fire in my heart never leaves me.

— Maire Brennan, "Ce Leis"

Quote: *You believe this knife is purely ceremonial? Come closer. I will show you its true nature.*

Prelude: Born angry. Always an outsider. Misunderstood by everyone. That is your life. You've built a hard shell around you, and prefer making other people uncomfortable to feeling the pain of their rejection.

The occult was insidiously appealing. Thinking about witchcraft and curses to use against those who hurt or ignored you made you feel powerful. Though the spells didn't work, practicing the scowl and acid comments which became your trademarks taught you that the best way to protect yourself was to intimidate others. *They should pay for what they did.* That phrase has haunted you since birth. You never really understood where that feeling came from.

Now you know. A small cabal of secretive mages introduced you to real power. Through studying with the Verbena, you have discovered who you truly are: the reincarnation of a witch killed during the Burning Times. Your old soul cries out for revenge and magick provides you with the means to take it. Not that you're a crazed killer; you have an important and valuable role — hunting and punishing or removing the enemies of the Verbena. Death is a part of Life, and next time around the Wheel, those whose blood you cleanse now may have a change of heart. If they don't, you can always take it again.

Concept: You were a spooky kid, always playing with insects and making up charms and hexes to get your own way. You consumed everything available about witches, and always felt sympathetic towards them. Hansel and Gretel, the self-righteous little brats, pissed you off when they tricked the witch into the oven, and you cheered for the wicked witch against Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Roleplaying Tips: Be aggressive. You are not intimidated by any situation and fear no one (except your Mentor). Act elusive if anyone gets too inquisitive about your business and always try to keep the upper hand. If someone offends you too much or harms another Verbena, make him pay.

Magick: You aren't as powerful as you'd like to be, but are very inventive in using the magick you have. The Sphere of Life allows you to change, heal or destroy simple life forms. Funny how destroying the good bacteria in someone's body can have the most devastating effects, or how changing wholesome vegetables into poisonous ones can play havoc with a dinner party. Dabbling in Entropy lets you find the weakness in things, a great boon to either healing or destroying them. Control of Prime lets you fuel up and will eventually allow you to power your creative and destructive capabilities directly.

Equipment: Knife, herbs, cauldron, black witchy clothing.



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Primordial
Nature: Deviant
Demeanor: Bravo

Concept: Avenging Witch
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength _____ ●●●●●
Dexterity *Quick* _____ ●●●●●
Stamina _____ ●●●●●

Social

Charisma _____ ●●●●●
Manipulation _____ ●●●●●
Appearance _____ ●●●●●

Mental

Perception _____ ●●●●●
Intelligence _____ ●●●●●
Wits _____ ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness _____ ●●●●●
Athletics _____ ●●●●●
Awareness _____ ●●●●●
Brawl _____ ●●●●●
Dodge _____ ●●●●●
Expression _____ ○○○○○
Intuition _____ ●●●●●
Intimidation _____ ●●●●●
Streetwise _____ ●●●●●
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

Skills

Drive _____ ●●●●●
Etiquette _____ ○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Leadership _____ ●○○○○
Meditation _____ ○○○○○
Melee _____ ●●●●●
Research _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ●●●●●
Survival _____ ●●●●●
Technology _____ ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer _____ ○○○○○
Cosmology _____ ○○○○○
Culture _____ ●○○○○
Enigmas _____ ○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Law _____ ○○○○○
Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ●●●●●
Science _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ○○○○○ Life _____ ●●●●● Prime _____ ●●●●●
Entropy _____ ●○○○○ Mind _____ ○○○○○ Spirit _____ ○○○○○
Forces _____ ○○○○○ Matter _____ ○○○○○ Time _____ ○○○○○

Other Traits

Poisons _____ ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

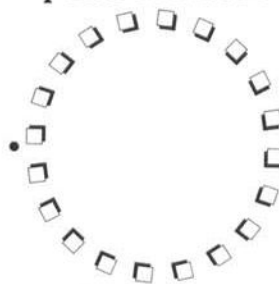
Arete

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Study Points

Backgrounds

Arcane _____ ●○○○○
Avatar _____ ●●●●●
Destiny _____ ●●●●●
Mentor _____ ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Bard

On and on

Searching for a clearer view

Winning and losing an inner war

Wonder what we do it for.

— Brian May, "Back to the Light"

Quote: *Hey, have you heard this one? It's a madrigal. What do you mean 'what's a madrigal?'*

Prelude: Born at the wrong time, you should have been a troubadour or an ancient Celtic bard. Modern life never suited you very well. While other kids were learning to play guitar, you chose Celtic lap harp. Unicorns and dragons and great heroes who fought terrible battles filled your imagination. The only real battle you ever fought was against prejudice.

Truth is important, and you always sensed that grownups were lying when they said magic had never existed in the world. All your instincts told you that if magic had never existed, there wouldn't have been so many stories, poems and songs about it. Your whole life has been a search for truth and magic.

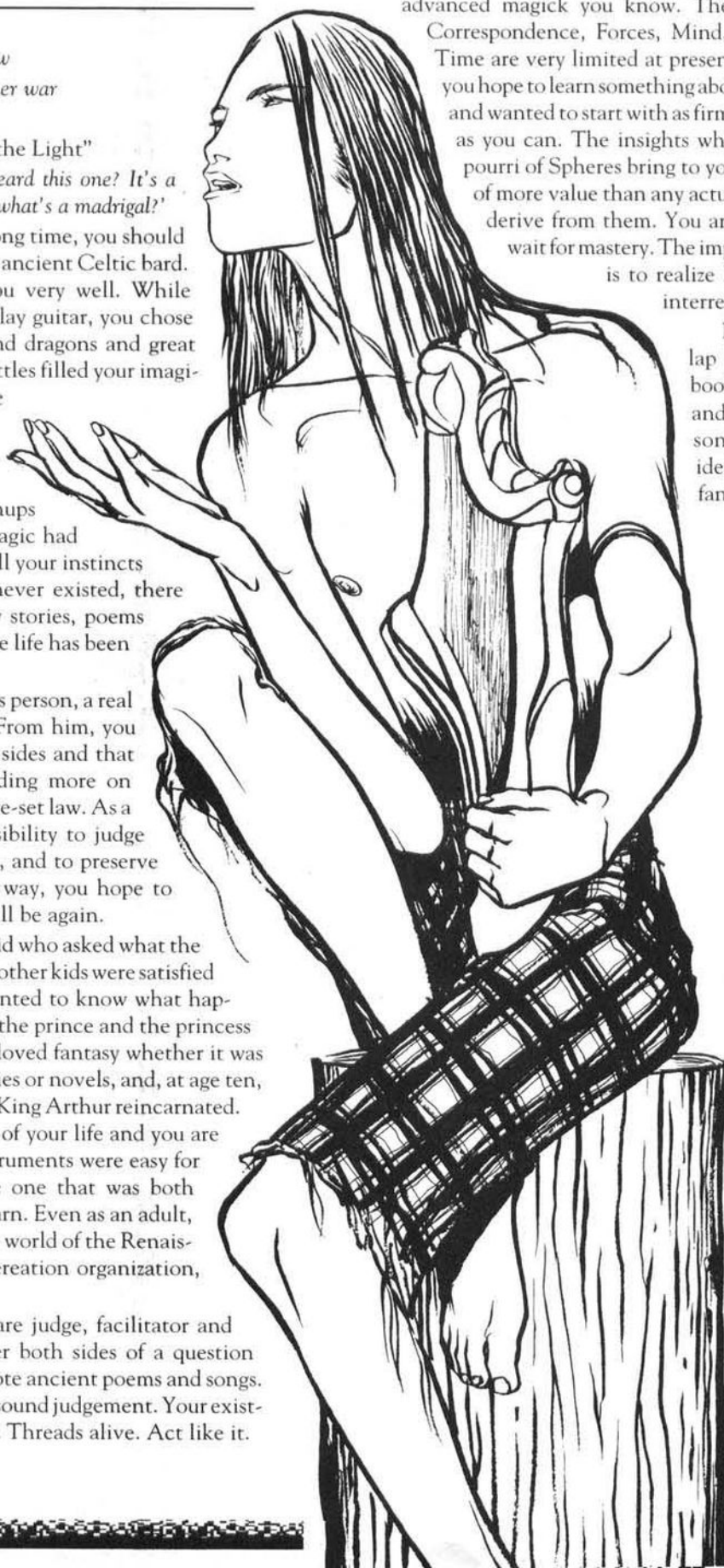
Then you met a wondrous person, a real bard like those in the tales. From him, you learned that magick has two sides and that most truths are gray, depending more on circumstance than on some pre-set law. As a lorekeeper, it is your responsibility to judge among truths and half-truths, and to preserve the ancient lore. Along the way, you hope to restore what was and what will be again.

