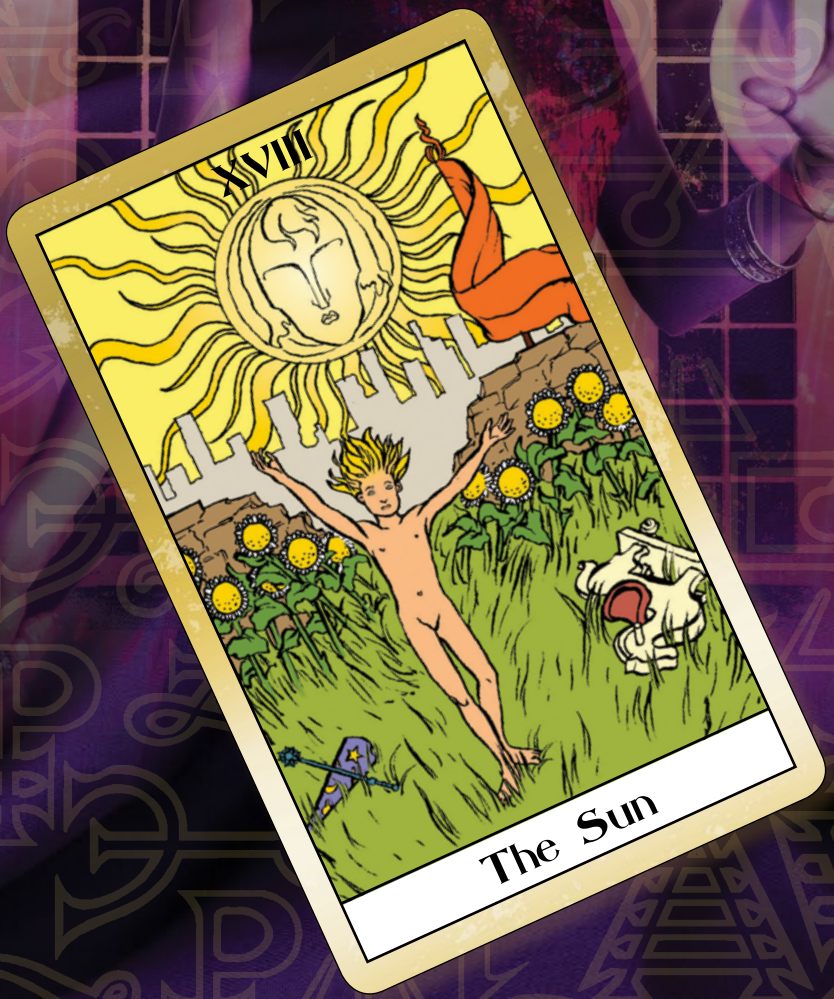
THE BOOK OF SECRETS



An Expansive Companion for
Mage 20th Anniversary Edition

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An Expansive Companion for
Mage 20th Anniversary Edition

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R.I.P.: Logan Masterson. Be at peace, brother. You are missed.

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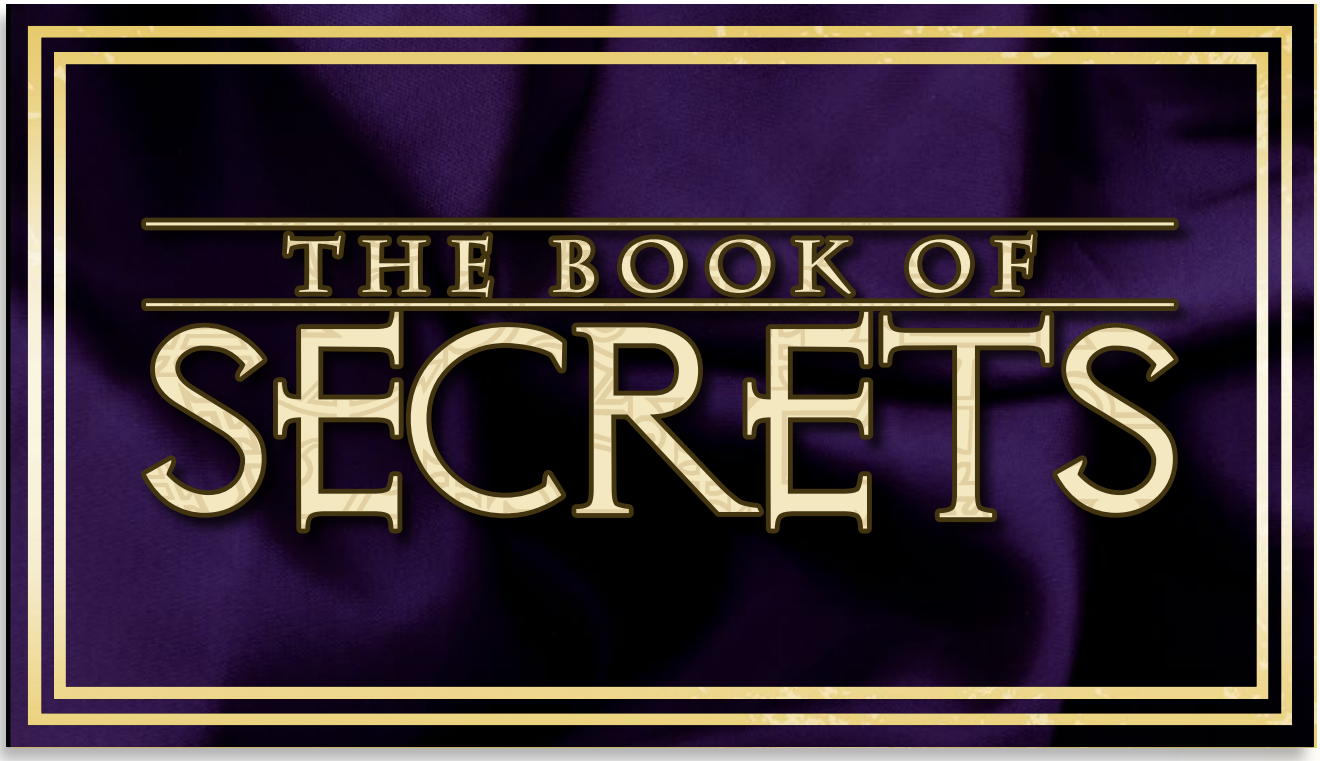
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The Secrets Game

You cannot muzzle a tempest with a cobweb...
– Ragnar Redbeard, *Might is Right*

"Tell me," I whisper as he screams.

Oh, it's not a loud scream. He makes no sound at all. I locked that sound inside his head, and locked his jaw so he can't make noise. I can hear it, though. In his head. Lovely echo. I hope it hurts.

Hope? Hell, I *know* it hurts. I made sure of that, and so did he.

The PsychOps torturer sits rigid in his office chair. His eyes stare into hells he created for himself while inflicting them on others. He can't move, can't talk, can't do anything except sit there until I set him free through death. Time, inside his skin, has been suspended. It's just a long, frozen moment for his body, and a long, endless nightmare for his mind. That's the least I can do for him, and much better than what he'd have done for me if he'd had the chance.

He can't actually tell me anything. He doesn't need to – I know it all. You don't have to strip a mind down to its core components in order to find out what's inside. You just need to know what you're doing. And I do.

The "Tell me" part? I guess that's just me being cruel.

Justice can be like that sometimes.

He's earned some rough justice, this rapist of psyches. He deserves to be broken because breaking people is what he does. So now I'm helping him feel what he's made so many other people feel. Really, it's the least I can do.

Never underestimate a cute little hippie-chick with a grudge, boys. You never know what she can do when she sets her heart on doing it.

He doesn't believe in hell, the guy in the chair. Not in gods or judgment or anything other than the gleam of technology and the rightness of his own purpose.

He'll believe in hell now, though. Because I've just opened up the hell inside him, and I've let him feel its flames.

Unlocking secrets was his game. It's my game too – and I just won. In a different life, I'd be the one in his chair. Giving up my secrets. Not the other way around.

But here we are. And Turnabout, as the saying goes, is fair play.

It's cold down here – not just the physical temperature, but in every element I sense, in all directions, as far as I can reach. The walls and floors and ceiling rebuff every sort of probe I try. My senses slide off of them like water off a Teflon pan. I could have died in a place like this, a long time ago. I would have, too. If it hadn't been for John.

So this one's for you, John. A thank-you gift for my salvation, courtesy of one of the men who made you what you are.

The torturer's eyes well with unshed tears. Poor baby. I think he's had enough. And really, it's time for me to go. I've got more work to do here. More secrets to unlock. More games of Turnabout to win.

My lips brush his forehead, a faint sarcastic kiss.

"Good night, asshole," I whisper.

Then I snap my fingers, and his life goes out.

Introduction: The Wizard's Annex

Everything you think, is true.
– Prince, acceptance speech for the 2006 Webby Awards

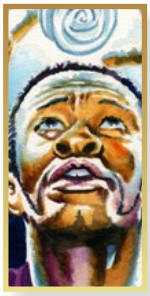
The old man's ghost lives inside these ruins. I can feel his bristly presence as I step into the room. The smell of him permeates each corner, as it so often does when some living thing has spent long hours in a space, but this is more than that. When I close my eyes, I can hear the timbre of his voice, even though we'd never met.

A curious ozone tang, as if left by just-departed lightning, hovers in this rain-washed debris. Echoes of his fingertips play across the pages of saturated books, their precious scribing turned to decorative mush. A looming pressure builds behind me, as if the regent of this blasted home is standing at my back. Each mystic sense of mine cries out with him.

Though long gone, Archmaster Porthos lingers here.

I wonder what other traces I might find...

A Personal Treasure-Trove



Welcome to the annex – the storehouse of secrets that escaped the mammoth confines of **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition** and found their way between these covers. Even with projects of that scope and size, there's never room for everything, and although the book in your hands isn't exactly "everything" (how could it possibly be *that?*), it's filled with expanded rules, optional Traits, Storyteller guidance, suggested sources of inspiration, an extension of the **Mage 20** focus rules, and even more besides.

Back when we were putting **Mage 20** together, we wanted to make that book a definitive "one-stop shopping" tome for **Mage**'s twenty-first-century incarnation. Yet it soon became obvious that no book, regardless of its size, could contain all the various goodies we wanted to include. About halfway through the writing process, the **Mage** line developer and primary author (that's me) began setting aside half-written sections and less-essential rules for inclusion into a second book whose working title was **The Wizard's Annex**. Like many working titles, that was soon changed to its final moniker, and that "annex" became the collection of magely lore you're reading now.

During **Mage 20**'s development, editing, and layout processes, I began cutting the book down even further. From a pre-edit draft of roughly 650,000 words, the final half-million word-count was squeezed between two covers by mighty Mike Chaney, **Mage 20**'s hard-working art director and graphic



designer. The remaining material went on to be expanded, revised, and compiled into **How Do You *DO* That?**; this book; and the currently-in-progress character sourcebook **Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers**. The majority of that cut material, though, can be found here, within this **Book of Secrets**.

What sorts of goodies do we have here for you, then? Well...

- **Chapter One: Heroic Traits** compiles a definitive collection of new character Archetypes, secondary Abilities, and Merits and Flaws. In many cases, these Traits – especially the Merits and Flaws – have been updated and revised in order to remain consistent with the 20th **Anniversary Edition** rule systems. Oh, yeah... and there's plenty of new stuff here as well. Lots of it.

- **Chapter Two: Expanded Rules** features an array of *optional rules* for things like combat, Resonance, computers, Wonders, and more.

- **Chapter Three: Matters of Focus** introduces a selection of new paradigms, practices, and instruments, plus ***Examples in Play*** and a focus-based FAQ that address the **Mage 20** focus rules.

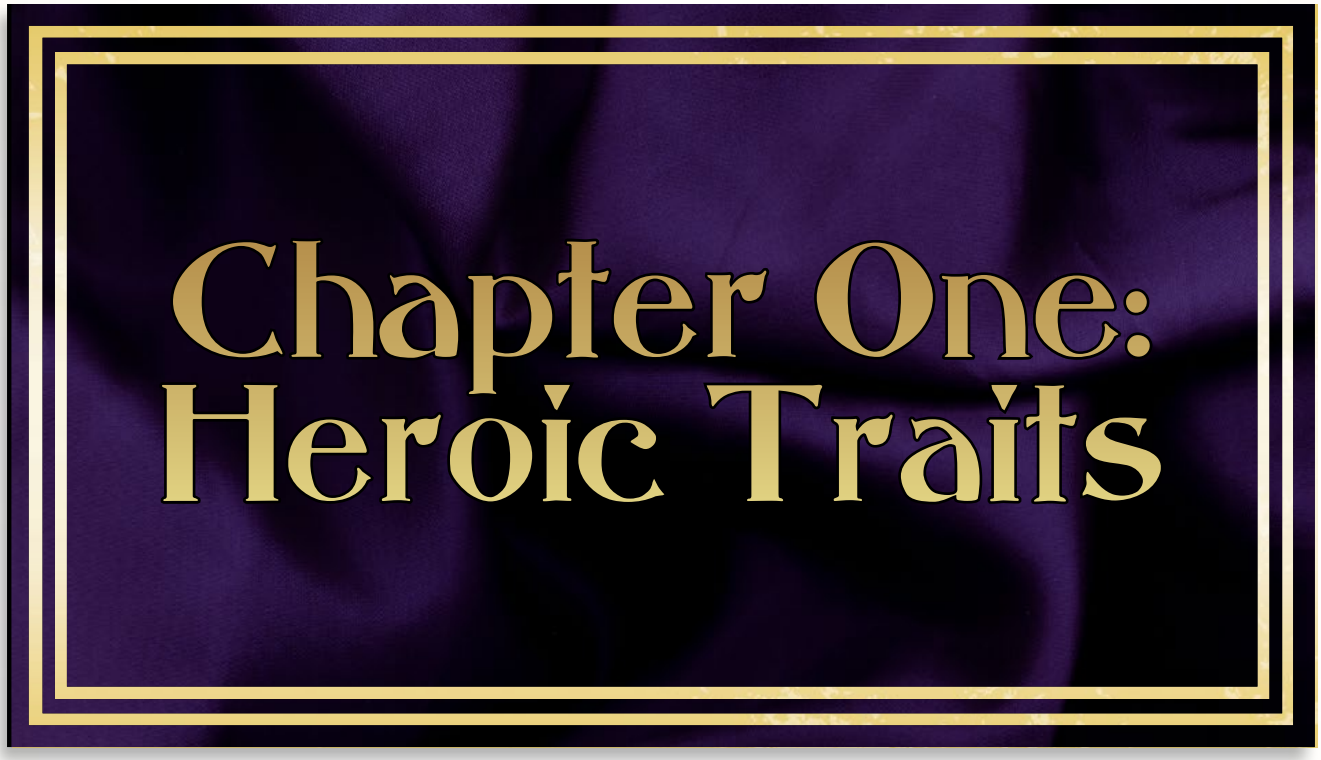
- **Chapter Four: Justice and Influence** provides a look at crimes, punishments, and areas of influence among the Masses for the Traditions, Technocracy, Disparate Alliance, and Nephandi. For the Mad Marauders, who really don't have such coherent social systems, there's an examination of various kinds of Marauders and the strange ways in which they function in a world that's too crazy for most of us but not quite crazy enough for them.

- **Chapter Five: To Speak of Many Things** wraps this book up with the ***M20 FAQ***, Storyteller suggestions for genre-based **Mage** stories, assorted essays that clarify and expound upon topics raised in **Mage 20**, and a collection of ***Suggested Sources*** that inspire and inform **Mage 20** in particular and **Mage: The Ascension** as a whole.

So yeah, again, welcome to the annex. I'm sure you'll find something of interest for you here.

Enjoy!





Chapter One: Heroic Traits

Heroes are ordinary people who make themselves extraordinary.
- Gerard Way

"Market correction."

"Excuse me?"

"The horns," said Jeremy Post, dim bar-light shining off the boney peaks projecting from his high forehead. "Another damned market correction."

"Oh, Post," his friend replied, her voice sliding into a half-scold tone. "Haven't you learned better than that by now?"

Jeremy Post, "magic man" of the Schofeld-Bloom bull-pit crew, slammed something strong and amber from the shot glass in his hand. The burn pulled his eyes tight for a moment. When he opened them again, they seemed brighter somehow – not lambent, exactly, but lit by a glow of rough satisfaction. His companion, Marjory Tate Sinclair, sipped her own drink and shook her head in mock despair.

"Risk is where the magic is, Sinclair," he said once the spirits had quit welding his windpipe shut. Post's voice had the rounded tone of someone who's been drinking light but steadily. "No risks, no profits, you know that. Play too safe, and you're drinking with the Mail Room boys again."

Sinclair snorted, her nose flaring with double-edged contempt. "Been a long time since I saw even ONE boy in the Mail Room, Post. That's where they send folks like me."

"Not like ***you****," Post assured her. "You've pulled your weight here from Day One."*

"MY weight, ***your*** *weight, even the Mail Room's weight some days, it feels like." She regarded his horns again. "So what'd you* ***do****, anyway?"*

"Do I need to fill out the proper report forms, Ms. Sinclair?" His voice mimicked the intern they'd both put through the ringer in their early days at the firm.

She laughed, a quick bark. "No, Post," she replied, reaching out her hand to touch the right-side horn. "I think we can keep this one off the records..."

What We're Made Of

Although imagination is the most important element of any **Mage** character, we must admit that a wide range of optional Traits can make the game more fun. Sure, **Mage 20**'s **Chapter Six** and **Appendix II** contain the game's most essential Traits; but for folks who want to play, for example, a heretical blind swordsman with an impressive capacity for alcohol, the following chapter features dozens upon dozens of Archetypes, Abilities, Merits and Flaws that may spice up your chronicle and add new flavors to an already brimming stew.

The following collection of Traits can be considered definitive for **Mage's 20th Anniversary** incarnation. As we've mentioned earlier (and will reiterate later), several of these

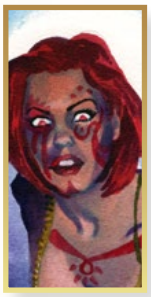
Traits revise and in some cases replace Traits from older editions of **Mage**. If your group prefers the original versions of those Traits, then feel free to use them. Those earlier versions, though, might not square with the more recent **20th Anniversary** books, so consider the details before deciding your preference. As with all of the other rules presented throughout this book, these Traits are all considered to be *optional rules*. Your Storyteller may allow or discard any, some, or all of the Traits below.

This chapter contains the following Traits on the following pages:

Archetypes **(pp. 14-15)**
Secondary Abilities
- Talents **(pp. 18-22)**
- Skills **(pp. 22-30)**
- Knowledges **(pp. 30-34)**

Merits and Flaws **(pp. 34-99)**
- Physical **(pp. 35-42)**
- Mental **(pp. 42-53)**
- Social **(pp. 53-68)**
- Supernatural **(pp. 68-96)**

Archetypes



We humans are mutable little monkeys. We can act like one sort of person while secretly nurturing an entirely different personality. That's especially true of mages, whose secretive dealings and unorthodox beliefs turn even the most honest Awakened folks into psychological halls of mirrors. And so, the modest selection of Archetype Traits provided in **Mage 20 (pp. 250 and 267-273)** can easily be expanded to include the following options as well:

Archetypes

Architect	Guardian
Artist	Heretic
Bon Vivant	Mentor
Caregiver	Romantic
Conformist	Tycoon
Director	Vigilante
Entertainer	Zealot

Architect

Structure is essential. Without it, life is chaos. It's up to you to provide stability and create things that endure. A builder, a craftsman, a designer for better tomorrows, you feel best when you're constructing things of value and shaping the foundations of a better tomorrow.

Dedicated **Purpose** guides your designs. You've got one eye on your tools and another on the legacy you'll leave behind. While other people *dream*, you *do*. Contentment is not your style; there's always room for improvement somewhere.

Obsession, though, is your weakness. As far as you're concerned, your way is the best way, and that fixation sometimes interferes with your ability to see the world in any way other than your own. To Ascend, you'll have to learn to accept imperfections, diversity, and designs that differ from your own.

– Regain Willpower when you create or provide something with lasting value or importance.

Artist

Magick is an art, and Reality is your canvas. Guided by inspiration, you reshape the world in accordance with your vision of the Truth as you see it. Perhaps you're a literal artist – a dancer, a painter, an author, a performer – who uses artistic media and intentions to focus your Awakened Arts; or maybe you're a more abstract form of artist, employing artistic principles to guide the reality you create. You could, of course, do both. Regardless of your tools and affiliation, your vision reaches beyond mere physical or metaphysical technique, encompassing a greater Truth. Art, after all, speaks for those who have no voice, and so you speak on their behalf.

Expression is your gift to the world. Through art, you channel feelings and observations into a form that other folks can recognize. Ideally, the things you express resonate with a wider audience, inspiring them to change their world on an even greater scale.

As with many artists, though, you tend to get **Stuck in Your Own Head**. Your vision can become so self-focused that no one else can understand what you're trying to express. At worst, this can lead to egotism, disconnection, depression, and insanity. Artists have a long tradition of going bugfuck nuts, and the Path of Artistry runs dangerously close to the Path to Marauderdom.

– Regain Willpower whenever you create a work of art in your chosen medium that communicates a sense of sublime Truth to your intended audience.

Bon Vivant

Grabbing hold of all the fun you can find, you're a devotee of excitement and experience. It's all too easy to weep and moan in this world. *Fuck* that noise. As far as you're concerned, it's better to laugh your way to hell than to zone out or crawl all the way to your inevitable grave.

Joie de vivre ("love of life") is your defining strength. Nothing gets you down for long. Your ability to find enjoyment

in even the darkest circumstances is an inspiration to the folks around you. More than simply being the life of the party, you bring the party wherever you might go.

Your **Superficiality**, though, can be a trap. Not only do your fun-seeking ways bring you into risky situations, they also trivialize things that really *do* need to be taken seriously. Pleasure in itself is not wrong; to Ascend beyond such superficial concerns, though, you'll need to face whatever pain you're hiding beyond that party-hearty façade.

– Regain Willpower whenever you have a truly awesome time and bring other folks along for the ride.

Caregiver

When people need you, you're there. Although you might lack the resources of a Benefactor or the vision of an Architect, you give time, work, and compassion to folks in need. This, to you, is merely what we, as human beings, should do for one another. Perhaps you act out of religious devotion, a generous philosophy, or a simple need to love and be loved in return. Whatever your reason, you're the one people turn to when the strains of life become too much to bear without help.

Kindness provides a wellspring for your strength. It keeps you going and provides the emotional reserves you'll need in such a fucked-up world. Because kindness often inspires other people to be kind in return, you're often treated well. This sustains your love at times when joy seems hard to find.

That said, there's a distinct **Insecurity** behind your generosity. Maybe you feel as though folks will ignore you unless you make yourself valuable to them. People also take advantage of you at times... which, in turn, fuels your insecurities. To go beyond the role of potential doormat, you've got to recognize your own worth and stop seeking validation from other folks.

– Regain Willpower when you successfully protect, comfort or nurture someone who really needs it. You've got to actually help that other person in some way, but whether or not they acknowledge your assistance, you still feel good about yourself.

Conformist

Every team needs players. That's what you're there for. Let some other hotshot go for the glory; you're the strong center that will hold no matter what comes. For obvious reasons, this is a common Technocratic Archetype. Other groups, however, have people like this too – it's not a group, after all, if no one treats it as a team. As far as you're concerned, stability is a virtue, not a fault.

Cooperation is your greatest strength. Your reliability stands as an example for others to follow. When malcontents try to tear things down, you're the walls, floor, and foundation of your group. It's not your place to call the shots, but if a plan makes sense, you're the first one to follow through.

In the long run, though, your eternal **Compliance** cripples you. Sure, it's great to provide support for other people's work. If you want to reach toward Ascension, you'll need to know when and how to become your own boss. As long as you choose to be a cog, you'll never leave the factory floor.

– Regain Willpower when you support an effort that goes according to plan because you were there to back it up.

Director

You're here to sort things out, lay down the law, and make sure that people follow through on things that must be done. The designated adult in all situations, you take your responsibilities to heart. Firm guidance and clear command are hallmarks of your approach. When stuff needs to get done, you're the best person to run the show.

Leadership is your gift to the world. While other folks stand around dithering, you know what to do, how to do it, and what will happen if things aren't done properly. You're good at motivating people, and tend to be the most organized one in your group. People look to you for guidance, and you rarely let them down.

Your **Intolerance**, though, sometimes trips you up. The real world never *does* run smoothly, and you can drive yourself (and everyone around you) crazy trying to implement your vision. In order to Ascend, you must integrate other possibilities into your approach. Collaboration might sound like a bad word to you, but a truly great leader learns how to accept compromise.

– Regain Willpower when you lead a group to accomplish a challenging task.

Entertainer

Life sucks. Good thing you're here to brighten things up! Maybe you're a satirist, kicking holes in the delusions surrounding you; or an actor, speaking for the folks who've forgotten what they needed to say. You could express the yearning that other people feel but cannot articulate, or simply bring a smile when joy is hard to find. Whatever it is that you do, though, it transcends mere silliness. Although you're not as driven as, say, the ***Artist*** described above, you *are* an artist too, revealing truth through entertainment.

You're **Fun and Entertaining** to be around – important gifts when folks are fighting for their lives. Beyond that, you inspire people to look past despair and find beauty and humor even in ugly situations.

Ego, however, is your biggest hurdle. Doing what you do, it's pretty easy to get lost in your own illusions of importance. Now, you *need* a strong ego in order to put yourself out there day after day; unless you learn to balance it with authentic self-reflection and restraint, however, you're just setting yourself up to be a punch line somewhere down the road. Ascension demands more than artistic sensibilities. To transcend your limitations, you need to swallow your ego and accept that you can't *always* be the star.

– Regain Willpower when your work makes some significant change in the lives of people around you.



Guardian

Shepherding the weak through the Valley of Darkness, you are truly your brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. You save your great vengeance and furious anger for those who would poison and betray your brothers, sisters, and so forth. Pop-culture quotations aside, you take your duty seriously... *someone*, after all, needs to protect folks who cannot, or sometimes *will* not, protect themselves. In essence, this ideal guides all Awakened factions; even the Fallen, in their twisted way, often justify themselves by claiming to be guardians of a rejected world.

Courage is your calling card. It takes guts to do what you do, and by all the Gods, you've got fortitude to spare.

Admirable though it may be, your dedication to **Self-Sacrifice** could be your Achilles' heel. Lots of would-be Guardians wind up ground into mulch by constant conflict. A knight needs battle, true enough; but until she learns when to *stop* fighting – to step aside, perhaps, and let people defend themselves or else make their own decisions – a Guardian can become a martyr, a bully, or just one more monster in a world already full of them.

– Regain Willpower when your actions directly save a weaker group or character from assured destruction.

Heretic

Grab your chainsaw and line up the sacred cows! Whatever your companions regard as "orthodox" and proper is, to you, anathema. Perhaps you follow a confrontational approach to your culture's institutions; or you undermine authorities that you consider to be corrupt. You could introduce a decidedly unconventional change to an established tradition (or Tradition), or revere a path or godhead that most folks consider to be "evil." Linguistically, *heretic* combines implications of choice, belief, and the act of taking something valuable. Whether your heresy is religious, philosophical, political, or some mixture of them all, you refuse to accept the popular (and perhaps demanded) creed.

Integrity drives you. After all, if you did not possess immense (often dangerous) degrees of integrity, you would simply go with the flow, not resist it the way you do.

And yet, that **Iconoclasm** could get you... and other people... killed. That is, after all, what often happens to heretics. Folks don't like to have their cherished beliefs overturned, and so as you run through life's market flipping over tables in the name of your belief, remember that one of those tables could very well land on top of you.

– Regain Willpower whenever you challenge a commonly held conviction and manage to change people's minds about that belief.

Mentor

You've got knowledge and experience that can benefit other people, so you share it as freely as you can. This might involve having a single pupil, apprentice or protégé, or it could involve several people learning what you have to teach. More than simply a teacher, though, you make a personal investment in your student's progress. An instructor can leave the classroom at the end of the day, but a Mentor's role might last for life.

Dedication is your source of strength. It's important to you that other people share in what you have to offer. Because you care about the results, and probably about the students too, you'll put yourself out there in surprising ways. (See the Background: ***Mentor*** for certain effects of a mentor /student bond.)

On the other hand, you can be **Pedantic**. Lecturing becomes a habit, with every circumstance providing an opportunity for more lessons. Occasionally, even the most accomplished teacher must step out from behind the podium. Your potential for Ascension depends in part upon humanity, and that's a hard thing to hang on to when you're always in the Professor role. (There's also a great potential to develop problematic and possibly unethical bonds with your protégé, but that's an entirely different sort of lesson to learn.)

– Regain Willpower when your guidance helps your pupil(s) accomplish something that had been beyond their reach before.

Romantic

In a world filled with ugliness, you seek and find beauty. Said beauty could be tragic (as detailed under the entries for ***Romance*** and ***Tragedy*** in this book's **Chapter Five** section ***Storytelling, Genre, and Mage***, pp. 285-286), but that sense of melancholy makes it pure. High drama is your heartbeat. Passion is your joy. In the words of Patti Smith, you "seek pleasure... seek the nerves under your skin." This quest is often painful, but that pain tells you you're alive.

That **Passion** provides your deepest strength. When other folks hesitate, you plunge in, reveling in the raw excitement of life's dance.

Enchanted by that dance, you can be pretty **Careless** about its effects. Like the original Romantics, your excesses hurt a lot of people. Eventually, you'll need to develop a greater sense of responsibility and moderation if you ever wish to Ascend.

– Regain Willpower when you throw yourself into a gloriously ruinous affair or reveal life's howling beauty to a previously hesitant soul.

Tycoon

Money makes the world go 'round, and you're at the controls for that particular ride. You're probably wealthy, with vast ***Resources*** at your command. Power is your drug, influence your bread and butter. Sure, you like the money and all the goodies it can bring. It's the *game*, though, not the prize, that provides your true reward.

You're **Savvy**, with an eye toward long-term profits. Calculating enough to get things done, you're a master manipulator and an asset to your cause. You know how to shake up your world, bringing good things to everyone concerned.

That said, you're a **Greedy** bastard. "Enough" is not part of your vocabulary. It's been said that gold blinds those who love it most, and in your case that's probably true. Before you can Ascend to greater things, you've got to love more than money, power, and the game of winning both.

– Regain Willpower when a long-shot plan of yours pays off in grand style. Not simply with money – that's too easy – but with influence, love, or other marvelous achievements.

Vigilante

The law is a farce. True justice comes only from those willing to take it up themselves. When the system is utterly corrupt – and you *know* that it is – someone must live beyond the law. That someone is you: the nightmare of unjust souls. Though you'll do everything possible to protect the innocent, guilty parties must pay... often with their lives. You're the Fist of Justice in an unjust world, and no sacrifice is too great for the common good.

Retribution is the hammer in your soul. This dedication keeps you going long after other folks would have given up. Delay is acceptable, but compromise is not. Extremism in pursuit of justice is no vice at all.

Unfortunately, your **Ruthlessness** poisons both your cause and your soul. Tangled up in the idea of beating whomever you're after, you can't look yourself squarely in the mirror. If you could, you'd see how little difference there is between you and your enemies. To rise beyond this sort of thing, you'll have to leave the warpath and cultivate compassion beyond vengeance. True Justice is more than simple punishment.

– Regain Willpower when you inflict major suffering on your target of choice. This target must be larger and more powerful than a single person. It could be an organization, a mage-sect, a government conspiracy, or an aspect of the underworld. Whatever it is, it's big enough to consume your entire life... or end it. Such vigilance is an endless task.

Zealot

A flipside to the ***Heretic***, you pursue your beliefs with extreme enthusiasm. Moderation, to you, is weakness – a true believer will do pretty much anything for the cause! Whatever your cause may be – a political philosophy, a theological creed, a social movement, whatever matters most to you – it's something that inspires and guides your behavior, associations, activities and, most importantly, your focus: the beliefs, practices, and instruments through which you shape your magickal feats.

Obviously, the player for a zealot mage must determine, in detail, what his character believes in, why he believes in it, how it shapes his personality, and what it takes to challenge and perhaps alter or destroy that belief. Zealots hold deeper

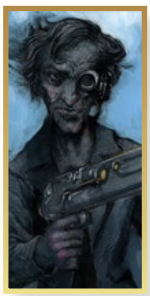
convictions than even the average mage would hold, and so it's vital to know what those convictions might be.

Conviction is your armor, shield, and sword. That steadfast confidence in your beliefs will stand with you when no one and nothing else will do.

Such **Extremity**, however, can inspire abhorrent acts in the name of your beliefs. A zealot, after all, is by definition someone who will sacrifice anything and any*one* for the cause. A zealot mage, in particular, can be a terrifying force. The Fallen, Mad, and Technocracy have plenty of uses for such people, and even the supposedly moderate Traditions and Disparates have members who'd sooner kill a busload of kids than step back on their convictions.

– Regain Willpower whenever your deeply held beliefs are proved right through your behavior.

Secondary Abilities



Mages have to be good at many things. And although the common range of Ability Traits has been covered in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Six**, certain new *secondary Abilities* (see **Mage 20**, p. **289**) can round out the more specialized areas of a character's expertise.

As with all the expanded Traits featured in this chapter, the following Abilities are *optional rules*. Most of them could be considered ***Hobby Talents***, ***Professional Skills***, and ***Expert Knowledges***, as described in **Mage 20**, p. **277**; some of them are, in fact, mentioned as such on that page. For players who want a more detailed assessment of such Abilities, however – or who simply want to be completists with regards to published Abilities – we offer the following Talents, Skills, and Knowledges to expand further upon those possibilities.

Talents

As described in **Mage 20**, Talents represent Abilities for which your character has an innate gift. Practice hones that gift, of course, but the basis for a Talent Trait comes from a knack that certain folks have and other folks do not.

Cooking

Food's your thing. You're good at preparing it, pulling meals together from odds and ends, and noting when something's not quite right. What good is this sort of talent for a mage? Ask any decent witch! A gifted cook can whip up an impressive meal on the go (perhaps even working some Life, Matter, Mind, or Time magicks into the mix to spoil or sweeten the food); spot tainted or poisoned chow; discern unusual ingredients (griffin, horse-meat, Soylent Green...); or create nutritious meals from whatever's close at hand – a vital skill in the wilderness or certain Realms!

Secondary Abilities

Talents

Cooking	Intrigue	Negotiation	Scrounging
Diplomacy	Intuition	Newspeak	Style
Instruction	Mimicry	Scan	

Skills

Blind Fighting	Fast-Talk	Heavy Weapons	Networking
Climbing	Fencing /Kenjutsu	Hunting	Pilot
Disguise	Fortune-Telling /Assessment Analysis	Hypnotism	Psychology /Psychoanalysis
Elusion	Gambling	Jury-Rigging	Security
Escapology	Gunsmith	Microgravity Operations	Speed-Reading
Fast-Draw		Misdirection	Swimming

Knowledges

Conspiracy Theory	Cultural Savvy	Power-Brokering	Unconventional Warfare
Chantry /Construct Politics	Helmsman	Propaganda	Vice
Covert Culture	History	Theology	

- • **Novice:** Pretty decent in a kitchen.
- •• **Practiced:** Good enough to work a restaurant gig.
- ••• **Skillful:** A culinary artist.
- •••• **Expert:** Able to make food from normally inedible substances.
- ••••• **Master:** A master of each aspect of food preparation, from skinning to serving.