Concept: You were the kid who asked what the nursery rhymes meant. When other kids were satisfied with a bedtime story, you wanted to know what happened to everyone else when the prince and the princess lived happily ever after. You loved fantasy whether it was in comics, stories, songs, movies or novels, and, at age ten, you wondered if you might be King Arthur reincarnated. Music has always been a part of your life and you are gifted with a great voice. Instruments were easy for you to master, so you chose one that was both ancient and a challenge to learn. Even as an adult, you tried to live in the fantasy world of the Renaissance Fair or a medieval recreation organization, rather than get a real job.

Roleplaying Tips: You are judge, facilitator and peacekeeper. Always consider both sides of a question before making a decision. Quote ancient poems and songs. Lead through inspiration and sound judgement. Your existence keeps one of the Mythic Threads alive. Act like it.

Magick: You don't have any very powerful magicks. Using Life to affect simple life forms which is the most advanced magick you know. The Spheres of Correspondence, Forces, Mind, Prime, and Time are very limited at present. As a bard, you hope to learn something about all magick and wanted to start with as firm a grounding as you can. The insights which this pot-pourri of Spheres bring to you is probably of more value than any actual power you derive from them. You are content to wait for mastery. The important thing is to realize how they all interrelate.

Equipment: lap harp, music books, notebook and pencil (for song and lyric ideas), library of fantasy books



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Questing
Nature: Judge
Demeanor: Visionary

Concept: Bard
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Social

Mental

Strength _____ ●○○○○
Dexterity _____ ●●○○○
Stamina _____ ●●○○○

Charisma _____ ●●●○○
Manipulation _____ ●●○○○
Appearance _____ ●●○○○

Perception _____ ●●●○○
Intelligence _____ ●●●○○
Wits _____ ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Skills

Knowledges

Alertness _____ ●○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○
Awareness _____ ●○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ●●○○○
Intuition _____ ●●○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

Drive _____ ●○○○○
Etiquette _____ ●●○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Leadership _____ ●●○○○
Meditation _____ ●○○○○
Melee _____ ○○○○○
Research _____ ●●○○○
Stealth _____ ●○○○○
Survival _____ ●○○○○
Technology _____ ○○○○○

Computer _____ ●○○○○
Cosmology _____ ○○○○○
Culture _____ ●●○○○
Enigmas _____ ●●○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Law _____ ●○○○○
Linguistics _____ ●○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ●○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ●○○○○
Entropy _____ ○○○○○
Forces _____ ●○○○○

Life _____ ●●○○○
Mind _____ ●○○○○
Matter _____ ○○○○○

Prime _____ ●○○○○
Spirit _____ ○○○○○
Time _____ ●○○○○

Other Traits

Arete

Health

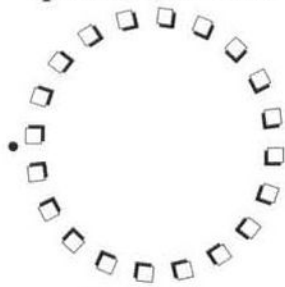
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Backgrounds

Avatar _____ ●●○○○
Destiny _____ ●●○○○
Dream _____ ●●○○○
Library _____ ●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Experience

Study Points

Eco-Terrorist Druid

*When all the leaves have fallen and turned to dust,
Will we remain entrenched within our ways.*

— Dead Can Dance, "Severance"

Quote: Humankind is arrogant. We ask 'if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one to hear it fall, does it make a noise?' as if the tree's only importance were in our relationship to it. The earth, the other trees, all life within the woods, hears it fall and echoes with the scream of its descent.

Prelude: You grew up in the city among towering buildings and garbage-filled alleyways. Rats were the only animals that survived for long in your neighborhood. The only trees were the ones spaced out every mile or so to bring some "greenery" to the city. The park was unapproachable because of the gangs that ruled there. You went to the zoo once, but the animals were penned up in bare cages and looked sick and miserable. You knew exactly how they felt. At age thirteen, you were sent away to a summer camp for disadvantaged kids, and for the first time you experienced the countryside. The camp had its own lake and a small forest, which you roved through as though it was your personal kingdom. Learning everything you could about the forest, you planned to become a forest ranger someday. Then summer ended and you returned to the bleak, dead city.

Never did get to be a forest ranger! You *did* settle near the largest forest in the east. Soon it became apparent that the forest was being decimated by logging. That was when you met the eco-terrorists who were trying to stop the deforestation. You joined and soon became a leader in the movement.

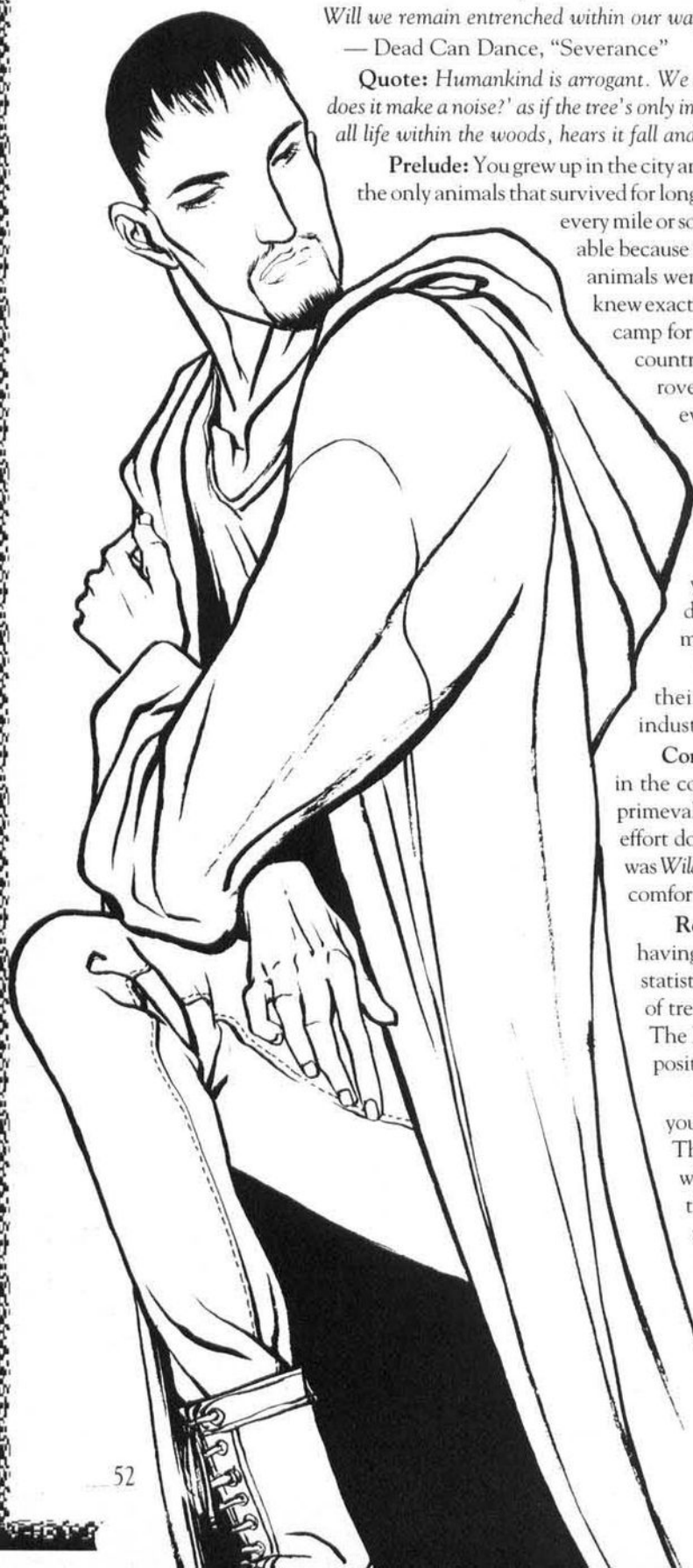
Then you met the true guardians of the forest and learned of their power to stop those who strip the forests in the name of industry and science.

Concept: You were an underprivileged city kid who longed to live in the country. You used to pretend to be an Indian who lived in the primeval forest. Trying to keep a fern alive in your apartment was an effort doomed to failure. The only television show that interested you was *Wild Kingdom*. A study in contrasts, you don't dislike people, but feel comfortable alone in the woods.

Roleplaying Tips: Read up on ecological issues, especially those having to do with the rainforest and old-growth woodlands. Quote statistics that support the contention that man will denude the planet of trees within the next fifty years. Remember you are also a Druid. The Druids were leaders and teachers in the old days. Assume these positions when you can.

Magick: Though you are only of the first circle now, eventually your magick will help shape and protect the new Mythic Reality. The Sphere of Life has provided insight into the complex patterns which govern all life on earth and you have learned to manipulate those patterns subtly. Command of Matter allows you to create new patterns to enhance the Life around it. You can make a small pool of water to feed a tree denied enough moisture. Prime lets you divert Quintessence to a needed pattern, and Forces allows you to perceive the energy flow which surrounds all things. Eventually, you will control Forces to such an extent that you can affect the weather and call lightning.

Equipment: Robes, sickle, packets of seeds, ecology pamphlets



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:

Essence: Pattern

Concept: Druid

Player:

Nature: Visionary

Mentor:

Chronicle:

Demeanor: Fanatic

Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○

Dexterity ●●○○○

Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○

Manipulation ●●○○○

Appearance ●●○○○

Mental

Perception Clear sight ●●●○○

Intelligence ●●○○○

Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○

Athletics ●○○○○

Awareness ○○○○○

Brawl ●●○○○

Dodge ●○○○○

Expression ○○○○○

Intuition ●○○○○

Intimidation ○○○○○

Streetwise ●●○○○

Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Drive ●●○○○

Etiquette ●○○○○

Firearms ●○○○○

Leadership ●●○○○

Meditation ○○○○○

Melee ●○○○○

Research ●○○○○

Stealth ●●○○○

Survival ●●○○○

Technology ●○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○

Cosmology ○○○○○

Culture ○○○○○

Enigmas ●○○○○

Investigation ○○○○○

Law ●○○○○

Linguistics ○○○○○

Medicine ●○○○○

Occult ●○○○○

Science ●○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○

Entropy ○○○○○

Forces ●○○○○

Life ●●○○○

Mind ○○○○○

Matter ●●○○○

Prime ●●○○○

Spirit ○○○○○

Time ○○○○○

Other Traits

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

Arete

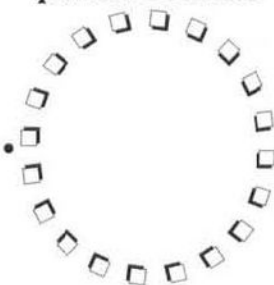
● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐

Hurt -1 ☐

Injured -1 ☐

Wounded -2 ☐

Mauled -2 ☐

Crippled -5 ☐

Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Study Points

Backgrounds

Allies ●●○○○

Arcane ●○○○○

Avatar ●●○○○

Influence ●○○○○

Node ●○○○○

○○○○○

Shapeshifter

And he went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion, and learned to catch prey, and devoured men.

— Ezekiel XIX, vi

Quote: *Grrrowll...*

Prelude: Born into a tribal culture, you were almost allowed to die because of your deformity. Instead those who were more “civilized” adopted and raised you. Never comfortable in their world, you always felt they expected gratitude and servitude for saving your worthless life.

Somewhere within you prowled an ancestral memory — of a sleek cat or a brilliantly plumed bird. Denied your rights as a member of the tribe, you knew that someday you would change, and in that change would find yourself as you should have been.

Meanwhile, suffering the difficulties of an infirm body, you imagined what it could be like in a more primitive, more magickal world. Longing for perfection of body and spirit, you were given an answer. You are a mage now and may someday have the power to transform your body into your visions of yourself. For now, you'll settle for curing the deformity.