Possessed By: Chefs, Hunters, Ecstatics, Restaurant Critics, Gourmands, Parents

Suggested Specialties: Grab-n-Go, Fast-Food Prep, Gourmet Meals, "Something from Nothing," Primitive Conditions, Special Diets, Magickal Enhancement, Seduction via Food

Diplomacy

You've got a knack for smoothing things over, making friends, and getting people to see past their differences. When you need to, you can also back up your guile with spine. A combination of ingratiating people skills, social psychology, knowledge of the situation, and innate timing allows you to gain people's respect and then maneuver them to your desired point of view. A good diplomat can be transparent about his motives and yet still have people doing what he wants them to do while believing it's their idea to do so. As an adjunct to Mind-based magicks, this Talent can become a huge (and occasionally fearsome) edge in group dynamics.

- • **Novice:** Advice columnist.
- •• **Practiced:** Relationship counselor.
- ••• **Skillful:** Hostage negotiator.
- •••• **Expert:** Noted diplomat.
- ••••• **Master:** Jimmy Carter.

Possessed By: Counselors, Psychologists, Lawyers, Politicians, Special Agents, Tycoons, Mediators, Therapists, Religious or Political Activists

Suggested Specialties: Relationship Intervention, Hostage Negotiations, Arbitration, International Diplomacy, High-Stakes Moderation, Inter-Faction Mediators, Non-Violent Communication

Instruction

You're really good at relaying information, teaching material, and helping other folks understand potentially complex principles. It's not so much that you're an expert on the subject at hand (though you might be), but that you've got a knack for taking your subject and making it easier to comprehend. A very useful Talent for mentors, professors and, of course, instructors for any given course of study, this Ability helps your character share his expertise with other characters.

In game terms, you can use Instruction to train other characters in any Skill or Knowledge that your character possesses. (At the Storyteller's discretion, Talents might be teachable too, assuming that the student already has at least one dot in the Trait in question; this way, the instructor helps that character refine a knack she already has.) You cannot raise another character's Trait higher than the level your own character has achieved, or teach something your own character doesn't already have. Let's say that Legacy Brown wants to teach Spider Chase some medical skills. Legacy has Medicine 3, so she could teach Spider up to three dots in Medicine before hitting the limits of her own knowledge. For each month of tutoring, Legacy's player rolls her Manipulation + Instruction against a difficulty of 11, minus Spider's Intelligence rating; if Spider has Intelligence 4, that difficulty would be 7 (11 – 4). For each success rolled, Spider's player gets to spend an experience point; if Legacy gets four successes, Spider spends four points toward Medicine. This way, a skillful teacher can speed up the learning process for new Abilities.

As an alternate rule, the Storyteller may decide to allow each success to save one experience point from the cost of learning or raising an Ability; in this case, Spider's player would save four points when buying and raising the Medicine Knowledge. For this option, the instructor's player rolls only *once*, not once per month. This way, you can teach Abilities faster and cheaper in a chronicle where time is of the essence. This option, however, should be not combined with the normal rule. Choose one or the other, not both.

In story terms, this Talent reflects a teacher with an engaging and memorable style. Even if you don't get into the point-spending element of education, your character is one of those teachers that students recall years or even decades after they've spent time under his instruction.

- • **Novice:** You can pass along basic concepts.
- •• **Practiced:** A topic's finer points are easy for you to express.
- ••• **Skillful:** Assuming you know something, you can teach it.
- •••• **Expert:** You're one of those folks that people *want* to learn from.
- ••••• **Master:** A master of all aspects of learning, you're a teacher that pupils recall for the rest of their lives.

Possessed By: Mentors, Masters, Teachers, Tutors, Cranky Old Folks with Much to Share if You Prove Worthy

Suggested Specialties: Classrooms, Private Tutoring, Esoteric Subjects, Fast & Practical, In-Depth Approach, Engaging Style, Memorable Mentor, Hard Knocks, Good with Kids, Sink or Swim

Intrigue

Machiavelli's ghost smiles upon you. In the vicious whirlpools of backstabbing power, you're a force to be reckoned with. A combination of instincts, audacity, knowledge, guile, and ruthlessness gives you insights and edges that most folks lack. You may serve a greater purpose, work toward hidden

agendas, or simply enjoy making puppets dance. Whatever your ultimate purpose, you're a player, not a pawn, in your personal Game of Thrones.

- • **Novice:** Ned Stark.
- •• **Practiced:** Cersei Lannister.
- ••• **Skillful:** Varys the Spider.
- •••• **Expert:** Littlefinger.
- ••••• **Master:** Tyrion Lannister.

Possessed By: Epic Fantasy Authors, Politicians, Nobility, Celebrities, Agents, Executives, Political Correspondents, Observant Servants, Movers & Shakers, Hermetic Wizards, Syndicate Schemers

Suggested Specialties: Alliances, Betrayals, Tangled Webs, Watching from Afar, International Intrigue, Corporate Politics, Bargains and Deals, Player of Pawns, Ruthless Bastard, Life-or-Death Stakes

Intuition

Also known as **Instinct**, this Talent represents a primal sort of perception that runs beneath your conscious mind. Essentially, you possess an animal-like awareness of your surroundings and circumstances. Though it's not mind-reading per se, your Intuition helps you spot cues about people's moods and intentions, notice when "something's not quite right," and recognize patterns and connections that your conscious mind might otherwise have missed. Combat vets, street survivors, primal folks, and animal-favoring shapechangers tend to develop such instincts as a survival skill; even then, though, such awareness comes more from innate talent than from practiced techniques. In situations where your character might pick up on subconscious clues or subtle giveaways, add your Intuition to a Mental Attribute to see whether or not that character's instincts kick in.

- • **Novice:** You've got strong gut-feelings.
- •• **Practiced:** You're learning how to follow your instincts even when you're not sure why.
- ••• **Skillful:** Things that other people miss seem obvious to you.
- •••• **Expert:** You possess uncanny insight into things you shouldn't even have noticed.
- ••••• **Master:** It's scary how much you notice about stuff no one else even sees.

Possessed By: Gamblers, Veterans, Survivors, Street People, Folks Who are Closer to Animals Than to People

Suggested Specialties: Hidden Agendas, Ambushes, Pattern Recognition, Traps, Mood-Reading, Flashes of Insight, Animal Instincts, Nose for Trouble



Mimicry

A skilled imitator, you can mimic voices or sounds; the higher your rating, the greater your ability. The human larynx is quite flexible, capable of a wide vocal range. (A touch of magick can make that range even wider if you augment your natural abilities with Life 2 or 3.) At the lower levels, you can imitate accents or the voices of specific people, while higher levels help you fake an impressive range of sonic phenomena.

- • **Novice:** You mock celebrities for fun.
- • • **Practiced:** Given time and practice, you can mimic a decent range of accents and voices.
- • • • **Skillful:** Your impersonations can fool folks who're familiar with the people or sounds you're imitating.
- • • • • **Expert:** You're like that dude in those old *Police Academy* flicks.
- • • • • • **Master:** Your ability to mimic almost anyone or anything is downright unsettling.

Possessed By: Comedians, Clones, Class Clowns, Actors, Spies, Infiltration Specialists, Sound-Effect Artists

Suggested Specialties: Accents, Deception, Animal Cries, Comedic Effects, Celebrity Impressions, Voice-Activated Tech

Negotiation

An acute perception for what people want makes you a master wheeler-dealer. Combined with social savvy and the ability to say "No" when you need to do so, this perception lets you bring other folks around to your point of view, helps them strike bargains, and puzzle out the potential agendas that drive them to – and away from – the bargaining table.

- • **Novice:** You mediate disputes at home.
- • • **Practiced:** You're good at herding cats toward a common destination.
- • • • **Skillful:** Your arbitration skills are in professional demand.
- • • • • **Expert:** Regardless of the dispute, you often get your way.
- • • • • • **Master:** You could forge lasting peace between old enemies, and leave them happy to have followed your lead.

Possessed By: Lawyers, Executives, Relationship Counselors, Arbitration Specialists, Politicians, Union Reps, Activists, Tycoons, Diplomats, Sports or Entertainment Agents, Syndicate Reps

Suggested Specialties: Business Deals, Bullying, Domestic Disputes, Fake-Outs, Hidden Agendas, Peace Treaties, Con Games, Fleecing the Sheep

Newspeak

Language is your playground. In a brave new age, you coin brave new words. Why? Because language is the gatekeeper of status and initiation. Obfuscatory miscourse is keycode. Disinfotech relegates the bleaters to Sidelinedia. Coprosperity sails on neochop, and so you bait the beespeakers and decompartmentalize linguiblocks. What the hell are you *saying*, anyway? Whatever the hell you want it to mean!

Essentially, this Talent helps you spin and juggle buzzwords, either existing or original. Beyond the roleplaying fun you can have with this Trait, Newspeak provides a verbal arsenal for social entanglements. By pairing Social Attributes with this Ability, you can excite, incite or inspire your audience (Charisma + Newspeak); dazzle, befuddle or intimidate opponents (Manipulation + Newspeak); or blast holes in Preconceptionsville by pairing beauty with brains (Appearance + Newspeak). Intelligence + Newspeak may help you decipher or deconstruct someone else's wordstorm, while Perception or Wits might help you keep track of a slogan-spitting raconteur... or beat her at her own game!

(Ideally, this Talent should be roleplayed out. Relegating it to a simple roll of dice is no fun at all.)

- • **Novice:** LOL
- • • **Practiced:** u mad, bro?
- • • • **Skillful:** Your neologic metaphases into commcom.
- • • • • **Expert:** Masspeak is youspeak. Youspeak is allspeak.
- • • • • • **Master:** That whirring sound you hear is Orwell's grave.

Possessed By: Satirists, SF Authors, Geeks, MMORGrs, Futurists, Pundits, Transhumanists, PR Consultants, Politicians, Speechwriters, Mindfuckers, Media Monkeys, Snarky Bastards, Trolls

Suggested Specialties: Whedonics, LolCat, Textchat, Masscom, Corpspeak, Techspeak, LeetSpeak, Poliflex, Disinformation, Advertising, Hip-Hop, Buzzfeed, Politics, Spin Control

Scan

Your quick eyes spot things other people miss. Darting your gaze across a place or situation, you can catch a quick appraisal that would take most people a while to observe. Generally combined with Perception, this Talent helps your character scope out potential targets, threats, clues, faces, escape routes, and other vital details. He might not always *know* just what it is he sees, and he has to actually *think* about scanning an area in order to use this Ability. Given time for a fast glance or two, however, he'll probably snag enough material to work with once he's got the chance to process what he's seen.

- • **Novice:** You catch the obvious hints.
- • • **Practiced:** You're good at noticing the little stuff.
- • • • **Skillful:** Quick appraisals are your specialty.
- • • • • **Expert:** Few details escape your gaze.
- • • • • • **Master:** Sherlock Holmes wishes he were you.

Possessed By: Hunters, Detectives, Inspectors, Commandos, Secret Agents, Threat Assessment Specialists, Forensics Teams

Suggested Specialties: Identifying Marks, Potential Threats, Hidden Goodies, Nagging Details, CSI

Scrounging

Dude! Where'd you find ***that****?* You're pretty good at spotting goodies in the oddest places. A skilled scavenger, you can discover all kinds of unlikely stuff. Granted, said stuff has to *be* there first... but then, if you're a mage, this Talent provides a wonderful excuse for coincidental magick. Even without magick, though, the toss-out nature of consumer culture often puts the odds in your favor.

- • **Novice:** You and Macklemore hit thrift shops together.
- •• **Practiced:** You *are* Macklemore.
- ••• **Skillful:** You scrounge most of what you need from society's cast-offs.
- •••• **Expert:** Given enough time and trash, you could find almost anything you need.
- ••••• **Master:** Money-wise, you live off little or nothing.

Possessed By: Street Folks, Poor Folks, Dumpster-Divers, Tech Geeks, Neotribals, Vagabonds, Gutter Punks, Bargain-Hunters, Starving Artists, Hollow Ones, Special Forces Ops

Suggested Specialties: Classified Ads, Freecycling, Food Sources, Forgotten Corners, Shelter, Improvised Weapons, Tech Sources, Digging Up Info

Style

You know how to look good. And although you've got an eye for fashion, this Talent's not so much about *what you wear* as *how you wear it*. Style helps you make good impressions based on clothes, bearing, behavior, and appearance... and while it's most obvious on pretty people, it can have striking effects on those who otherwise look plain.

- • **Novice:** Clothes horse.
- •• **Practiced:** Sharp dresser.
- ••• **Skillful:** Professional model.
- •••• **Expert:** Lady Gaga.
- ••••• **Master:** *Queer Eye for the Mage Guy*.

Possessed By: Pop Stars, Models, Royalty, Rich Folks, Designers, Artists, Celebutants, Fashion Consultants, Spies

Suggested Specialties: Bohemian, Outrageousness, Classic Style, High Fashion, Cosplay, Trend-Setting, Newest Looks, Avant-Garde

Skills

Hard-won Abilities honed by study and practice, the following Skills reflect specialized training that the average person (even the average mage) does not possess. That said, anyone can acquire such skills with the proper instruction and a dedicated pursuit of the field in question.

Blind Fighting

Either through training, meditation or grim necessity, you can get around without sight even under extreme conditions. Each dot in Blind Fighting reduces, by -1 per dot, your penalty for performing actions while visually blinded. (It does not, of course, give you a bonus for fighting in the dark, although it certainly gives you an edge if your opponents are blind as well.) This Skill does not give you the ability to see in darkness, nor does it add to Correspondence Effects; it does, however, reflect an extraordinary perception of your body and immediate surroundings even when you cannot see.

For the Flaw related to visual impairment, see ***Impediment*****, pp. 39-40**.

- • **Novice:** You can move through a darkened room without running into things.
- •• **Practiced:** Through sound, you can figure out where things and people are.
- ••• **Skillful:** Your opponents are as obvious to you in the dark as they would be if you could see.
- •••• **Expert:** You essentially "feel" the presence, movements, and location of various obstacles and opponents.
- ••••• **Master:** Zatoichi, the Blind Swordsman.

Possessed By: Blind Superheroes, Ninja, Martial Artists, Assassins, Akashic Masters

Suggested Specialties: Dodging, Blind Strikes, Thrown Objects, Zen Archery, Spatial Awareness, Multiple Foes

Climbing

The phrase "sheer surface" means less to you than it means to most folks. You can scale walls, trees, mountains, and other surfaces so long as you've got *something* to hold onto. Although this Skill does not grant superhuman abilities, it's really amazing what a skilled climber can do, even without gear.

- • **Novice:** You spend time at the local gym's climbing wall.
- •• **Practiced:** Given gear or strong handholds, you can scale and descend perilous surfaces.
- ••• **Skillful:** You're an experienced climber on a variety of surfaces.
- •••• **Expert:** No gear? No problem.
- ••••• **Master:** Even without gear, you're a human gecko.

Possessed By: Freerunners, Burglars, Ninja, Hunters, Outlaws, Rock-Climbers, Extreme Athletes, Active Kids, Folks Raised in the Wilderness

Suggested Specialties: Brick Walls, Rocks, Trees, Ice, Buildings, No Gear, Mountaineering

Disguise

Looking like someone else is your specialty. This might involve impersonating an existing person, concealing your own identity, or creating a whole new persona independent of yourself. Even without Life or Mind magick, your expertise can fool casual observers... and, at the higher levels, fool almost anyone. Add Life and /or Mind to this Skill, and your disguise skills can become damn near perfect. (For more details, see ***Impersonating Other Beings*** in **How Do You *DO* That?**, p. 25.)

With or without make-up and such, the art of disguise depends upon an ineffable quality that allows a person to slip into another personality. A truly magnificent disguise-artist can change personas with a few shifts of physicality, though most folks need make-up and clothes to complete the illusion. *Disguise* means "remove appearances," and so the core of this Skill involves changing the way you come across – not simply gluing on a moustache, but appearing to become an entirely different person.

- • **Novice:** Is that *you?*
- •• **Practiced:** You can pass a brief inspection.
- ••• **Skillful:** You fool some of the people some of the time.
- •••• **Expert:** You fool most of the people most of the time.
- ••••• **Master:** Given time and materials, you can appear as almost anyone it's physically possible for you to resemble.

Possessed By: Spies, Clones, Actors, Ninja, Shapeshifters, Fugitives, Undercover Cops, Infiltration Specialists

Suggested Specialties: Impersonation, Genderfuck, Performance, Body Language, Alternate Identities, Improvised Materials, Passing as the Other, Magickal Disguise

Elusion

You're good at giving people the slip. With enough cover to work with (crowds, underbrush, rooms filled with boxes, etc.), you can shake pursuit, hide from observation, trick pursuers, and blend in with the landscape. Cleverly employed, Elusion can help you puzzle out new surroundings (Intelligence + Elusion), confuse your pursuers (Manipulation + Elusion), spot traps and hiding places (Perception + Elusion), duck quickly behind cover (Dexterity + Elusion), and trick antagonists into following false leads or falling into hazards (Wits + Elusion). And, of course, you also know what to look for if someone *else* is trying to hide from *you*... (Again, Perception + Elusion.)

In itself, this Skill is not magickal – it's all about knowing how to use your surroundings to your advantage. Certain magickal Effects, however, can bend light and sound (the Forces Sphere), shift probability (Entropy), influence bystanders (Mind), or spot "perfect moments" (Time) that take your mundane skill to the next level, often without so much as rippling the Consensus.

- • **Novice:** You can shake a casual pursuer.
- •• **Practiced:** Folks tend to look for you where you are not.
- ••• **Skillful:** It takes a pro to track you down.
- •••• **Expert:** Even the pros have a hard time tracking you down.
- ••••• **Master:** Where *are* you, you wascally wabbit?

Possessed By: Ninja, Hunters, Detectives, Shapeshifters, Fugitives, Street Kids, Secret Agents, Special Forces Operatives

Suggested Specialties: Deep Forest, Crowds, Strange Terrain, Misdirection, Manhunts, Nowhere To Hide... Except *There!*

Escapology

Through a combination of tricks, misdirection, muscular control and really flexible joints, you can shuck most forms of physical restraint. Ropes, chains, holds, and death-traps slow you down, but... given time and perhaps a hidden lockpick or two... you've figured out how to foil most of them. This Skill does not confer any supernatural ability, although you can use it to justify magickal escapes if your "audience" knows that you've studied escapist techniques.

For the misnamed talent of being "double-jointed," see the **Merit: *Hyperflexible*, p. 36**.

- • **Novice:** You can slip out of poorly-tied ropes or simple holds.
- •• **Practiced:** You give fits to the average dominant.
- ••• **Skillful:** "I'm sorry, officer – you must've forgotten to *lock* those handcuffs."
- •••• **Expert:** Chains, locks, straitjackets... few of them can hold you for long.
- ••••• **Master:** With a bit of time, you can escape just about anything short of a locked bank vault.

Possessed By: Entertainers, Spies, Magicians' Assistants, Wiseass Submissives, Superheroes

Suggested Specialties: Handcuffs, Ropes, Magic Tricks, "Impossible" Escapes, Fetish Bondage, Underwater, Hidden Lockpicks, Wrestling Locks and Holds

Fast-Draw

You're quick. They're dead. A roll of Dexterity + Fast-Draw (three successes or more) lets you pull a weapon and have it ready to use. The roll's difficulty depends on where you'd been keeping that weapon stored – a hidden ankle-knife is harder to draw than a pistol in an open holster! This Skill works with any weapon, and can "explain" why that gun in your hand just appeared from nowhere. With the Storyteller's approval, you can add the dots in this Skill to your Initiative roll when either you or your opponent is trying to get in the very first shot. (It does *not*, however, add to that roll after the initial turn.)

- • **Novice:** You fumble less than most folks do.
- •• **Practiced:** Decent reflexes and a steady hand.
- ••• **Skillful:** Holy *crap*, you're fast!
- •••• **Expert:** "Fill your hands, you sonofabitch!"
- ••••• **Master:** Han didn't shoot first – *you* did.

Possessed By: Knife-Fighters, Hitmen, Martial Artists, Wild West Reenactment Buffs, Special Forces Ops, Vigilantes, Showoffs

Suggested Specialties: Duels, Old-School Gunfights, Concealed Weapons, Pistols, Swords, Knives, Ambushes

Fast-Talk

Weaving a blizzard of words, you dazzle folks with brilliant bullshittery. A surprisingly effective tactic (assuming that your target has a Wits rating of three or less; brighter folks are less easily bamboozled), this Skill lets you overwhelm a person's ability to understand or deflect your agenda. You're so distracting, convincing, or downright puzzling that people are inclined to believe you... at least until they've had a chance to think about what you're saying. Deployed by a pundit, debater, salesman or crook, Fast-Talk can be a devastating weapon.

- • **Novice:** Street-corner hustler.
- •• **Practiced:** Used-car salesman.
- ••• **Skillful:** Political pundit.
- •••• **Expert:** Slick politician.
- ••••• **Master:** Master of puppets.

Possessed By: Activists, Evangelists, Blog-Trolls, Debaters, Spies, Thieves, Con Artists, Sales Reps, Cult Leaders

Suggested Specialties: Politics, Religion, Obfuscation, Hustling, Salesmanship, Turnabout, Confusion, Panhandling, Getting Off the Hook

Fencing /Kenjutsu

The Art of the Blade, **Fencing** reflects expertise with an array of European sword-and-dagger-fighting techniques, while **Kenjutsu** reflects Japanese samurai swordsmanship. Other cultural forms of bladed martial arts, such as Chinese wushu weapon techniques, can be considered as "fencing" for the purposes of dice pools and maneuvers; just change the name to whatever art is appropriate for that character.

At its lowest levels, such knowledge is purely sporting; an accomplished fencer or kendoka, though, can be deadly in true hand-to-hand combat. As with most martial arts, a dedicated study of swordsmanship includes philosophy, meditation, vigorous exercise, and a refinement of mind, body, and soul... which makes it an excellent magickal focus technique. In game terms, this Skill lets a character use an array of specialized combat maneuvers; see ***Expanded Combat Systems: Advanced Weapon Techniques*** in **Chapter Two, pp. 106-111**.

- • **Novice:** "The pointy end goes into the other man."
- •• **Practiced:** Kikuchiyo or Elizabeth Swann.
- ••• **Skillful:** Katsushiro Okamoto or Elena Montero.
- •••• **Expert:** Inigo or the Dread Pirate Roberts.
- ••••• **Master:** Ogami Itto or the Bride.

Possessed By: Renaissance Enthusiasts, Martial Artists, Fight Choreographers, Entertainers, Refined Gentlemen, Shakespearian Actors, Old-School Mages and Technocrats

Suggested Specialties: Sport Fencing, Stage Combat, Movie Combat, Magickal Focus, Dirty Tricks, Florentine (two-bladed) Style, Sabers, Practical Dueling, Fancy Stunts

Fortune-Telling /Assessment Analysis

Whether or not you actually possess accurate gifts of prophecy, you often have folks *believing* that you do. Scanning anything from cards to entrails to scripture verses, you can convincingly predict future events, read a person, or otherwise get someone to believe in your incredible prescience. This makes an excellent instrument for Mind-, Entropy- or Time-based magicks, although its believability (and thus, its ability to be considered coincidental) will depend upon both your audience and your own beliefs. A true believer will easily accept an accurate Tarot reading, but a skeptic might prove far harder to convince.

A Technocratic variation, **Assessment Analysis**, does exactly the same thing but with a very different explanation. Instead of using symbolic or religious trappings, such Analysis involves psychological cues, deductive reasoning, body language, and other methods to read a person's inner landscape, predict potential behaviors, or estimate the probabilities of future events. This lets Assessment Specialists size people up at a glance, determine accurate calculations, or strip away deceptions to perceive the truth beneath them. In the modern world, this sort of thing tends to be coincidental, so long as the Specialist can point out cues or clues that might lead to a rational conclusion.

- • **Novice:** You know your way around a single divination method well enough to convince people of what they want to hear.
- •• **Practiced:** You're pretty convincing with your chosen method, and you understand one or two other methods as well.
- ••• **Skillful:** You can rattle off credible readings with a handful of different methods, and can be frighteningly precise with your specialty.
- •••• **Expert:** An expert at the means and principles of divination (or analysis), you can assure most people that you know what you're talking about.
- ••••• **Master:** Your mastery of divinatory arts convinces even hardened skeptics that you have



special insight into the invisible world. Even if you practice Analysis instead of absurd superstitionism, your insights are downright spooky.

Possessed By: New Agers, Street People, Neotribal Vagabonds, Pagans, Starving Artists, Carnival Performers, Assessment Specialists, Detectives, Psychics, Profilers, So-Called "Gypsies"

Suggested Specialties: Tarot, Palm-Reading, Bibliomancy, Astrology, Threat /Risk Assessment, Deductive Reasoning, Probability Calculation, Uncanny Hunch

Gambling

Games of nerve and chance are your specialties. Even without the aid of Entropy Arts (which can add a devastating edge to this Skill), you're good at gauging odds, bluffing rivals, spotting cheats, hedging bets, faking people out, and employing the mind-games and slight-of-hand essential to card games, betting, and apparently random luck.

- • **Novice:** Poker-night shark.
- • • **Practiced:** Vegas tourist.
- • • • **Skillful:** Professional gambler.
- • • • • **Expert:** High-roller.
- • • • • • **Master:** "Your call, Mr. Bond..."

Possessed By: Gamblers, Hustlers, Con Artists, Tourists, Gamers, Dealers, Pit Bosses, Gangsters, Syndicate Personnel, Thanatoic Mages

Suggested Specialties: Poker, Roulette, High-Stakes Gambling, Esoteric Games, Cheating, Casino Games, Horse Races, Slot Machines, Dealing, Bluffing, Card-Counting, Entropic Influence

Gunsmith

Shooting guns is easy. *Knowing how guns work* is a bit more complicated. This Skill reflects a practical knowledge of weapon manufacture, modification, design and repair. The various levels cover expanding categories of firearms expertise. Given time, tools, and enough dots in this Skill, you can fix guns, craft firearms and unique ammo from scratch, and even use Matter and Forces Effects to alter or supercharge mundane firearms in surprising ways.

It's worth noting that modern mass-produced firearms are far easier to modify than antique or archaic weapons are. Attempts to modify or repair older-model mass-produced weaponry (pre-Vietnam), or small-run models of more recent vintage, will add +1 or +2 to the difficulty of Gunsmith rolls, while firearms from before the twentieth century add between +1 to +3 to the difficulties of such attempts, depending upon

the complexity of the attempted modification. Shoddy weapons, of course, will be harder to repair or modify; for more details, see ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology*** in **Mage 20, pp. 463-464**.

- • **Novice:** Basic gun repair and minor modifications.
- •• **Practiced:** Advanced modification of simple firearms and ammunition.
- ••• **Skillful:** Extensive design, repair, and modification experience with conventional firearms.
- •••• **Expert:** Dazzling mastery of most gun and ammunition types.
- ••••• **Master:** Mack Bolan comes to you for advice.

Possessed By: Cops, Soldiers, Spies, Assassins, Weapon Techs, Special Forces Personnel, Gun-Store Employees, Survivalists, Firearm Enthusiasts, Militia Members, Weapon Design Specialists

Suggested Specialties: Archaic Firearms, Military Arms, Field Mods, Improvised Gear, Original Designs, Specialty Ammo, Technomagickal Improvements

Heavy Weapons

Military-grade weaponry is a world apart from commercial-grade firearms. Your training, however, allows you to employ serious gear: machine-guns, rocket-launchers, Stinger missiles, and other high-impact forms of portable destruction. Because such weapons tend to be finicky, you know how to field-repair them as well. Perhaps you even have your own YouTube channel, for thrilling the armchair-testosterone set. ("*Now that is what I am talking about... And, as always, have nice day!*")

- • **Novice:** Basic training.
- •• **Practiced:** Field experience.
- ••• **Skillful:** Heavy-weapons specialist.
- •••• **Expert:** Master of disaster.
- ••••• **Master:** Rambo.

Possessed By: Combat Vets, Special Forces Personnel, Insurgents, Terrorists, Survivalists, SWAT Team Members, Cyborgs, HIT Marks, Black Suits

Suggested Specialties: Shoulder-Mounted Missiles, Machine-Guns, Mortars, Desert Operations, Urban Combat, Weapons-Based Technocratic Damage Procedures

Hunting

You score food old-school style: by tracking, trapping, spotting, stalking, killing, gutting, skinning, and packing it out yourself. Some folks think you're a testosterone sadist, and they might even be right. As far as you see it, though, you're keeping an essential skill alive. Especially among mages who spend time in the wilderness or Otherworlds, this Skill means the difference between being a live magus and a dead child of the supermarket age!

Like ***Art***, ***Crafts***, and other broad-set Abilities, Hunting covers a field of related expertise. Each type of expertise demands a given specialty. Unlike the ***Survival*** Skill, this secondary Ability deals specifically with predatory skill-sets. You could use its specialties to follow a target without being spotted (Shadowing), spot traces of your chosen prey (Tracking), dismantle a dead body without spoiling the meat (Dressing the Kill), and perform other feats that go beyond mere survival. These specialties replace an array of secondary Abilities from earlier editions of **Mage**. To be skilled with those disciplines, simply purchase those specialties. Assuming your Storyteller's consent, the ***well-skilled craftsman*** option **(Mage 20, p. 279)** may apply.

- • **Novice:** Weekend warrior.
- •• **Practiced:** Rural native.
- ••• **Skillful:** Practical provider.
- •••• **Expert:** Full-time hunter.
- ••••• **Master:** Ted Nugent wishes he were you.

Possessed By: Survivalists, Sportsmen, Country Folk, Kids Raised by Old-School Parents, Wilderness Explorers, Witches, Special Forces Experts, Vison-Questers, Vagabonds

Suggested Specialties: Shadowing, Tracking, Trapping, Dressing the Kill, Minimal Gear, Traditional Practices, Environmental Impact, Bow- or Spear-Hunting, Big Game, Otherworldly Prey, Environments (woodlands, mountains, jungles, cities, etc.)

Hypnotism

Using mundane psychological techniques (as opposed to Mind-based magicks), you can place someone in a trance and then rummage around a bit inside his head. Though it's not nearly as effective as people seem to believe it is, such mesmerism is quite potent under the proper circumstances.

Mesmerism typically demands a setting that encourages a subject to surrender himself to the hypnotist's control; traditionally hypnotic settings, tools, and techniques include religious rituals, quiet clinics, repetitious music, dramatic contrasts of light and darkness, and – believe it or not – television screens. Drawing the subject into a receptive state of mind, the hypnotist gets him to lower his defenses and let her in. If the subject resists, the hypnotist will probably need to resort to Mind magicks rather than simple mesmerism.

System-wise, the player makes a resisted roll that pits her Charisma + Hypnotism against her subject's Intelligence (for a willing subject) or Intelligence + Willpower (for an unwilling subject). The number of successes reflects the depth of the trance, with one to three successes indicating a mild trance and four or more successes revealing a fairly deep one. For each success rolled, the hypnotist adds one additional die to her second roll; three successes, for example, would add three more dice to that second roll's dice pool.

Next, the hypnotist player rolls a second time against a difficulty of the subject's Willpower; for each success, she man-

ages to uncover one piece of information; instill one "trigger phrase"; inspire one idea, behavior or memory that the subject will think is his own; "command" one simple activity; or reduce the difficulty a related Mind-based spell by -1. This process, in turn, takes roughly one minute of in-game time per task involved. (It would, for instance, take four minutes to instill four triggers or memories.) Contrary to popular perception, short sessions of hypnotic influence cannot drive a person to commit things he wouldn't do otherwise. *Extended* influence, on the other hand, can be surprisingly efficacious.

Hypnotism is a psychological art, not an exact science. Its effects are unpredictable – not even "experts" can fully control another person's mind without hardcore Mind-magick. Ultimately, the Storyteller decides how much influence our mesmerist exerts upon her subject. That said, a skilled hypnotist can do some pretty impressive things with a willing subject... especially if she's adept with the Mind Sphere as well.

- • **Novice:** You can do some basic parlor tricks.
- •• **Practiced:** You've studied professional mesmerism techniques.
- ••• **Skillful:** A devotee of the art, you can uncover or inspire surprising results.
- •••• **Expert:** It's scary just how much you can do when you set *someone else's* mind to it.
- ••••• **Master:** Dr. Caligari was a fraud. You are not.

Possessed By: Psychologists, Therapists, Past-Life Regressionists, Stage Magicians, Interrogators, PsychOps, Nephandic Tempters and Corrupters

Suggested Specialties: Uncovering Secrets, Unlocking Inhibitions, Discovering Past Lives, Behavior Modification, False Memories, Post-Hypnotic Suggestion

Jury-Rigging

With a bit of luck and a lot of skill, you can rig a gadget, make temporary repairs, or cobble together something vaguely workable from a pile of spare parts. Naturally, you'll need the appropriate Traits as well – stuff like ***Hypertech***, ***Computers***, ***Energy Weapons***, and so forth. You can't rig something you don't understand. A brilliant technician, though, can make gear jump through hoops long enough to get through an immediate crisis.

Clever technomancers can also use Jury-Rigging as part of their focus if they've got something to work with and enough time to make things happen. (See ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects*** in **Mage 20, pp. 532-534**.) That said, this is a *Skill*, not a *Sphere*; it can't do something blatantly impossible on its own. Whether or not a Jury-Rigged device is vulgar magick depends on just how outlandish it seems. An armored suit made out of forged steel and weapon-parts? Okay. A flying car composed of Frisbees and dog treats? Um, *no*.

For game-system details about this sort of thing, see ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology*** in **Mage 20, pp. 463-464**.

- • **Novice:** Garage tinkerer.
- •• **Practiced:** Mr. Fixit.
- ••• **Skillful:** Field gadgeteer.
- •••• **Expert:** MacGyver.
- ••••• **Master:** Tony Friggin' Stark.

Possessed By: Cyborgs, Field Ops, Inventors, Superheroes, HIT Marks, Mad Scientists, Q Division Personnel

Suggested Specialties: Scraps, Repairs, Found Objects, Field Modifications, "How'd You *do* That?"

Microgravity Operations

Things get weird when you leave Earth's gravity. Although there's no such thing as true "zero-G," the radically altered gravitational forces found in strange Realms, spacecraft or Etherspace demand specialized training and experience. Without the Microgravity Operations Skill, a character in such environments cannot use dice from any Physical Ability; sure, he's still strong or dexterous, but that martial arts training won't do him a damn bit of good when the physics upon which those arts depend have been replaced by micro-gravity.

A rare skill-set outside the ranks of Technocratic Void Engineers, Microgravity Operations teaches you how to move and act in altered gravity. Each dot in this Skill allows your character to use a dot in his other physical Abilities. Let's say that the guy mentioned above has four dots in Martial Arts; he could use one of them at Microgravity 1, two at Microgravity 2, and so on. Without such training, a person bounces and floats with very little control of personal physics; with this Skill, that same person knows how to use that environment to his advantage.