Concept: You are a “primitive” tribesperson decked out in “civilized” costume; always out of place among those who are out of touch with their bodies and emotions. The deformity which ruled your life has made you more aware of your own carnal nature, even as it closed the door to the fulfillment of your desires. You crave perfection in yourself. Because you have so often been the object of pity or ridicule, you empathize with those who are hurt or treated cruelly. You once hid your deformity as though it were a curse, but now you begin to take pride in what you are.

Roleplaying Tips: The line from C. S. Lewis' *Namia* chronicles, “It's not as if he were a tame lion,” suits you perfectly. Show the strength, ferocity and gentleness of the panther within you. Move to the rhythms of traditional chants and drums rather than the pulse of modern life. Walk in grace and beauty. Always look for ways to perfect yourself. Talk about shifting with anyone who will listen.

Magick: Your study of Life allows you to make changes in yourself. Soon you hope to be able to shift forms with ease. Mind magick will make certain you can retain your own personality and sanity when you become a full shapeshifter. You seek to use the Time Sphere as a means to examine the past for clues to your ancestral memories. You may one day use it to escape hunters or bring down prey. You are convinced your shapeshifting holds the key to ultimate Ascension. When everyone is everyone else, there will be no need for quarreling.

Equipment: Stretch clothing, camouflage stick, pistol (let the hunter beware)



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Dynamic
Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Loner

Concept: Shapeshifter
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○
Stamina Hardy ●●●●○

Social

Charisma ●●●○○
Manipulation ●○○○○
Appearance ●●○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ●●○○○
Brawl ●●○○○
Dodge ●○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intuition ●●○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○

Skills

Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ●●○○○
Firearms ●○○○○
Leadership ●○○○○
Meditation ●○○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Research ●○○○○
Stealth ●●●○○
Survival ●●●○○
Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Cosmology ●○○○○
Culture ●●○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ●○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ●●○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○ Life ●●●○○ Prime ○○○○○
Entropy ○○○○○ Mind ●○○○○ Spirit ○○○○○
Forces ○○○○○ Matter ○○○○○ Time ●●○○○

Other Traits

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

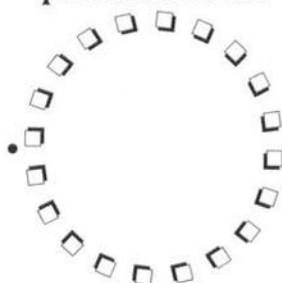
Arete

●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Study Points

Backgrounds

Arcane ●●○○○
Avatar ●●○○○
Mentor ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Healer/Medicine Man

Sharing... must be considered with great care by the Elders and the medicine people who carry the Sacred Trusts, so that no harm may come to people through ignorance and misuse of these powerful forces.

— Resolution of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Traditional Elders Circle

Quote: *Let me tell you of my vision.*

Prelude: You were born on the reservation and lived with your grandfather. He was a great medicine man and you wanted to be just like him. Secretly, though, you feared you lacked the power or the wisdom to ever become a healer as he was. You longed to have a vision, but fears and doubts kept you from achieving one. Lack of visions convinced you that you were not good enough to be a medicine man.

Giving up on traditional ways, you decided you could learn to be a doctor. Despite poverty and lack of opportunity, you managed to make it through school. But you couldn't get a scholarship, so that road was blocked as well. When your grandfather died, you were left alone with no money, no power and no future.

Then the Verbena came. They promised to teach you how to heal. They said you had power just waiting to be released. You left the reservation to follow your dream. Though you tried for almost a year, others had visions while you were left with none.

You returned to the reservation and renewed yourself with ancient rituals. A vision came at last and you knew you must return to the Verbena to finish your training as a mage. Though you are not a traditional medicine man, one who deals with the spirits, you are a healer who respects and understands the old ways.

Concept: You followed your grandfather around everywhere he went trying to fathom the "trick" involved in being a medicine man. The spirits never spoke to you, and you wondered if you were the only spirit-deaf person in your tribe. Embarrassed and hurt by your lack of success, you came very close to joining the Technocracy without even knowing what it was. Doing so would have killed your own spirit.

Roleplaying Tips: Although you have embraced modern medicine and the Verbena way of magick, you are more than half shaman. Quote heavily from great medicine men of the past. Walk softly on the Earth. She is your Mother. You hold the powers of life and death in your hands. Use that power wisely. Hold to the others in your cabal as though they were your tribe. They are.

Magick: You specialize in Life and Prime, and emphasis on those two Spheres allows you to make changes to simple life forms and your own body. You hope that by understanding Prime you will be able to use it to heal others more effectively. You use Entropy to locate the weaknesses in others which might cause problems, or to search for keys to weakening the hold disease and injury have on people. Though you are capable of causing injury or illness, you prefer not to do so unless absolutely necessary. Thus far, you have studiously avoided learning Spirit, as the spirits ignored you for far too long. It makes you nervous to think about using that Sphere.

Equipment: Herbs, first aid kit, medicine bag (Talisman), knife



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:

Essence: Pattern

Concept: Healer/Medicine Man

Player:

Nature: Visionary

Mentor:

Chronicle:

Demeanor: Caregiver

Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○

Dexterity ●●●○○

Stamina ●●●○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○

Manipulation ●●○○○

Appearance ●●○○○

Mental

Perception ●●○○○

Intelligence Intuitive ●●●●●

Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○

Athletics ●○○○○

Awareness ●○○○○

Brawl ●●○○○

Dodge ●○○○○

Expression ○○○○○

Intuition ●○○○○

Intimidation ○○○○○

Streetwise ●○○○○

Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Drive ●○○○○

Etiquette ○○○○○

Firearms ○○○○○

Leadership ○○○○○

Meditation ●●○○○

Melee ●○○○○

Research ○○○○○

Stealth ○○○○○

Survival ●○○○○

Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○

Cosmology ●○○○○

Culture ●●○○○

Enigmas ●○○○○

Investigation ●○○○○

Law ●○○○○

Linguistics ●○○○○

Medicine ●●●○○

Occult ●●●○○

Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○

Entropy ●○○○○

Forces ○○○○○

Life ●●●○○

Mind ○○○○○

Matter ○○○○○

Prime ●●●○○

Spirit ○○○○○

Time ○○○○○

Other Traits

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

Arete

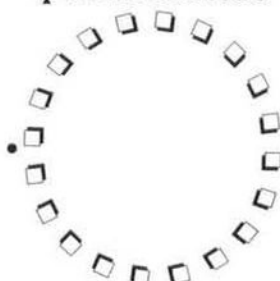
●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○

□□□□□□□□

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐

Hurt -1 ☐

Injured -1 ☐

Wounded -2 ☐

Mauled -2 ☐

Crippled -5 ☐

Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Study Points

Backgrounds

Avatar ●●●○○

Destiny ●●●○○

Talisman ●○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

Neo-Pagan

Human kind cannot bear very much reality.