- • **Novice:** Don't hyperventilate and don't throw up.
- •• **Practiced:** You're good so long as you have something to hang on to.
- ••• **Skillful:** It feels weird, but you've started to get the hang of things.
- •••• **Expert:** You move almost as well in micro-G as you do on Earth.
- ••••• **Master:** You've spent so much time in space that you're not sure what earthly gravity feels like anymore.

Possessed By: Void Engineers, Astronauts, Ethernauts, Space Marines

Suggested Specialties: Low-G, Micro-G, Vacuum Suit, Combat, Extra-Vehicular Maneuvers

Misdirection

"*Look!* Over *there!*" Okay, you're usually more subtle than that. Still, you're good at distracting folks from what you're actually trying to do. An essential skill for magicians, pickpockets, seducers, and other people who prefer to redirect attention, this Ability helps you steer someone's concentration elsewhere.

In a fight, this Skill also helps you set someone up for an unpleasant surprise. Each success in a Dexterity + Misdirection roll (difficulty 5 + the target's Wits) lowers the difficulty of your next strike. Essentially, you throw a fake-out, your opponent responds, and you clock him. Similar applications of this Skill let you set up distractions and then do something else when your target's back is turned... in game terms, reducing the difficulty of your next roll if you succeed with a Misdirection attempt. Naturally, this sort of trick stops working if you rely upon it too often. Each subsequent attempt with the same target (or group of targets) raises your Misdirection difficulty by +2. *Dude* – they're *on* to you! Time to try a different tactic...

- • **Novice:** "My God – what's *that?*"
- •• **Practiced:** "Nothing up my sleeves..."
- ••• **Skillful:** "What about that guy over *there?*"
- •••• **Expert:** "You mean *this* hand...?"
- ••••• **Master:** "These aren't the droids you're looking for..."

Possessed By: Stage Magicians, Hustlers, Thieves, Con Artists, Martial Artists, Dirty Fighters

Suggested Specialties: Confusion, Feints, Passing the Buck, Over There, *Psych!*

Networking

You're good at making contacts and working them for all they're worth. While these networks won't actually act on your behalf (certain Backgrounds cover that sort of thing), they're real lifesavers when you're trying to assemble data (Perception + Networking), get something done (Manipulation + Networking), or win someone over (Charisma or Appearance + Networking) through your various contacts. Simple tasks have lower difficulties, while obscure or difficult tasks demand much better rolls – or, in story terms, a more thorough and dedicated network.

Networking demands time, access, and attention. Although cell phones and laptops can link you to your contacts in most tech-enabled locations, you still need to spend time reaching out and maintaining your network. Occasionally, they'll ask you for favors too – you get nothing for nothing, after all! The nice thing, though, about extensive networks is that the people in them have a greater ability to help one another when need be.

- • **Novice:** You've got some friends who know some friends.
- •• **Practiced:** You know how to sweet-talk certain gatekeepers.
- ••• **Skillful:** You know who to talk to and how to talk to them.
- •••• **Expert:** With two hours and a phone, you work wonders.
- ••••• **Master:** Access to almost *anyone* is just a matter of time.

Possessed By: Syndicate Ops, Sales Reps, Schmooze Masters, Agents, PR Consultants, Research Assistants, Personal Assistants, Journalists, Editors, Bloggers, Activists

Suggested Specialties: Research, Politics, Celebrities, Contact Info, Favors, Tickets, Dirt, the Underworld

Pilot

Most folks, when confronted with the complex control panels of conventional aircraft, don't have the slightest idea where to start. You do. Training and experience allow you to fly, land, and control most types of Sleepertech flying machines; the higher your rating, the more sophisticated the craft.

- • **Novice:** Small prop planes.
- •• **Practiced:** Private jets.
- ••• **Skillful:** Commercial aircraft.
- •••• **Expert:** Military war machines.
- ••••• **Master:** Damn near anything.

Possessed By: Pilots, Commandos, Daredevils, Transport Techs

Suggested Specialties: Helicopters, Jets, Vintage Aircraft, Jet Fighters, Stunts, Combat, Hovercraft, Emergencies

Psychology /Psychoanalysis

Versed in the practice of clinical psychology, you can help folks deal with mental and emotional ailments. Also known as **Psychoanalysis**, this Trait takes time and trust to deploy – you can't cure phobias during a firefight! Given the space and opportunity to work your craft, though, you can win someone's confidence and then help him sort out the traumas in his head.

For each session of focused psychoanalysis, roll Intelligence + Psychoanalysis, with a difficulty of the subject's Intelligence + 3. If he's resisting your efforts, use Manipulation or Charisma + Psychoanalysis, with a difficulty of his Willpower + 3 (max 10). Each success counts toward at least a temporary resolution of an illness or neurosis. Simple quirks are easy to fix (five to 10 successes), while severe mental illness can be much harder (20 successes or more).

On the shadow-side, the same techniques can be used to *instill* mental quirks and illnesses – false memories, induced phobias, that sort of thing. This application assumes that the subject is resisting you subconsciously (Willpower +3), but can still be quite effective if your patient trusts you. The Satanic ritual abuse panic of the '80s and '90s came largely from dishonest psychologists "leading" their patients to "discover" things that had never actually happened. Corrupters, seducers, and "conversion specialists" study psychoanalysis for that very reason.

Whether you're trying to help or harm someone, Mind magick obviously helps with this sort of thing. (Again, see ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects*** in **Mage 20**, as well as the ***Uncanny Influence*** section of **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 114-136**) Thus, "miracle cures" can be explained by your reputation as a skilled psychotherapist.

- • **Novice:** A trusted shoulder to cry on.
- • • **Practiced:** High-school guidance counselor.
- • • • **Skillful:** Professional therapist.
- • • • • **Expert:** Acclaimed authority.
- • • • • • **Master:** Miracle-worker.

Possessed By: Therapists, Counselors, Caregivers, Interrogators, Teachers, Healers, Mind-Crackers, Clergy

Suggested Specialties: NLP, Freudian Techniques, Jungian Approach, Ancestral Tradition, Childhood Trauma, Abuse Survivors, False Memory Syndrome, Seduction, Subversion, Extreme Mental Illness, Criminal Psychology

Security

Locks are for morons. In our high-tech era, anything worth keeping is guarded by advanced security systems. As a specialist in such systems, you can analyze, install, access, and – when necessary – subvert or disable them. A common vocation among Technocratic operatives and their enemies, this Skill handles networks that turn a sneak-thief's world upside-down.

In game terms, this Ability lets you set up, maintain, and infiltrate elaborate security installations: video cameras, laser-triggers, pressure-sensitive plates, and so on. Obviously, such tasks demand time and focus, plus the occasional bit of magick or Enlightened procedure. Given the intricate technology involved in security networks, other Abilities in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Six** (***Computer***, ***Hypertech***, ***Technology***, and so forth) often come into play as well; the Security Skill could tell you where to place the cameras, but it won't help you hack their monitoring network! Appropriate task rolls include Perception + Security (to scope out the system), Intelligence + Security (to install or disable a system), Wits + Security (to spot hidden cameras or tricks), or even Dexterity + Security (to perform the famous Hollywood *dodge-the-laser-sensors-with-fancy-moves* stunt).

For rule systems related to security networks, see the ***Computer Systems*** presented in **Chapter Two**, **pp. 116-127**.

- • **Novice:** You've skimmed some manuals.
- • • **Practiced:** Trained on one side of the law.
- • • • **Skillful:** Trained on *both* sides of the law.
- • • • • **Expert:** You've designed (or defeated) extensive networks.
- • • • • • **Master:** Catwoman.

Possessed By: Infiltration Experts, Spies, Technicians, Security Specialists, Special Agents, High-Tech Thieves

Suggested Specialties: Computer Systems, Laser Arrays, Cat Burglary, Containment Traps, Video Surveillance Networks

Speed-Reading

Through a combination of concentration and skill, you can scan and retain large amounts of information in very short periods of time. Speed reading utilizes a number of tricks that help you process things you read quickly. Although complex



works demand more time and focus than simple ones do, this skill comes in handy when you've got research to do and not much time with which to do it.

Although this is a valuable talent for Technocrats, Hermetic mages, Virtual Adepts, and other folks who need to absorb huge chunks of data, it's a hazardous trick to employ when you're reading about advanced magickal or scientific matters. Both advanced science and ritual magick, after all, depend upon precise reading in order to get the proper results. Speed-reading techniques depend upon mnemonic shortcuts, and "shortcuts" and "magick" tend to make poor bedfellows. The Storyteller might inflict a penalty upon rites or procedures whose details have been learned through speed-reading, with potentially horrific results if the attempt fails. The moral behind this principle: *Don't try summoning Elder Gods with a ritual you skimmed in your hurry to get through the book!*

- • **Novice:** *Twilight* in an hour.
- •• **Practiced:** *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in two or three hours.
- ••• **Skillful:** *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows* in two or three hours.
- •••• **Expert:** *A Game of Thrones* in two or three hours.
- ••••• **Master:** *War and Peace* in two or three hours.

Possessed By: Students, Authors, Research Assistants, Programmers, Engineers, Book-Lovers, Field Agents, Hermetic Mages

Suggested Specialties: Research, Fiction, Periodicals, Internet, Ebooks, Cramming, Retention

Swimming

You don't sink – you swim. Under normal circumstances, you can move roughly 8 yards + your Dexterity rating in a turn. By focusing solely upon your speed, you can move up to 12 yards + your Dexterity rating; and by throwing everything you have behind the strokes, you can roll your Stamina + Swimming (difficulty 7) to add three more yards to your movement that turn. Each turn demands a separate roll, though, and you can do this for only one turn per point of Stamina you possess. After *that*... well, sinking might become an option...

- • **Novice:** You've had some swimming lessons.
- •• **Practiced:** You spend plenty of time in pools, lakes or oceans.
- ••• **Skillful:** You could score a place on a swim team.
- •••• **Expert:** You'd probably pass a professional lifeguard test.
- ••••• **Master:** Olympic-level competition is yours if you want it.

Possessed By: Lifeguards, Athletes, Divers, Surfers, Sailors, Folks Who Grow Up Near Water

Suggested Specialties: Distance, Endurance, Racing, Competition, Open Seas, Lifesaving, Survival

Knowledges

For most mages, knowledge is the ultimate weapon. And so, more than any other denizens of the World of Darkness, mages favor Knowledge Traits as a primary skill-set, and then employ those Abilities as essential elements of their mundane lives and magickal focus.

As mentioned both in **Mage 20** and in **Chapter Five**'s ***M20 FAQ***, many Knowledge Abilities from older editions of **Mage** have been subsumed into the Knowledge Traits: ***Academics***, ***Esoterica***, and ***Lore /RD Data*** (as found in **Mage 20, Chapter Six**); thus, you won't find, say, Enochian or Spirit Lore listed among the Knowledges below. For simplicity's sake, many of the Knowledges detailed below could be considered ***Expert Knowledges***, as per **Mage 20, p. 277**. That said, the entries below can be used to inspire ideas and inform specialties among other Knowledge Traits.

Conspiracy Theory

"They" are not merely the projections of a delusional mind. You know damn well that secret power-players manipulate the world, and you're on to their schemes. In the World of Darkness, paranoia is a survival technique, and so this Knowledge gives you clues to the conspiracies that may or may not be eating that world from the inside-out. Naturally, such information makes you a target... and though you may indeed be paranoid, They probably *are* out to get you... especially if you're working for Them too.

- • **Dabbler:** Fox News anchor.
- •• **Student:** Glenn Beck fan.
- ••• **Scholar:** Glenn Beck.
- •••• **Professor:** Art Bell.
- ••••• **Master:** The Truth is Out There... and you have it.

Possessed By: Bloggers, Pundits, Activists, TV Producers, Game Designers, Internet Trolls, Tea-Party Members, Puppet-Masters, Media Ops, UFOlogists, Government Agents, Survivalists, Folks Who're Scared Shitless of the World in General

Suggested Specialties: Right-Wing Political Lore, Left-Wing Political Lore, Hoaxes, 9/11, Birth Certificates, Anchor-Babies, Blogs, Newspapers, Aliens, Megacorps, Manufacturing Consent, Hidden History, Cults, Satanic Underground, the Catholic Church, Zionist Cabals, Reality Deviants (the vampiric Masquerade, werebeast packs, Ascension War factions, etc.), Technocratic Plots, Government Cover-Ups, Big Money, Big Media, Follow the Money, Roleplaying Games

Chantry /Construct Politics

In the corridors of Awakened and Enlightened power, you know your way around. Alliances, rivalries, histories, influential players, status and weaknesses... they're your bread and butter.

With such expertise, you're able to accomplish things that leave lesser mages scratching their heads.

This Knowledge comes in two forms: **Chantry Politics** covers the internal workings of a mystic stronghold, while **Construct Politics** reveals the inner workings of Technocratic installations. The higher your rating, the more you know. Certain levels of this Knowledge, however, are off-limits to characters under a certain rank. Low-level mages or Technocrats won't have the security clearance necessary to access high-level secrets (that is, C-Politics higher than 3), and members of rival factions probably won't be able to find out much about the other guys at all unless they're skilled infiltrators walking a *very* dangerous line.

Regardless of the character's rank or affiliation, C-Politics just gives you data and rumors, not the ability to act on what you think you know. Putting that knowledge to good use requires Traits like ***Diplomacy***, ***Subterfuge***, ***Allies***, ***Patron***, and ***Spies***.

- • **Dabbler:** You know the major places and players.
- •• **Student:** You've got a moderate assessment of your chosen base.
- ••• **Scholar:** Anything that's common knowledge in the ranks, you know.
- •••• **Professor:** Classified access is yours to command.
- ••••• **Master:** You know enough rumors, data, secrets and dirt to make lots of people nervous; given how *much* you know, *you* should be nervous too!

Possessed By: Managers, Masters, Diplomats, Infiltrators, Turncoats, Funding Committee Members, Oversight Specialists, Inquisitors, Informants, Troublemakers, Spiders in that Particular Web

Suggested Specialties: Deals, Dirt, Projects, Protocols, Rivalries, Romances, Alliances, Classified Data, Personnel Profiles, Problems, Hidden Power-Players

Covert Culture

In the alphabet soup of international intrigue (CIA, NSA, ICPO, etc.), you've got a backstage pass at the shadow-plays. Probably thanks to hard-won experience, you can spot cues, identify agents, play connect-the-dots between government agencies, and rattle off covert operations as if they were football games. In order to put such knowledge to use, of course, you'll need other skills to back up the things you know. Still, even James Bond needs to know who to trick, seduce, take orders from, and shoot on sight.

- • **Dabbler:** You know the names and general data pertaining to the secret service agencies of major world powers.
- •• **Student:** You keep tabs on every major covert operations agency in the world, and know tidbits about various "paraintelligence" groups (the Arcanum, Zaibatsu, Inquisition, etc.) as well.
- ••• **Scholar:** Beyond the obvious facts and figures involved in covert operations, you've got dirt on important figures in the community, solid data about "nonexistent" groups, and enough so-called "secrets" to make certain folks uneasy.
- •••• **Professor:** You know about, and are known to, every major party in the covert-culture world, with plenty of knowledge about other groups as well.
- ••••• **Master:** They just call you "M."

Possessed By: Hacktivists, Spies, Covert Ops, Mercenaries, Terrorists, Crime Lords, Arms Dealers, Investigators, Conspiracy Experts, Any Technocratic Manager Worth that Rank

Suggested Specialties: Secret Societies, Government Agencies, Tactics, Personnel, Counterterrorism, Agency Heads, Operative Status, Gossip, Scandals, Wetwork, Special Projects, Things You're Really Not Supposed to Know

Cultural Savvy

You're a walking travel guide, even in places you've never visited before. A combination of prior knowledge and innate savvy helps you spot cultural sweet spots and pitfalls before you (or your companions) trip over your own ignorance.

Unlike the ***Etiquette*** Skill, this Knowledge is less about making friends than it is about figuring out how cultures work as a whole. With it, you can grasp foreign manners, catch subtle cues, unravel complex social roles, and draw conclusions about the importance of gender, politics, ethnicity, and – perhaps most importantly – the cultural expectations of the people in question. In a chronicle that employs *reality zones*, this can be a subtle but important weapon in the global Ascension War. For details, again see ***Reality Zones*** in **Mage 20, pp. 611-617**.

- • **Dabbler:** You read travel guides for fun.
- •• **Student:** You're a smart tourist.
- ••• **Scholar:** A cultural chameleon, you catch on fast.
- •••• **Professor:** Versed in several societies, you know more than many natives do.
- ••••• **Master:** The world is your playground, your oyster, and your home.

Possessed By: Diplomats, Activists, Peace Corps Personnel, UN Operatives, Infiltration Specialists, Cultural Attachés, Missionaries, Jet-Setters, Globetrotters, Mages Without Borders

Suggested Specialties: Manners, Taboos, Social Graces, Social Castes, Local Politics, Subtle Cues, Religion, Regional History, Gender Politics, Unspoken Rules

Helmsman

The baroque complexity of starship controls is enough to give most folks a headache. Not you. Rigorous training and practice have taught you how to maneuver the weird craft that operate beyond the mundane realm. Although you probably need a support crew to help you (starships are *complicated!*), you're got practical knowledge regarding the various screens, buttons, keys, and monitors involved in navigating and steering such advanced vehicles.