— T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Quote: *Come to our festival. There's something there for everyone. The Goddess holds all her children in equal regard.*

Prelude: Raised in a home without joy or love, only duty — to parents, religion, and school — you couldn't believe in the all-powerful, cruel God they said ruled your every thought. Praise was rare; punishment swift. What was wrong with dancing or listening to loud music or hanging out with the other kids?

Secretly, you tried all the things your parents forbade. And God didn't strike you down. Dancing and singing made you happy. Loud music made you feel alive. Being kind rather than competitive brought you joy.

Your parents found out some of what you'd been up to when your sister was murdered. Their rage pushed you too far. A group of pagans welcomed you and encouraged you to join. You left home and never looked back, you learned about love, sharing — and self-defense.

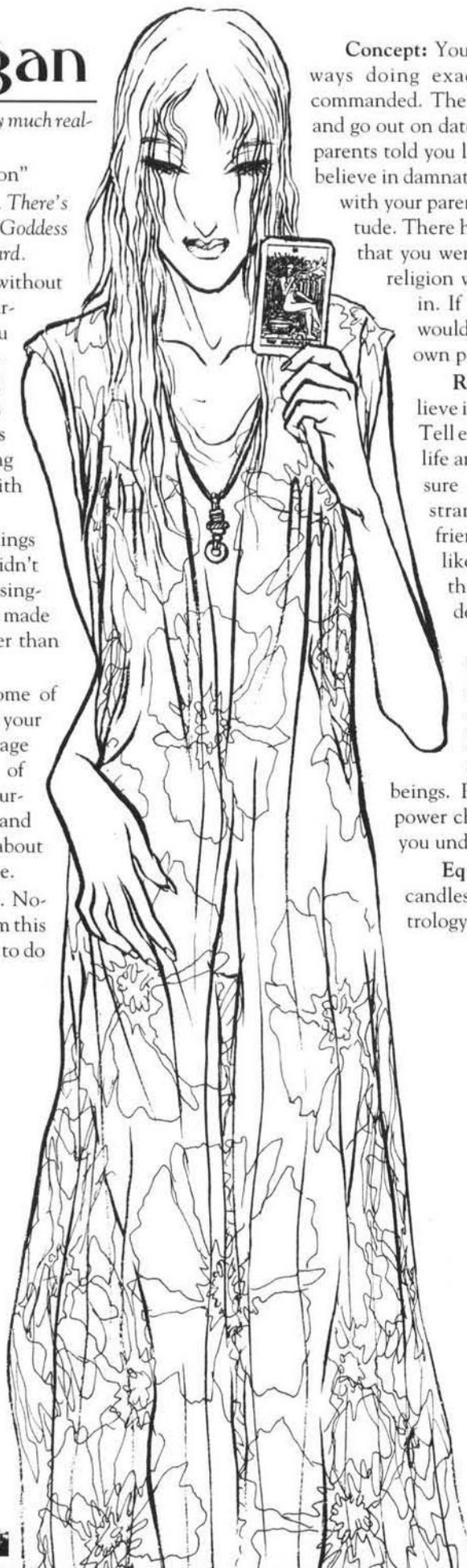
The pagan attitude is cool. Nobody will ever take you away from this and nobody will ever forbid you to do what you want.

Concept: You were a straight-laced rich kid, always doing exactly what Mommy and Daddy commanded. The other kids you knew could dance and go out on dates and do a lot of other things your parents told you led to damnation. You didn't really believe in damnation — unless damnation was living with your parents and their holier-than-thou attitude. There had to be something more. It wasn't that you were irreligious, it was just that their religion wasn't what you wanted to believe in. If there hadn't been a Goddess, you would have had to invent her for your own peace of mind.

Roleplaying Tips: You fervently believe in the Goddess and all Her blessings. Tell everyone about them. Schedule your life around the pagan festivals and make sure everyone knows you do so. Call strangers "sister" and "brother." Be friendly and supportive unless you feel like you're being taken advantage of, then warn the sleazeball of the Goddess' wrath when crossed.

Magick: Life lets you manipulate simple life forms and correct small defects in yourself, allowing you to embody the Mother's beauty. Mind allows you to receive empathic feelings from other living beings. Prime and Forces may eventually power changes you wish to make and help you understand the weather.

Equipment: Athame, wand, robes, candles, bell, crystal, herbs, cauldron, astrology book



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:

Essence: *Questing*

Concept: *Neo-Pagan*

Player:

Nature: *Architect*

Mentor:

Chronicle:

Demeanor: *Conformist*

Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength _____ ●○○○○
Dexterity _____ ●○○○○
Stamina _____ ●○○○○

Social

Charisma *Persuasive* _____ ●●●●○
Manipulation _____ ●●○○○
Appearance *Pretty* _____ ●●●●○

Mental

Perception _____ ●●●○○
Intelligence _____ ●●○○○
Wits _____ ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness _____ ●○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○
Awareness _____ ●●●○○
Brawl _____ ●○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ●●○○○
Intuition _____ ●○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

Skills

Drive _____ ●●○○○
Etiquette _____ ●●○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Leadership _____ ○○○○○
Meditation _____ ●○○○○
Melee _____ ○○○○○
Research _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ●○○○○
Survival _____ ●●○○○
Technology _____ ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer _____ ○○○○○
Cosmology _____ ●○○○○
Culture _____ ●○○○○
Enigmas _____ ●○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Law _____ ○○○○○
Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ●○○○○
Occult _____ ●○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ○○○○○
Entropy _____ ○○○○○
Forces _____ ●○○○○

Life _____ ●●●○○
Mind _____ ●●○○○
Matter _____ ○○○○○

Prime _____ ●○○○○
Spirit _____ ○○○○○
Time _____ ○○○○○

Other Traits

Dancing _____ ●●○○○
High Ritual _____ ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