Despite some cosmetic similarities to the ***Pilot*** Skill above, Helmsman works with a very different sort of vehicle. And because this Skill deals with spacecraft, *very* few characters – other than Void Engineers and certain Etherites – know that it exists... and even fewer have studied its techniques. On a related note, there are some pretty significant differences between the standardized controls of Technocratic-fleet vessels and the more... um, *elegant* designs of unique Etherite craft. In game terms, the Storyteller should impose a penalty, typically -1 to -3, on a helmsman who's trying to puzzle out an unfamiliar set of controls. Oh, the consequences of a blown roll can be downright *ugly*. In (Ether)space, no one can hear you die.

- • **Novice:** You're been trained in basic shuttle operations.
- •• **Practiced:** They let you take the helm when things are calm.
- ••• **Skillful:** You're an experienced helmsman who's seen some scrapes and come through fine.
- •••• **Expert:** "Mr. Sulu – take the helm!"
- ••••• **Master:** Han Solo considers you a peer.

Possessed By: Void Engineers, Cyborgs, Space Marines, Etherian Adventurers

Suggested Specialties: Combat, Navigation, Crisis Situations, Improvised Circumstances, Guesstimation, Etherite Gadgetry, Extended Trips

History

Those who forget history are doomed to be stupid mages. You're not one of them. A pursuit of historical knowledge includes not only the usual facts and figures but – especially in recent years – an exploration of the cultural trends behind the big events, the role of "little people" (marginalized populations, commoners, women, etc.), and other things that old-school historians didn't think were worth recording but which turned out to be vitally important. Hermetics, Technocrats, and historical recreationists and reclamationists take history very seriously; some of the older ones may even have experienced "historical events" in person.

- • **Dabbler:** Time-Life books are your friends.
- •• **Student:** You're starting to learn the stuff they don't teach in school.
- ••• **Scholar:** A professional teaching gig might suit you.
- •••• **Professor:** You know the ins and outs of common and alternative history.
- ••••• **Master:** If you weren't *actually* there, you may as well have been.

Possessed By: Authors, Bloggers, Scholars, Conspiracy Theorists, Consultants, History Buffs, Revisionists, Anthropologists, Activists, Archivists, Long-Lived Magi

Suggested Specialties: Hidden History, Social History, Occult History, Cultural History, Shadow History, Suppressed History, Alternate Sources, Marginalized Groups, Ascension War Events, Supernatural Influence (vampires, demons, werecritters, etc.)

Power-Brokering

When it's time to set up puppets and get them dancing, this Ability reflects your ability to consolidate connections, facilitate access, introduce power-players to one another, and then lay foundations for the type of influence that gets things done. An "offstage" ability (like ***Research*** and ***Networking***), Power-Brokering allows you to set up and manipulate networks of authority and then sit in the center of them and employ the folks who owe you favors. Is this magick? Oh, *hell* yes. Members of the Syndicate, NWO, Solificati, Virtual Adepts, and Celestial Chorus swear by this type of "enchantment," as do the most efficient and influential Nephandi. Even Ecstatics, witches and shamans employ these sorts of connections among their related peers. Faces and titles may differ, but social power is universal.

Especially when combined with Mind spells, Power-Brokering lets you "make a few calls" to bring influential parties together and point them at common goals. Social-based rolls create those connections – typically composed of Manipulation + Power-Brokering, although Charisma, Appearance, Intelligence, Perception, and perhaps even – within some cultures – Strength could be combined with Power-Brokering as well. In conjunction with Backgrounds like ***Allies***, ***Influence***, ***Resources***, and ***Spies***, or Abilities like ***Etiquette***, ***Cultural Savvy***, ***Media***, ***Politics***, ***Subterfuge***, and similar Traits, you can forge potent connections without ever resorting to Spheres; if you do nudge things a bit with True Magick, the results can be astounding... just ask the Technocracy... and the Nephandi...

For suggestions about the metaphysical applications of such influence, see the **Mage 20** ***Instruments*** entries for ***Mass Media*** and ***Management and Human Resources*** **(pp. 594-595)**, and ***Influence From a Distance*** and ***The Social Element*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 116-120.**

- • **Dabbler:** You know how to talk to receptionists.
- •• **Student:** Getting your foot in the door... and *keeping* it there... is easy enough.
- ••• **Scholar:** Power-players know your name and take your calls.
- •••• **Professor:** "Mr. Koch will see you now."
- ••••• **Master:** World-leaders consider you a friend.

Possessed By: Diplomats, Tycoons, Brokers, Celebrities, Activists, Journalists, Editors, Promoters, Politicians, Spies, Anonymous, Receptionists

Suggested Specialties: Media, Politics, High Finance, Hollywood, Tribal Councils, United Nations, Corporate Powers, Megacorporations, Underworld, Prison Culture, Inner Circles, Deals, Backscratching, Blackmail, Schmoozing, Making Friends

Propaganda

From your lips to the world's ears. You know how to influence public opinion on a mass scale, often by bending an inflammatory truth just enough to boil the blood of John and Jane Q. Public. Given a few days, some resources, and the right venue, you can make your chosen party look as good or bad as possible. Obviously, this demands media access (computers, social media, TV network connections, etc.); assuming you have it, though, you can craft messages that lodge and burn in the public consciousness.

Like other "offstage" Abilities, this Trait requires time and patience to employ. In game terms, you decide the message you want to send, the instruments you want to employ when delivering that message, the methods you plan to use in order to get that message across, and the effect you want it to have once it's out there. A Manipulation + Propaganda roll sends that message out to the court of public opinion; the better you roll, the stronger that idea takes hold. That roll's difficulty depends on your target, the message, and the general public's receptivity to the idea. Claiming that the first dark-skinned American president is a malignant foreign infiltrator appears to be a very easy task; convincing the general public that their favorite news sources are owned by an Arabian prince is far more challenging. To many Technocratic Operatives, this Trait makes a perfect venue for large-scale coincidental Mind Procedures. Note, however, that such propaganda, even in Awakened hands, is effective but not perfect. The pervasive and contradictory nature of mass-media culture assures a certain degree of skepticism in even the most gullible audiences.

For potential applications of this Trait, again see ***Influence From a Distance*** and ***The Social Element*** in **How Do You *DO* That?**.

- • **Dabbler:** Daily Kos blogger.
- •• **Student:** Fox News anchor.
- ••• **Scholar:** Rush Limbaugh.
- •••• **Professor:** Noam Chomsky.
- ••••• **Master:** Dick Chaney.

Possessed By: Pundits, Bloggers, Politicians, Anonymous, Media Analysts, Media Activists, Ad Executives, Adbusters, Politicians, Spin Doctors, Speechwriters, PR Consultants, Network Honchos, Game Designers, Media Ops, Religious Leaders, Conspiracy Theorists, NWO Specialists, Syndicate Ops, Nephandic Corrupters

Suggested Specialties: Targets, Moral Panics, Celebrity Endorsements, Smears, Scandals, Red Alerts, Misdirection, Elections, Subliminals, Advertising, Politics, "Othering," Undermining, Counterprogramming, Pervasive Images, Military Applications, Total Fabrications, Panic Buttons, Beating the War-Drums

Theology

You understand religious structures, doctrines and histories... not necessarily from a believer's standpoint (although many theologians are believers by default) but from an informed perspective. At the upper levels (three dots or more), most people with this Trait tend to notice the common threads between different creeds; that, however, is not a universal tendency – plenty of dedicated theologians remain locked, with intense devotion, into a single religious belief.

For mages in particular, an understanding of local and cultural theology can be invaluable when influencing beliefs or turning them to your advantage (as described in the ***Reality Zones*** section of **Mage 20, pp. 611-617**), exploring and exploiting paradigms (see ***Belief: The Core of Focus*** in **Mage 20, pp. 567-572**, the ***Expanded Paradigms*** in this book, pp. 188-196, and ***The Paradigm Ward*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 102-103**), and seeking ***Mythic Threads*** and other potential tools of coincidence **(Mage 20, pp. 61 and 588)**.

- • **Dabbler:** You know the basic tenets.
- •• **Student:** Deeper study reveals the inner workings.
- ••• **Scholar:** Esoteric elements of your chosen creed become obvious.
- •••• **Professor:** You're a dedicated authority in your creed... and perhaps in others as well.
- ••••• **Master:** Few people alive understand as much as you do about the pillars of belief.

Possessed By: Clergy, Religious Leaders, Religious Historians, Creed Advocates, Inquisitors, Activists, Scholars, Missionaries, Zealots, Chorus Mages

Suggested Specialties: Comparative Religion, Prosperity Gospel, Orthodoxy, Counter-Theology, Religion /Science Communion, Religious Activism, Religious History, Alternative /Marginalized Theologies, Loopholes, Hidden Scriptures, Dirty Little Secrets, Religious-Government Collaboration, End-Times Theology, Specific Religious Creeds (Spanish Catholicism, Nordic Heathenism, Reform Judaism, Universal Unitarianism, Tibetan Buddhism, etc.)

Unconventional Warfare

Perhaps the biggest hot-button topic of the new millennium, unconventional warfare is as old as war itself. Originally referred to as the Knowledge: ***Terrorism***, this field of expertise deals with the techniques of mass terror, the instruments of fear, the underworlds associated with unconventional warfare, and the most efficacious methods for "sending a message" or catching the people who do.

Combined with Traits like ***Computer***, ***Demolitions***, ***Intimidation***, ***Security***, ***Politics***, ***Media***, ***Covert Culture***, and so forth, this Knowledge can reflect the practical as well as the organizational, ideological, and social aspects of terrorism. ***Theology*** or ***Occult*** may let a character recognize the religious or mystic aims of terrorism, while ***Expression*** and ***Cultural Savvy*** unlock the potentially artistic side of mass murder.

Since the difference between heroes and terrorists is almost entirely subjective, experts in this field often veer into exceedingly hazy moral territory with regards to the people they know and the things they'll do. And while terrorism is unquestionably a dirty business, it can be profoundly effective... especially for mages locked in a shadow war to control Reality on a global scale.

- • **Dabbler:** You know the major organizations involved in terror, as well as their usual tactics, targets, methodologies, and key personnel.
- •• **Student:** You're a consultant for the UN Security Council, the U.S. Army, al Qaeda, or some other interested party.
- ••• **Scholar:** You know the majors, the fringes, and the fakes.
- •••• **Professor:** You're a key player in the terror-wars.
- ••••• **Master:** You're either a leader or the power behind one.

Possessed By: Terrorists, Counterterrorism Ops, Hacktivists, Activists, Vigilantes, Mob Leaders, Intelligence Agents, War Buffs, Bloggers, Commandos, Reporters, Spies, Arms Dealers, Guerilla Fighters, Would-Be Revolutionaries

Suggested Specialties: Domestic Terror, Ethnic Conflicts, History of Terror, Media Effects, Watchdogs, Counterterrorism Agencies, Intelligence Collection, Kidnapping, Ideology, Secrets, Networks, "Celebrity Figures," Alliances, Sponsors, Weaponry

Vice

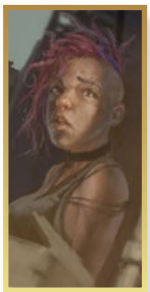
You're a master and a scholar of decadent pleasures. Sex, drugs, booze, and other thrills both common and forbidden are your specialty. You might be a vice cop or Interpol agent tasked with cleaning such places up; a criminal rooted in those undergrounds; a wizard with a shady past; or a sensation-seeker of the first and final order. Perhaps you're a sex-worker, a drug-mule, or some other street-level professional... or a tourist in places the guidebooks never mention. Regardless of the source of your information, you know how to find dens of iniquity, chase your favorite dragons, and get what you want or need without getting killed in the process... that is, of course, assuming that you "get lucky" and stay that way.

- • **Dabbler:** Mr. Bachelor Party.
- •• **Student:** Taxi driver or hotel concierge.
- ••• **Scholar:** Vice cop.
- •••• **Professor:** Working pro.
- ••••• **Master:** Overlord of Sin.

Possessed By: Gangsters, Beat Cops, Detectives, "Johns," Blackmailers, Drug Addicts, Dr. Feelgoods, Bartenders, Sex Workers, Couriers, Street Folks, Tempters, Corrupters, Infernalists, Ecstatics, Moral Crusaders, Vigilantes, Syndicate "Made Men"

Suggested Specialties: Nightclubs, Strip Clubs, Fetish Clubs, Drug Dens, Networks, Black Markets, Sex Work, Key Players, Secret Clients, Human Trafficking, Internet Sources, International Vice Trade, Forbidden Thrills, the Worst of the Worst, Moving Through The Underworld, Born and Raised in Hell

Merits and Flaws



Somewhere in between raw Abilities and the preternatural powers of the Spheres, Merits and Flaws represent blessings and curses that set certain folks apart from mundane humanity. **Mage 20** features a handful of such Traits in **Appendix II**. A much more expansive collection of them can be found below.

As **Mage 20** explains, Merits and Flaws get divided up into four general categories: *Physical*, *Mental*, *Social*, and *Supernatural*. A fifth category, *Genetic Flaws*, applies only to Flaws applied to the Background: ***Enhancements***, and is detailed in **Mage 20, Appendix II**. As that rulebook also says, these Traits are all *optional*, and certain ones may be limited to Storyteller characters or ignored altogether in a given chronicle. For further details about Merits and Flaws, see the rules given in **Mage 20**, p. **642**. Although we have not reprinted the Traits given in that book, we *have* included entries below that refer you to those **Mage 20** entries; this way, all of the appropriate Merits and Flaws are presented together for clarity's sake, and you don't need to go paging through different books in order to find what you need.

For the purposes of most **Mage** chronicles and characters, the following Merits and Flaws are essentially definitive. The **Revised Edition Tradition Books** include a handful of additional Merits and Flaws which apply to certain types of mages, and a few other sourcebooks – most notably **World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary**, **Masters of the Art**, and **Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers** – feature several Merits and Flaws that don't suit a typical human mage. The following collection, however, should provide most, if not all, of what you need when featuring Merits and Flaws in your **Mage 20** chronicle.

Optional Rule: Higher Limits on Flaws

Officially, **Mage** characters are limited to seven points in Flaws. That said, certain Flaws (***Aging***, ***Degeneration***, ***Mayfly Curse***, and ***Jinx / Infernal Contraption***) can take a character beyond that limit. Also, certain characters may be especially cursed, "burdened with great purpose," or both. In such cases, the Storyteller *might* allow a player character to exceed the usual seven-point limitation, even if she's got more than two Flaws (see **Mage 20**, p. **642**).

If you choose to allow such exceptions, we recommend a *strict* upper limit of 13 points in Flaws – a limit allowable for only the most unfortunately magnificent characters. Don't let your players game this exception – make it hurt. As a Storyteller, play those Flaws up constantly; hey, if a player wants to be Loki, then remind him what usually *happens* to Loki by the time the story's over.

Adversarial Backgrounds

The **Revised Edition Mage** sourcebook **Guide to the Traditions** introduced an optional category of Traits called ***adversarial Backgrounds***: inverted Background Traits that hamper the character instead of benefitting him. That sourcebook, however, was the one and only time such Traits appeared in a World of Darkness game. And so – for consistency's sake – those adversarial Backgrounds have been either revised into Flaws in the following pages or, for adversarial Backgrounds that duplicated existing Flaws, eliminated altogether.

You can find the revised versions of those adversarial Backgrounds on the following pages:

Apprentice **p. 81**
Blacklisted **p. 59**
Debts **p. 61**
Enemies eliminated
Gremlin **p. 84**
Infamy **p. 62**
Jinx **p. 88**
Notoriety **p. 65**
Rival House **p. 63**
Skeptics eliminated
Throwback **p. 85**
Uncanny **p. 86**
Wards eliminated

Time, Clarity, and Revisions

Time, as La Morrissette said, has a funny way of sneaking up on you. And as the following list of Merits and Flaws reveals, time also changes the ways in which we view certain things. The old idea that hyperflexible people are somehow double-jointed, for example, has been swept away by research into *Ehlers-Danlos hypermobility syndrome*: a collection of related disorders in which a person's connective tissues (skin, muscles, blood vessels, and so forth) are unusually flexible... which seems cool until you realize that it means your body is falling apart from the inside out. The meanings and connotations of words change too; schizophrenia, for instance, is not the same thing as Multiple Personality Dissociative Disorder even though many folks used to employ that term to refer to people with multiple personalities. Other terms, like *lame*, fell out of favor because they're insulting to people with physical impediments. And so, rather than rehashing the old Merits and Flaws that had been belted out by a bunch of barely-post-teenagers in the 1990s, the following Merits and Flaws have been, whenever possible, updated for the twenty-first century, reflecting the changes in language and understanding that have occurred since then.

Many of the following Merits and Flaws have also been consolidated and streamlined from their 1990s incarnations. The ***Ties*** Merit featured in **Mage 20**, for example, gathers into a single Trait all of the various sorts of Ties that had been presented in older World of Darkness books. The Physical Flaw ***Impediment*** (pp. 39-40) consolidates a host of physical conditions into a single Trait that's based on how much a condition interferes with your character's life. This way, we've cut down on redundancy while offering new options that had not been possible before.

Beyond those updates, the following Merits and Flaws also include a number of all-new Traits, as well as rules-changes that reflect the **20th Anniversary Edition** systems. And so, while some of them won't square up exactly with the older versions of those Traits, these Merits and Flaws present a more accurate picture of our new millennium, with the possibilities and pitfalls of our age.

Physical Merits

Mages are known more often for their mental acumen and metaphysical prowess than for their rippling abs and jaw-dropping physiques. That said, certain mages have advantages in the physical realm that the average mortal (Awakened or otherwise) simply can't match. For such specimens, the following Merits await.

Acute Senses (1 or 3 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, pp. 642-643**.

Alcohol /Drug Tolerance (1 to 2 pt. Merit)

You can drink folks under the table or otherwise party till everybody else drops. System-wise, this Merit lets you

make a Stamina roll (difficulty 7) to shake off the effects of intoxication – a useful talent for hard-pounding Ecstatics and tough-as-leather Black Suits!