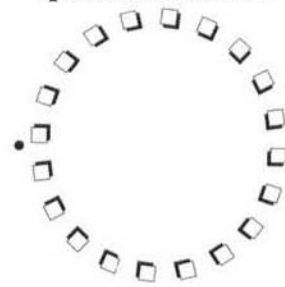
Arete

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

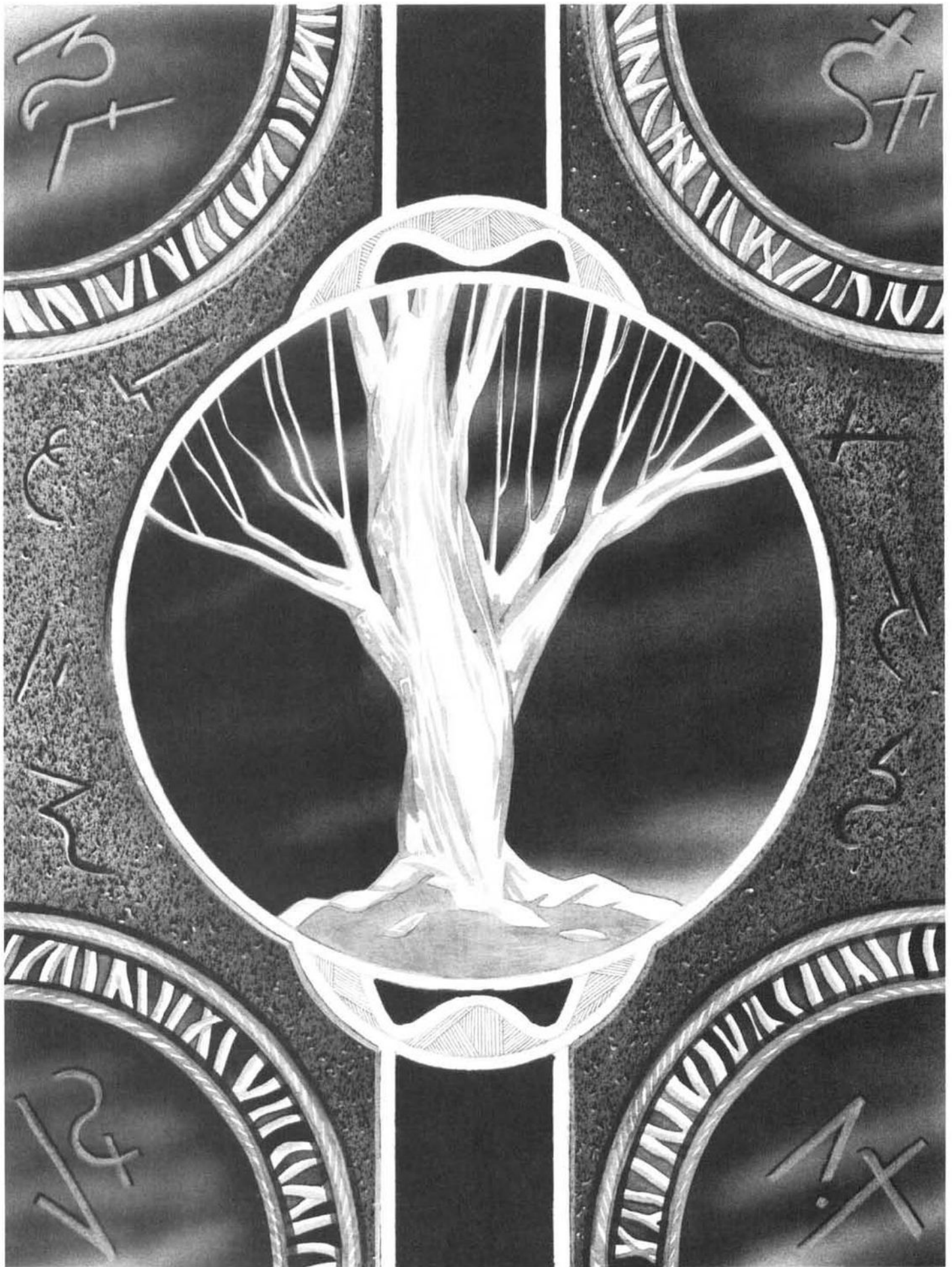
Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Study Points

Backgrounds

Allies _____ ●●○○○
Avatar _____ ●●●○○
Dream _____ ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○



Appendix One: Ancient Wisdom Verbena Magick

No living organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream.

— Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

The Spheres of Magick



Verbena view magick somewhat differently than the other Traditions. As they originated many of the Spheres, they have a more primitive conception of how magick works, yet their use of various Spheres often shows a brilliance unparalleled even by the Traditions which nominally specialize in those areas.

Pathways

Correspondence — The Art of the

Verbena see Correspondence as a way of moving from place to place — not as a rigid hierarchy of space/time. They see the ley lines and move through the paths much like a spider moves through her web.

Entropy — The Art of the Fates

Life...and death. The Art of the Fates is the art of knowing about death, decay and the path that Life must take. The most powerful Verbena have mastered this art because they realize that knowledge of Life is nothing without knowledge of Death, just as knowledge of Time is nothing without knowledge of Fate. Verbena see the Fates as lines of possibility streaming out from the now, and revere the teachings which show them how to choose, measure out and cut the twines of Fate.

Forces — The Art of Winds

Dancers on the edge of ecstasy, Verbena hold that they first shaped the forces of weather to allow early humans to survive, and later to provide good weather for crops. Despite the advent of technology and electricity, Verbena

largely see the Art of Winds as control over the forces of weather, although many of them recognize the tides and flows of electricity to be very like the blowing of the wind.

Life — The Art of Blood

This primordial Sphere is the focus of the initial Verbena training. Verbena use the Art of Blood to gently shape bodies so that they grow stronger, better, more beautiful. They work with the Lifeflow, the tendency for life to keep moving, changing, dying, and reproducing itself. This is the problem they have with the Progenitors: the Progenitors believe either that the Lifeflow is a superstition, or that they themselves have discovered the means by which to control it.

Matter — The Art of Crafting

Long ago, Verbena shaped the first stone cutters and knives with their power. Now the Art of Crafting serves them to create tools and craft things of beauty or power. The Art also deals with the use of herbs, roots, seeds, and non-living organic things.

Mind — The Art of Sight

Though long neglected by Verbena, the Art of Sight helped them to survive during the Burning Times through the careful shaping of minds. Curiously enough, many Primordial Verbena specialize in this art, claiming that the Wyck used it before they were Embodied.

Prime — The Art of Power

Many Verbena consider the Art of Power important but secondary, although some of the most powerful Verbena are Masters of this art. Many young mages try to master it as well, thinking they can outdo their older mentors through studying the base nature of magick.

Spirit — The Art of Calling

Also called the Art of Drawing, this is the body of chants, songs, dances and poetry that reaches back to the first times. Summoning spirits is now the specialty of Dreamspeakers, and has stagnated among Verbena except among those of Questing natures.

Time — The Art of Turning

Verbena feel that time is a wheel, always repeating and always moving ahead. Farther back in time, it becomes a spiral: a circle with no end that continually moves down into the past. When you step back through Time, you ride that spiral. Many of the pattern-oriented Verbena were shocked at the Progenitors' use of the double-spiral as a symbol for DNA. The double-spiral has long been the symbol that represented both the Lifeflow and the Timeflow — as they are linked together. Because of this belief, the Verbena hold certain times of the year to be special, and created the first calendars to mark these times.

Shapechanging

Although true shapechanging requires ••••• Life, many with •••• Life risk taking on higher-mammal forms (such as wolves, dolphins and whales) without the special



Mythic Threads

Magickal footholds in modern belief, Mythic Threads embody supernatural or paranormal trappings that remain a part of the collective unconscious. Something “special” within these concepts calls to modern minds, and they retain some power even in the most industrialized societies.

In game terms, a Mythic Thread is something that shapes a mage's magick style and philosophy. Used cleverly, Mythic Threads can turn otherwise vulgar Effects into coincidental ones; a Sleeper is much more likely to believe in a fortune teller reading his mind through tarot cards than in some stranger who just glances at him and learns the same things without effort. Mythic Threads tie into cultural beliefs — concepts that can work in a mage's favor.

The different Traditions have different Mythic Threads — to a certain extent Do and the Digital Web are Mythic Threads the Akashics and Virtual Adepts use. These ideas reflect and color the way a given mage views his magick; they are symbols of his or her philosophy. The “Personalizing Magick” section in **The Book of Shadows** goes into this subject in more detail, although it does not use the term Mythic Threads *per se*. Thread concepts shape the method of one's magick.

By creative use of Mythic Threads, a mage may pass off some Effects as coincidental (see the Blatancy and High Ritual Abilities in **The Book of Shadows**). This is largely a matter of Storyteller discretion, and will depend on the mage's presentation, location and conviction. A Verbena on Wall Street in a three-piece suit would have a harder time utilizing Mythic Threads than if she were on the moors in a midnight-blue cloak, her hair unbound and blowing dramatically. Grossly vulgar Effects — fire from one's fingertips, summoned demons, etc. — cannot be passed off under most circumstances, though this too can vary. Conjuring up the Loch Ness Monster in a Scottish loch would be more coincidental than creating a Tyrannosaurus in the Oval Office. As always, subtlety and reason should guide reality.

Mythic Threads of the Verbena include:

Mythic Creatures: The Loch Ness Monster, unicorns, werewolves, vampires, ghosts, and even angels and demons remain a part of common belief. These legendary creatures live on in folklore (or other ways), despite the encroachment of the static reality imposed by the Technocracy. Mages utilizing this Thread must be wary, however; Paradox abhors a dramatic paradigm change.

Crafts: Witchcraft, astrology, divination (by tarot cards, runes, or I Ching), herbalism, candle-spells, poppet-making, crystals and gemstones, hypnotism, psychics, curses, and blessings all have a place in a mage's magickal workings. Use of any of these in the appropriate circumstances should lower the difficulty of the magick being cast.

Times: Samhain, Beltaine, Friday the 13th, Midnight, Dawn, Eclipses — all are times of power, especially for the Verbena. Magick used during these times should have increased power — though not always of a predictable sort! Naturally, other times such as Sunday mornings, midday, or during the Ides of March might decrease the power of the magick, making it more difficult for the Verbena to use. Such fluctuations in power would increase or decrease magick difficulty by one or two (never more than three) places.

Superstitions: The number 13, black cats, an upside-down horseshoe, ravens and four-leaf clovers have been viewed as explanations for things beyond mortal ken. Sighting any of these portents or carrying such talismans as a rabbit's foot might increase the efficacy of magicks cast by Verbena. Conversely, bad omens might make their magick less strong or prevent the Verbena from casting at all (see the Echoes Flaw).

benefits that come with those forms (water breathing, flight, etc.). Such mages risk leaving their sentience behind, as they do not fully understand what they are doing. Shapechanging is very difficult to do coincidentally. Many Verbena specialize in specific forms by purchasing that form as a Knowledge (**Mage**, pgs 145-146). A specialty form lowers the difficulty by 1 when the mage is trying to change into that animal.

Rotes

Sense the Fleeting Moment (• Time)

This rote allows a Verbena to sense the proper moment in which to act. By using the Mythic Thread of astrology, a Verbena may choose the perfect time and place to do a

specific thing, and may even be successful at discerning whether or not the thing should be done at all.

[Each success on the magick roll lowers the difficulty for one specific non-magickal task by 1. This is usually coincidental. Once this single action ends, the magick ends as well.]

Bloodsight (• Life)

This rote allows a Verbena to sense how healthy a person is, what diseases (if any) she has, whether she is insane or pregnant or how old she really is, and alerts him to the presence of any foreign substances including bullets, drugs, and alcohol. The Verbena also use this rote to determine someone's lineage.

[Each success provides one fact about the target's physical state.]

Dousing (• Life, • Correspondence)

Using a forked stick (hazel is best) and this rote, a Verbena can search an area for the presence of water (or oil), by sensing both the presence of minute life forms attracted to the moisture, and the volume of liquid present. This is useful both for discovering underground resources and for finding water in an arid environment.

[Each success provides one more piece of information about the liquid, i.e. if there is liquid present, how close to the surface it is, how much there is, if it is safe to drink, etc.]

Banishing Blessing (•• Entropy, •• Mind)

Verbena often use this to rid themselves of people who are annoying but not actually threatening. By controlling the randomness of everyday events and offering mental suggestions, a Verbena can cause things to happen which will send the target away. These things are usually positive: the target wins the lottery and moves away, or finds a free airline ticket voucher and flies to Paris for a week, or wangles a car ride even when the last possibility has dried up.

[Each success sends the target away for more and more time. The Effect is always beneficial rather than baneful; this is seen as a more subtle means to be rid of others.]

Calling the Wind Lords (•• Forces, •• Spirit)

This rote summons spirits of the wind, who will then influence the local weather. The Verbena use this to alter the weather slightly: a sunny day becomes cloudy, clouds become rain, rain becomes a thunderstorm. Since the weather is still not completely predictable even by the science of meteorology, this Effect is usually coincidental.

[Each success on the roll enables the Verbena to alter the local weather; the more successes she rolls, the greater the change. Getting a cloud to block the sun for a moment would require one success, while summoning a full-blown storm would require five. These changes must be gradual and slow; speeding the Effect can result in vulgar magick. This weather-alteration affects the sky within immediate sight of the Verbena, lasts for a "normal" length of time, and cannot create phenomena out of nothing. Especially powerful storms (hurricanes, tornadoes) are beyond the power of this rote. Note that a larger weather pattern may evolve after the rote is over: the weather is not a system one tweaks without consequences.]

Circle Ward (•• Spirit, • Mind, •• Prime)

This rote creates a circle of power within which a Verbena can safely work. The ward itself is created by summoning four separate and distinctly powerful spirits (usually allied with one of the four directions, seasons, or classical elements) and weaving a circular pattern out of their spiritual essences. The result is a very strong ward that can hold up against many kinds of direct magickal attacks.

[Each success on the roll gives the Verbena +1 to her counter-magick roll for the scene, as long as she stays within the circle. This rote cannot be maintained for more than one scene per point of Stamina].

Taliesin's Song (••• Life, •• Mind)

A Verbena may completely sway another's mind, simply by altering his vocal chords and singing. This control is coincidental, and allows the Verbena to influence others. Usually those who use this rote do so only when absolutely necessary. The target must be able to hear the music sung or words spoken for this rote to be successful.