In its one-point form, this Merit functions only for "natural" drugs (booze, pot, cocaine, etc.), not for lab-synthesized concoctions (LSD, meth, krokodil, etc.). For two points, however, the Merit can neutralize the psychoactive effects of any drug *unless that drug has been created as the vector for a Sphere-based magickal Effect*. (That is, say, a pill that delivers a Life 3 /Mind 3 Effect to the person who takes it, as opposed to an "ordinary" pill that a mage takes as part of the focus instruments ***Drugs and Poisons*** or ***Brews, Potions***, and so forth, as detailed in **Mage 20**, **pp. 588-600**.) In the latter case, the character needs to use countermagick; this Merit will not help to counteract such drugs. "Awakened" substances, however (as per **Mage 20**, **p. 443**) are treated as "synthesized concoctions" even if they are, in all other forms, "natural.

For a more comprehensive resistance to toxins, see ***Poison Resistance***, below.

Ambidextrous (1 pt. Merit)

The hemispheres of your brain are so attuned that you can use both hands with equal dexterity. In game terms, you do not suffer a higher difficulty if you use two weapons or perform some task with your off-hand. The normal rules for performing multiple actions still apply (see **Mage 20**, **p. 388-389**), but coordination between the left and right sides of your body is no problem at all.

Cast-Iron Stomach (1 pt. Merit)

You can eat more or less anything without gagging. Squirming bugs, synthetic goop, a freshly-gutted carcass with the innards still hanging out... hey, it's all food, so chow down! Anything you can physically devour and digest is yours for the eating. This Merit does not in any way protect you from the effects of said substances (rotted meat can still poison you), but you can keep down a meal that would make the average person puke from its mere proximity... an especially useful gift if you have the supernatural Flaw: ***Bizarre Hunger*** (see p. 87).

Catlike Balance (1 pt. Merit)

Your sense of balance has been honed – either through practice, magick, or other means – to uncanny acuity. System-wise, you reduce the difficulty by -2 when your character performs some physical act (rolling with a fall, walking a tightrope, etc.) that requires her to keep her feet.

Hyperflexible (1 pt. Merit)

You are what's commonly but erroneously known as "double-jointed" (as per the old Merit of that name). In reality, your joints are exceedingly flexible, perhaps due to intense training, magickal augmentation, or the medical condition known as *Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome* (EDS – see above, as well as the ***Impediment*** Flaw, below). Whatever the reason, you can stretch and flex in ways most people cannot.

In game terms, this Merit allows you a -2 reduction in difficulty for rolls that involve physical flexibility – escape attempts, contortions, etc. Your character can also perform uncanny acts of hyperflexibility, as seen in Cirque Du Soleil, butoh dance, and extreme yoga postures.

Light Sleeper (1 pt. Merit)

Four hours of sleep a night works just fine for you. And unlike most folks, you can wake up out of an apparently dead slumber more or less ready for action. You can, of course, enjoy longer periods of sleep too. But when deadlines, intruders, and end-of-the-world emergencies shake you out of bed, you get by with cat-naps and the occasional light snooze.

Noble Blood (1 pt. Merit)

Although the modern world resists the old traditions of lineage as a mark of quality, your features link you to a powerful family; you're a Kennedy, a Windsor, a Saud, a Rothschild – someone whose pedigree is obvious in your physical form and presence.

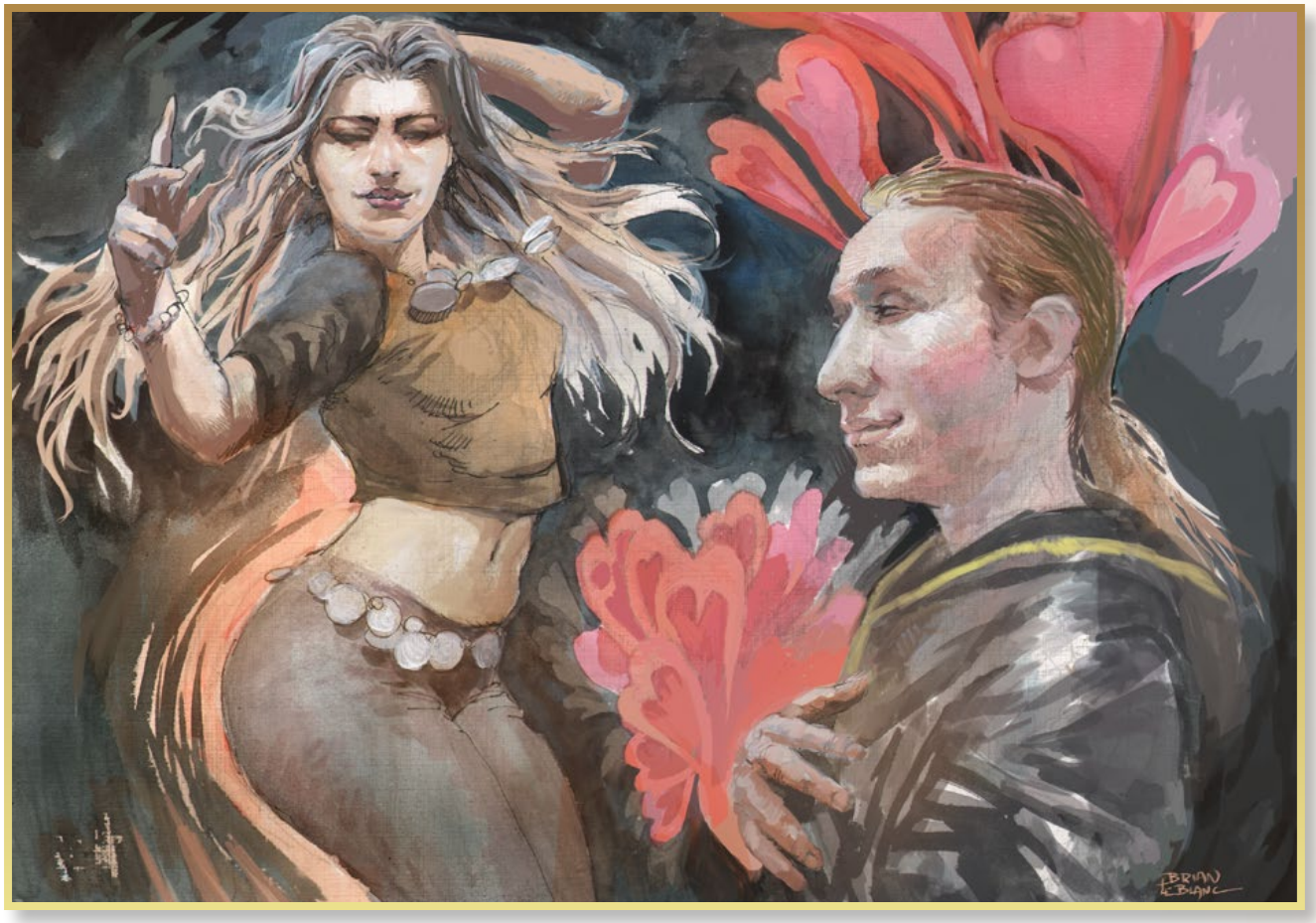
In story terms, this Merit grants you the obvious physical features of a well-known "royal" family: the Kennedy smile, the Windsor ears, and so forth. The family in question doesn't have to belong to a formal aristocracy, either; you might be a Kardashian, a Murdoch, or a Clinton, and may the gods have mercy on your soul. On the flipside, your distinct features might not be especially attractive (royal families are notoriously inbred), and will mark you out for enemies of the clan in question.

In social situations, this Merit might be worth a -2 reduction for the difficulty of social rolls that involve people who care about things like aristocracy, but would also increase your difficulty by +2 if you're dealing with folks who hate that noble family's guts! In all cases, this Merit reflects an actual genetic connection, not simply a cosmetic resemblance... which could provide all kinds of complications when magick and its secret histories are involved.

While it might be worth some social currency, this Merit does not in any way provide material wealth or other perks. For such goodies, see Backgrounds like ***Influence***, ***Rank***, ***Resources***, and so forth in the **Mage 20** rulebook, **Chapter Six**. For the social benefits of regal presence, see the Social Merit ***Regal Bearing***, elsewhere in this chapter.

Sterile (1 pt. Merit or Flaw)

For some physical reason, you're unable to sire or conceive children. Whether this is a Merit or a Flaw depends upon whether or not you *want* to sire or conceive children. Generally, this sort of condition can be easily cured with a little Life-Sphere magick; in your case, though, it can't be rectified until and unless you, the player, discard the Merit or pay off this Flaw.



Enchanting Feature (2 pt. Merit)

Blessed with magnificent eyes, sleek hair, mighty biceps, preternatural grace, ripped abs, a dazzling smile, or some other standout physical feature, you can enchant people with the raw perfection of that feature. The feature in question doesn't need to be visually obvious, either; maybe you smell good, possess a seductive voice, move with animalistic allure, or enjoy some likewise wondrous physical asset. (Please be tasteful here, folks.)

This Merit takes the place of related Physical Merits such as **Enchanting Gaze**, **Soothing Voice**, **Graceful**, and other potentially similar attributes. Story-wise, this Enchanting Feature becomes a standout part of your character's description. System-wise, you reduce the difficulty by -2 when your character deploys the feature in question as part of some social feat.

If your mage employs his Enchanting Feature Merit as part of his magickal focus (see the ***Instruments*** entries for ***Eye Contact***, ***Dance and Movement***, ***Ordeals and Exertions***, ***Sex and Sensuality***, ***Social Domination***, and ***Voice and Vocalizations*** in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Ten**), then you could count this Merit as a ***personalized unique/specialized instrument*** (as detailed in **Mage 20**, **pp. 503 and 588**). On the plus side, this allows you to reduce certain casting difficulties by -2 when the feature in question is specifically employed in the casting of an Effect. On the not-so-good side, this might get your mage's eyes gouged out, his face marred, his vocal cords cut, or... well, you get the picture... if a particularly ruthless enemy considers that feature to be "the focus of his power."

Physically Impressive (2 pt. Merit)

You are one imposing sumbitch, not so much large as apparently dangerous no matter what mood you might be in at the time. This could be as obvious as scarring or an intimidating build, or as intangible as the proverbial "air of menace." System-wise, the Merit adds two dice to all Social-Trait rolls that involve intimidating someone; story-wise, people find you unnerving – and quite possibly attractive in a dangerous way – even when you're not trying to be impressive.

Poison Resistance (2 pt. Merit)

Toxins may sicken you, but probably won't kill you. Although magickal poisons may be the exception to this rule, your body shakes off the worst effects of natural and synthesized poisons.

When attacked by such substances, add two dice to your character's Stamina roll when resisting their effects; a successful roll reduces the intensity of powerful toxins, and eliminates the deadlier effects of lesser ones altogether. Sure, she might feel a little woozy and could get seriously ill, but even if you fail that roll your character probably won't die.

Although it works against toxic bacteria, this Merit does not protect against diseases spread from viruses, genetic conditions, and so forth. For details, see ***Drugs, Poisons, and Disease*** in **Mage 20, pp. 441-444 and 456**. And because intoxicants are toxins too, this Merit helps you survive overdoses of booze or drugs – see ***Alcohol /Drug Tolerance***, above.

Poker Face (2 pt. Merit)

Nothing rattles you. Nothing. The emergence of a titanic elder thing from the depths of space might warrant a concerned twitch of your mouth, but that's really about it. Oh, this doesn't mean you don't *feel* anything – that's the Mental Flaw: ***Icy***, below. Your deadpan expression, blank eyes, and flat tone of voice, however, reveal nothing about your thoughts or intentions... which, for folks on the receiving end of you, can be quite disconcerting; reduce the difficulty of intimidation, subterfuge, and resistance-to-intimidation rolls by -2, while adding +2 to the difficulties of anyone who tries to rattle your cage or get under your skin, including attempts to read, seduce, torture, or otherwise get past that poker face.

Daredevil (3 pt. Merit)

You laugh at danger. Even when daring the Fates with near-suicidal impulsiveness, you possess an innate knack for not getting yourself perished. Add three dice to *non-combat* and *non-magickal* rolls that involve some physical act of incomprehensible stupidity (leaping from roof to roof, diving into a waterfall, jumping a motorcycle onto the back of a moving train, etc.) that would turn the average mortal into hash.

Hypersensitivity (3 pt. Merit)

Extraordinarily open to physical sensations, you possess a depth of sensitivity most folks cannot conceive of having. A mere sip of wine can reveal its vintage to you; a whiff of smoke betrays the quality (or lack thereof) and origins of its burnt tobacco; a faint touch can conjure up orgasmic ecstasies.

Story-wise, you can easily "fall into" an enjoyable sensation, relishing it to a degree far beyond typical human sensitivity. System-wise, you reduce the difficulty by -2 if you're trying to use a Perception + Alertness roll to identify details about a sensation. Assuming that you employ instruments like ***Bodywork***, ***Drugs***, ***Energy***, ***Eye Contact***, ***Food and Drink***, or ***Sex and Sensuality*** (and you probably use most or all of them), you can get more "bang for your buck" from such sensations, which allows you to employ those instruments faster, and perhaps (Storyteller's option) gives you a -2 reduction to the difficulty of associated Ability rolls. The normal modifier limits still apply.

On the flipside, however, painful sensations and overstimulation can trigger paralyzing agonies and intense panic. Whenever you experience a painful sensation without your consent (that is, being flogged against your will, subjected to loud music that you didn't wish to hear, or injured by something you didn't want to be hurt by), you must make a Willpower roll to avoid being "dragged under" and stunned by the pain for a turn or two. (See ***Stunning*** in **Mage 20**, p. **417**.) That roll's difficulty depends upon the intensity of the pain – from difficulty 4 for a minor annoyance, to difficulty 10 for screaming agony. As any Cultist can tell you, ecstasy is indeed a two-way street!

Although this Merit goes well with ***Acute Senses***, it cannot be taken by a character who's also ***Insensate to Pain*** (detailed below).

Nightsight (3 pt. Merit)

Unlike most people, you can see in near-total darkness. Only the complete absence of visible light will negate this ability. In even the dimmest light, your visual abilities remain essentially unimpaired.

This Merit does not increase your character's visual capacity – for that gift, see ***Acute Senses***, above; it does, however, mean that low light does not impose any sort of penalty on her visual perception rolls. Other visual impediments, like smoke or fog, block her sight as usual, and magickally-imposed darkness (for instance, the sort caused by deflecting light with the Forces Sphere) negates this Merit if and when it involves the dispersal of light itself.

Huge Size (4 pt. Merit)

You're far bigger than usual – possibly over seven feet tall and /or over 400 pounds in weight. Such large people stand out in a crowd, and have a hard time literally "fitting in" to a world built for smaller human beings. Still, your character's large build gives him one additional health level, which counts as an extra level of Bruised when it comes to wound-based penalties. If he shapeshifts into a smaller form through Life-based magick, that extra health level goes away. In his normal form, however, this large character can be quite imposing and hard to beat.

Insensate to Pain (5 pt. Merit)

Nothing hurts until it kills you. Okay, it probably *does* hurt, but not enough to slow you down. Wound penalties do not affect your character at all; until she dies, she usually functions with her full dice pools intact. This Merit does not in any way change the way in which she *takes* damage – for that Merit, see below – but it radically changes the way said damage affects her ability to get things done.

There is, of course, a downside to all this: Pain tells us that we're not functioning properly and should probably stop while we're ahead. And so, you'll also do stuff like burn yourself by accident, try to walk on broken legs, and notice cuts only when the blood is seeping through your shirt. Although pain won't slow you down, shattered bones and organs will. Injuries that inflict significant physical impairment (crushed legs, broken skull, gouged-out eyes, etc.) supersede your usual immunity to dice-pool penalties due

to wounds, and you might inflict further lethal injury upon yourself (Storyteller's option) if you keep going after your body tries to tell you to stop.

Too Tough to Die (5 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, p. 644**.

Physical Flaws

As any Life-skilled mage understands, "average" is a meaningless concept with regards to biological organisms. Even so, certain features of a physical body make it harder for a person to function in a world that's often built for "average" people. Physical Flaws reflect limitations of a character's body that are not – without magick, technology or both – things she can repair. That said, a person with such "flaws" is often more resourceful than someone who hasn't had to work around those obstacles.

Physical Flaws also make excellent ***Genetic Flaws*** for Enhanced and genegineered characters, as described in **Mage 20**, p. **650**. Taken that way, however, each Flaw is worth only one point, and so you'd be better off taking most such Flaws in addition to the Genetic ones unless the Flaw in question is worth only one or two points to begin with.

Addiction (1 or 3 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20, p. 646**.

Child (1 to 3 pt. Flaw)

Awakening often hits before legal maturity. This wasn't a problem in the old days, but within modern society a young mage has certain built-in limitations: physical size, life experience, legal status (or lack thereof), and the challenges of being taken seriously in a grown-up world. Perhaps you're a child prodigy... or an adolescent whose reality truly *is* beyond understanding. In any case, this Flaw represents the social, legal, and physical obstacles of being a kid.

Depending on the value of this Flaw, your character might be a young child (3 points), a pre-adolescent young person (2 points), or someone near the verge of adulthood but not quite there (1 point). In the first two cases, you should also take ***Short*** to reflect a growing body... and in all cases, your ability to run with the mages is going to be limited by your age and the ways in which people react to it. For more details, see ***Child-Mages*** in **Chapter Two**, **pp. 115-116**.

Impediment (1 to 6 pt. Flaw)

Due to some physical condition, you're less able to deal with certain situations than most other people seem to be able to do. And if all of that sounds very conditional, that's because the specifics of this Flaw depend a lot on the following circumstances:

- What sort of condition you have.
- How much it gets in your way.
- Whether or not other people can tell that it gets in your way.