[Each success on the roll adds an automatic success to the Verbena's Social rolls against the target or targets within range, for the magick's usual duration. This Effect can be resisted by Willpower if the target is aware that some coercion is being used, of course. **Taliesin's Song** is not terribly effective against other mages (who may be aware that they are being bewitched), but is quite useful when dealing with Sleepers.]

Merlin's Ride (••• Correspondence; •••• Correspondence to move others)

It is said this rote was first used to transport Arthur and his army to Badon Hill when Arthur needed magickal aid to defeat those who would not join him. To achieve this Effect, the Verbena begins to walk, run, or ride (a horse is preferable, although some Verbena have learned to do this while driving a car). Slowly, the scenery begins to blur around her as she travels toward her destination. The traveler does not appear "differently" to outside observers, as the Effect speeds and slows the traveler gradually.

[Each success on the Effect roll reduces travel time by 20%. Five successes on the roll cause the user to arrive almost instantaneously. Note that this Effect can be coincidental if done late at night or with very few witnesses, and the area around the traveler is in deep wilderness or on a lonely road.]

Appendix Two: The Center of the Wheel Famous Verbena

*And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every
beast of the earth...*

—Genesis IX, ii

Lilith



Known as the Damned Queen or the Lady of Night, Lilith is counted the first Verbena. Indeed, many view her as the first feminist and the first mage. The greatest of the Wyck, Lilith was said to be Adam's first wife. She refused a subservient position and was driven from the Garden. Lacking any comforts, she had to create what she needed to sustain herself in the darkness.

Lilith created a palace for herself in the Umbra. It was, essentially, the first Horizon Realm. She gave birth to a number of children, one of whom supposedly became the ancestress of the Garou. When Cain was driven out, Lilith sheltered and Awakened him. Because of the curse upon him, he was changed into a vampire by his Awakening. Lilith taught him her magick, which became the vampiric Disciplines.



It is said that Lilith could read the twines of Fate and would share her knowledge with any who asked. Such knowledge always came with a price, however. The beautiful, dark woman whose eyes pierce through darkness and disguise to read the soul is rumored to survive in her hidden Realm. Tales abound of mages who learn deep magicks at the feet of a goddess — a goddess with no navel, for Lilith was created, not born.

Verbena acknowledge Lilith as the mother of all Verbena and the originator of all Spheres of magick. She is believed to have rescued the four secret Horizon Realms of the Verbena from the shattered remains of the Mythic World and set them floating in the Umbra, keyed to Verbena magick. If this is true, Lilith may still have dealings with the Tradition today.

Heasha Morningshade



Heasha, an Adept, is the quintessential Celtic earth mother type. In her mid-thirties, she still looks youthful, with clear blue eyes and a mane of flaming red hair which falls to her waist. Though she is not ravishingly beautiful, Heasha's dignity and grace command attention and respect.

She learned her magicks from Nightshade, the Verbena member of the Council of Nine. Her vision of the future for Verbena has led her to become a spokesperson for the Verbena to other Traditions, and she is pursued as a teacher by many young initiates. Her eloquence and passion speak for themselves, and many older Verbena find themselves quoting her or using one of her arguments when proving a point.

In recent years, Heasha has led the campaign to locate and integrate Orphans into the Verbena. Unlike many of her elders, Heasha recognizes the power Orphans have to offer and wants to encourage all mages to embrace the cause of Ascension rather than waste themselves in angst and party tricks.



AMK-24

Sam Haine



The gruff, dour fellow who calls himself Sam Haine is a troubleshooter for the Verbena. He doesn't agree with most of the witchy trappings and rituals so many of the Verbena enjoy. He travels the world looking for pieces of the Mythic Threads and coaxing them back into reality or to Verbena Horizon Realms where they can be preserved. His secondary job is as a debunker of the false occult items and ideas the Syndicate sells to a gullible public.

Because he sees himself as a lone crusader doing the Verbena's dirty work, he is rude, intolerant and difficult to understand. Most Verbena would just as soon he shut up and joined the Technocracy (except he knows too much). Sam has been captured by the Technocracy more than once and somehow managed to escape each time. Many Verbena suspect he has allies or sympathizers within the Technocracy, but if he does, he keeps his own counsel. The only reason most Verbena trust him is that Sam Haine has never been known to tell a lie or to repeat sensitive information that someone asked him to keep quiet.

Sam is able to change his appearance magickally and likes to scout out new territories or situations in various forms before he commits himself to action. To many acquaintances, he is simply known as Changing Man.



VERBENA

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence:
Nature:
Demeanor:

Concept:
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength _____ ●○○○○○
Dexterity _____ ●○○○○○
Stamina _____ ●○○○○○

Social

Charisma _____ ●○○○○○
Manipulation _____ ●○○○○○
Appearance _____ ●○○○○○

Mental

Perception _____ ●○○○○○
Intelligence _____ ●○○○○○
Wits _____ ●○○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness _____ ○○○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○○
Awareness _____ ○○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○○
Intuition _____ ○○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○○

Skills

Drive _____ ○○○○○○
Etiquette _____ ○○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○○
Leadership _____ ○○○○○○
Meditation _____ ○○○○○○
Melee _____ ○○○○○○
Research _____ ○○○○○○
Stealth _____ ○○○○○○
Survival _____ ○○○○○○
Technology _____ ○○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer _____ ○○○○○○
Cosmology _____ ○○○○○○
Culture _____ ○○○○○○
Enigmas _____ ○○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○○
Law _____ ○○○○○○
Linguistics _____ ○○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○○
Occult _____ ○○○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ○○○○○○ Life _____ ●○○○○○ Prime _____ ○○○○○○
Entropy _____ ○○○○○○ Mind _____ ○○○○○○ Spirit _____ ○○○○○○
Forces _____ ○○○○○○ Matter _____ ○○○○○○ Time _____ ○○○○○○

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○

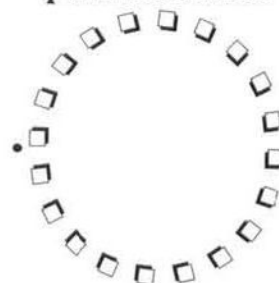
Arete

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Study Points

Backgrounds

_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○

Merits & Flaws

Merits & Flaws

[illegible]

Talismans

Name	Level	Arete	Quintessence	Appearance

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

Maneuver	Accuracy	Damage
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Kick	7	Strength + 1
Body slam	7	Special; see Options

Armor: _____



MAGE: The Ascension™

Expanded Background

Contacts, Sleeper

Contacts, Awakened

Influence, Sleeper

Allies, Awakened

Resources

Mentor

Familiar

Chantry

Acolytes

Node(s)

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Foci

Preferred Mythic Threads/Methods

VERBENA
MAGE: The Ascension™

History

Awakening

Goals / Destiny

Seekings

Quiets

Description

Age

Apparent Age

Date of Birth

Age of Awakening

Hair

Eyes

Race

Nationality

Height

Weight

Sex

Appearance / Nature of Avatar

Visuals

Cabal Chart

Character Sketch