Literally speaking, an *impediment* interferes with your path by "blocking your feet." System-wise, this Flaw reflects any sort of impairment that's based in your character's physical situation. That includes neurological and internal chemical conditions like autism, dyslexia, chronic fatigue, significant allergies, and other maladies that may be "invisible" to others but which are rooted in the physical body, as opposed to in the psyche or the spirit. Such conditions might be linked to psychological and /or spiritual health too; those elements *are* interrelated, of course. For the purposes of this Flaw, however, an Impediment is something that hampers the character's ability to function in the physical realm.

Story-wise, an Impediment can be any body-based condition – obvious or not – that interferes with your character's ability to do stuff. Examples of obvious Impediments include a missing limb, a limp, a bent spine, missing teeth, heavy scarring, deformed features, and the like, while "invisible" Impediments would include chronic pain and /or fatigue, poor eyesight, asthma, internal tumors, sensory processing disorders, and so forth. The more that condition impedes your character, the more this Flaw is worth:

- (1 point) Like chronic headaches, impaired vision, minor arthritis or a few missing teeth, the Impediment presents occasional inconveniences but is not a major hassle in your life unless something worsens the condition or removes the things (glasses, dentures, pain reliever) that you use to compensate for it.
- (2 points) As with dyslexia, high-functioning Asperger's syndrome, chronic fatigue or pain, poor or deteriorating eyesight, or other internal obstacles, your Impediment presents constant but not insurmountable problems. In certain situations, you may suffer a +1 to difficulties that deal with that element of your life.
- (3 points) Your Impediment – severe migraines, significant autism, allergies or asthma, missing fingers or an eye, near-deafness, palsy, Tourette's syndrome, deteriorating limb(s), and so forth – significantly impairs several elements of your everyday life. System-wise, you add +1 to difficulties related to your Impediment.
- (4 points) An inescapable Impediment – missing limb, profound deafness or autism, near-blindness, malformed bones or connective tissues (as with EDS, mentioned above), severe arthritis, gnarled hands or feet, and similar obstacles – forces you to try working around that condition on a daily basis. Under most circumstances, you add +2 to difficulties related to that Impediment, and certain situations (like a nasty allergic reaction) might damage your health and endanger your life.

- (5 points) Thanks to a profound physical condition – partial paralysis, constant and severe pain, advanced cancer, the inability to hear or speak, muscular-skeletal deterioration, major sight-loss, and other maladies – you're unable to function in most ways that people take for granted. Add +2 to physical difficulties unless you've got a reliable way to compensate for that handicap, and assume that you simply cannot do certain things at all.

- (6 points) For whatever reasons, your condition is so advanced and severe that you need major work-arounds in order to function in the everyday world. Many physical feats are beyond you, and you add +2 or even +3 to difficulties of things you *can* do but only with a major effort.

The Flaw reflects *practical impairment* in the character's life; if your mage has a cybernetic arm that acts like his original arm only better, then that character is not impaired until or unless that arm breaks down. If someone cures this condition with magick or some other treatment, then the character loses this Flaw.

All forms of Impediment are not created equal, and so one "blind" person can function in the seeing world better (that is, with fewer points in the Flaw) than another visually-impaired person (with more points in the Flaw) can do. The Impediment's value may also reflect several different conditions that, taken together, impede that character's ability to function "normally" more than any single condition does. As an example, this author has dyslexia, dyscalculia, poor vision, and two chronically injured knees; does this stop him? No. Does it slow him down in certain respects? It sure does, and so the total of his "Flaw" would reflect the amount of difficulty that these conditions, all told, present in daily life.

This Flaw serves as a catch-all for previously published Physical Flaws like **Blind**, **Deaf**, and especially the pejorative **Lame**. Unlike many of the labels applied to such "handicaps," the Impediment Flaw does not carry any form of judgment on the part of the game itself; although characters (and players) might think less of a "lazy" person with five points in Impediment due to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, the Flaw itself is not intended in any way to be an insult against people with such conditions.

On that note, an unobvious Impediment may present significant social challenges; a person with Tourette's Syndrome may seem perfectly healthy even as her brain misfires, with the only visible symptoms being "inappropriate" sounds or actions. (See the Mental Flaw: ***Inappropriate***, p. 46) That mage with CFS could be considered "too lazy to get out of bed" by people who don't see her body sabotaging her from the inside out. And so, the value of the Flaw – with the Storyteller's approval – might reflect a penalty to social-based rolls instead of physical ones in certain situations. ("*Why weren't you at work again?*" "*I couldn't take ten steps without falling over.*" "*Yeah, right...*")

Aging (2, 4, 6, 8 or 10 pt. Flaw)

You ain't as young as you used to be... or perhaps you're a little *too* young. The years have taken their toll on your physical capacities, and while the spirit may be willing, the body most certainly is not.

System-wise, this Flaw reflects the diminished capabilities of a body that is either too old or too young to employ its full adult potential. For every two points in this Flaw, the character loses one dot from a Physical Attribute (Strength, Dexterity or Stamina), either because his body is aging past its prime, or because it has not yet developed to mature capacity.

In the latter case, a young child (see the Flaw: ***Child***, above) should also take 4 points in this Flaw, with an older child taking 2 points. Adolescent characters, obviously, have no such physical limitations due to age, although they could have other sorts of health issues, as described above under the Flaw: ***Impediment***.

Previous editions of this Flaw – that is, ones that were written by authors in their 20s or early 30s – maintained that a character must lose one dot of Physical Attributes for each decade over 40. As this author (currently in his 50s, and in better shape than he was at half this age) can attest, that's nonsense. A person can maintain, or even exceed, a young adult's physical capabilities well into middle age, and mages – who employ Life magicks, yoga, and other forms of physical conditioning – often age even better than most people do. Considering that a skilled mage can live for centuries with little (or no) loss of her physical abilities, this Flaw is not bound to a character's chronological age, only to her physical health in relation to that age. Even so, ancient mages can get pretty frail. For health problems related to greater stages of decrepitude, see ***Impediment***, above.

Easily Intoxicated (2 pt. Flaw)

Shit really fucks you up fast. The flipside of ***Alcohol/Drug Tolerance***, above, this Flaw renders you especially susceptible to intoxication. Your Stamina rolls to resist the effects of drugs or poisons (though not disease), as described in the ***Drugs, Poisons, and Disease*** section of **Mage 20**, suffer a +3 modifier to the usual difficulty involved. Contrary to popular conception, this does not make you a good candidate for the Cult of Ecstasy because *you* don't control the drugs – the drugs control *you*.

Repulsive Feature (2 pt. Flaw)

Some physical feature of yours turns people away. Maybe you smell bad regardless of your state of hygiene, possess the proverbial "evil eye," have an especially grating voice, suffer from a pervasive skin condition, or have a similarly repugnant physical characteristic. Perhaps the mere presence of you makes people's skins crawl even though there's nothing discernibly ugly about you. In any case, this feature discourages folks from sticking around much.

Essentially the inverse of the Merit: ***Enchanting Feature***, this Flaw represents a concealable yet disconcerting element of your physical presence. Unlike ***Impediment***, this Feature affects the way people regard you, not the way your body functions. That said, you could take both Flaws together, in order to reflect a physically debilitating condition that has socially awkward effects as well. The feature in question doesn't represent overall ugliness,

as per ***Monstrous*** and ***Horrific***, below; instead, it manifests as a single unpleasant physical distinction.

System-wise, this Flaw adds a +2 difficulty modifier to Social-Trait rolls whenever this feature comes into play. Story-wise, this Flaw renders you physically distinctive unless you make an effort to hide the Repulsive Feature. If you change shape, that feature carries over into your other forms, which interferes with disguise attempts. If the feature transcends visual senses (like, for example, an unpleasant odor or grating voice), it might betray your presence even if you can't be seen. In both cases, this Flaw penalizes your rolls for physical concealment the same way it penalizes your social interactions.

As some consolation, the feature could be used to deliberately frighten or irritate people; in that case, the usual penalty becomes a -2 to your difficulty instead. A Repulsive Feature that has been integrated into your magickal focus (again, for instance, the "evil eye") offers the same instrumental benefits described under ***Enchanting Feature***, with the same potential for mutilation and a greater incentive for someone to mess you up!

Profiled Appearance (2 pt. Flaw)

You look like one of *those* people... y'know, the people that "respectable citizens" expect bad things from. Depending on the setting of your chronicle, this could involve physical mannerisms, body art, gender distinctions, individual features, ethnic heritage, cybernetic modifications, or other elements of your physical body that you cannot remove and probably don't want to "fix" anyhow. Problem is, the people around you are constantly watching your every move, making trouble for you when they can get away with it, and otherwise causing you grief. The authorities shake you down on principle, and most folks won't object to whatever they choose to do to you.

Although it's related to the Social Flaw: ***Cultural Other*** (below), Profiled Appearance is based on your character's physical features, not on their social behavior. Although it can be concealed to some degree, your Profiled Appearance is not something that can be removed without magick, and it reflects an essential part of your identity. Like ***Impediment***, *it does not carry a value judgment in the game* even though it represents the way other characters will view you. If this feels unfair in the game, imagine how it must feel in real life.

Degeneration (3, 6 or 9 pt. Flaw)

Your body is falling apart. A curse, disease, flawed biotech, corrupting magicks, or some other affliction is rotting your physical form, and although Life magick can repair the damage to some degree, this degeneration remains permanent unless the Flaw is somehow removed.

In its three-point variation, this Flaw reflects an inability to heal injuries without the aid of magick or medical technology. Until treated by Life Sphere Effects or medical intervention, the character cannot recover heath levels lost to injury, disease or other factors.

At the six-point level, the character suffers a constant stream of injuries even without outside trauma. Whenever he's at full Health, that character loses one health level every two weeks until he is either healed or he dies. As described above, he cannot heal on his own.

At the nine-point level, that Health loss is essentially aggravated damage, and cannot be healed except through vulgar Life-Sphere Effects.

Obviously, this Flaw is meaningless in one-shots or short-duration games. It should be taken only by characters (and players) involved in long-term chronicles.

Monstrous (3 pt. Flaw)

A frightening appearance marks you as an outsider. Regardless of your true personality and temperament, some profound deformities, scars, body mods or other characteristics fill people with terror and revulsion. System-wise, your character has an Appearance of 0, and probably suffers penalties to social-based rolls to win people over, while getting difficulty reductions when trying to scare people, depending upon what he looks like and who he's dealing with.

Permanent Wound (3 pt. Flaw)

Due to lasting injury, Pattern leakage, a Paradox Flaw, or some other physiological deficit, you suffer from a chronic injury that never heals. This might be an incurable tumor, endless bleeding, debilitating pain, brittle bones... the specifics are not important. Regardless of the cause, your character is always at the Wounded health level; even with magickal healing, the injury returns to its normal state at either sunrise or sunset (your choice) every day. Although this wound does not deteriorate further unless your character gets injured by some other source – at which point, another four health levels in damage can kill your character – this Permanent Wound does not recover to a healthy state until and unless the Flaw is bought off through a dramatic story-based cure.

Short (3 pt. Flaw)

Whether you're the next Harry Potter or a budding Tyrion Lannister, you're shorter than five feet tall... possibly a *lot* shorter than that. In game terms, your character runs at half the normal speed, has problems reaching certain things, lacks the physical leverage for certain feats, and probably gets a lot of shit from people who refuse to take him seriously.

Horrific (5 pt. Flaw)

Well past ***Monstrous***, you're hideous to the point of inspiring nightmares. Unless you mask your true form with serious magick, people and animals run screaming from your presence. Physically, you're not merely misshapen but repulsive on a primal level – the sort of terror that sent Lovecraft's heroes over the edge. You might not *actually* be a Nephandus or Marauder, but folks who know what those words mean will assume that you are one. A normal life is, for you, impossible. Whether due to Paradox disfigurement,

malignant disease, extreme body modifications (cybernetic, artistic, or otherwise), severe scarring, or similar acts of malevolent fate, you look like John Cobb threw up on you, then ran.

System-wise, this Flaw inflicts a +3 difficulty modifier to any social roll that involves *not* scaring the shit out of people, and lowers the difficulty by -3 if you *are*. Your Appearance Trait is stuck below zero, and faint-hearted or weak-willed Storyteller characters may be faced with ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** (as per **Mage 20, p. 407**) if they wind up spending time with you.

Mayfly Curse (5 or 10 pt. Flaw)

Your lifespan burns bright and fast. Due, perhaps, to biotech, cloning, or some other inhuman heritage or modification, you age far more quickly than normal human beings do. While this means that you reach(ed) maturity in record time, it ushers in premature decrepitude. When you live this fast, kid, one way or another, you're dying young!

At the five-point level of this Flaw, your character ages one year for every two months of earthly time (six years of age for each passing year). At the 10-point level, he ages one year per week (or 52 years of age in a single 12-month period). Such a character had best watch out for Time-savvy mages; the ***Accelerated Youth or Decay*** feat described in **How Do You *DO* That? (pp. 111-112)** has horrific effects on a mayfly, who suffers six to 52 years of aging for each year of time inflicted upon him.

As the years rush in, other Flaws like ***Aging***, ***Impediment***, ***Absent-Minded***, and so forth may pile up on this character as well. *Life-Sphere magick cannot negate this Flaw*, which could be interpreted as a manifestation of the Unbelief form of Paradox, unless the player buys off the Flaw... and perhaps not even then.

Mental Merits

Mages depend upon their mental faculties. Although vampires, werefolk, and the like prize certain mental aptitudes, most

Neurodiversity and Mental Traits

Minds aren't machines. For all the talk of "normal brains" and "average functionality," medical research and social activism have shown that such ideas are absurd. In older days, people slapped labels on folks whose mental capabilities seemed to be "different": *slow, moron, diminished capacity, retarded.* (Also, *brilliant, genius, egghead,* and *savant.*) Some people cling to those definitions even now. In the twenty-first century, however, two terms have gained preference over those old labels: *neurodivergence* and *neurodiversity*.

Essentially, *neurodivergence* means "someone whose brain-functions diverge from the human norm," while *neurodiversity* means "all of our brains work differently, so let's respect our differences." Some folks argue that the latter term is too broad-ranging and "politically correct" to be useful, while others assert that *neurodivergent* is an insult which holds human minds to an unrealistic standard. Both arguments have merit; severe mental conditions *do* interfere with a person's ability to function in the everyday world, and it *is* insulting to call folks "divergent" when their minds work along different lines than other people's minds do. (Maybe less insulting than *moron*, but you get the idea.) As of this writing, neurodiversity is the preferred term among people who want to be inclusive, not divisive, with regards to the vast range of human minds.

What does this have to do with **Mage**? For starters, both Merits and Flaws in the Mental category reflect "divergence" from supposedly normal mental functions. If these traits didn't diverge from the norm, they would not be "merits" or "flaws." Secondly, both the benefits and the drawbacks originate with the same source: mental capacity that ranges beyond the apparent human norm. *People whose minds work differently than other people's minds work have pluses in some regards and minuses in others.* And so, a character who has, say, ***Lightning Calculator*** might also behave in ways that are ***Inappropriate*** to many situations. This works the opposite way too – witness the ways in which autistic people often ***Hyperfocus*** with uncanny acuity. Mental conditions, pro and con, tend to be intertwined. The conditions that nurture the Merit often nurture the Flaw as well, and so characters with Mental Merits or Flaws really ought to have both.

Because neurological conditions like dyslexia and the autistic spectrum have physical causes which affect mental processing, such conditions are considered, in game terms, to be ***Impediments***, as in the Physical Flaw of that name. (See **pp. 39-40**.) The ways in which they manifest, though, can come through as Mental Merits and /or Flaws too. Other, more nebulous conditions, like ***Chronic Depression***, may have physical sources with predominantly mental results for one character, and completely psychological sources for another. Such distinctions, of course, fall into the rather Technocratic mind /body Cartesian duality thing, which doesn't really suit the spirit of **Mage**. To be honest, *all these distinctions are arbitrary anyhow.* Minds aren't lists of game traits, either. It really doesn't matter whether a given Merit or Flaw is Physical, Mental, Social, or even Supernatural – only that it guides roleplaying and affects gameplay.

Technically, *all* mages are neurodivergent. Awakened consciousness is functionally different than a Sleeping mind, and can perform tasks (like, say, magick) that a "normal" mind cannot manage. Even so, mental Merits and Flaws represent significant departures from what the "average" mage can do, and so a character who has such Traits is functioning on a different mental plane – for better and worse – than the characters who do not. When choosing such Traits, and roleplaying them out, we recommend keeping that fact literally in mind.

Awakened characters favor those abilities over all else. And so, it's likely that your mage will have at least one Mental Merit... and, all things being related, may well suffer from Mental Flaws as well, as described in the sidebar nearby.

Like Physical Flaws, Mental Flaws make excellent Genetic Flaws for Enhanced and biomodded characters, especially for ones whose "modifications" and/or origins remain essentially invisible to the naked eye. Constructs (Technocratic and otherwise) are especially subject to such conditions. See the heading ***Physical Flaws*** for details.

Artistically Gifted (1 pt. Merit)

The Muses work their will through you, or so it appears. Whenever you employ your artistic talent (as in, the Talent: ***Art*** in **Mage 20**, p. **275**), reduce the difficulty of those rolls by -2. As with other Merits of this kind, *this Merit does not reduce the difficulty of magick-casting rolls*, but may reduce the difficulty of Attribute + Ability rolls that are involved with magickal acts. (For more details, see ***Abilities Enhancing Magick***, **Mage 20**, **pp. 533**.)

Common Sense (1 pt. Merit)

If such sense were truly common, there wouldn't be a Merit to represent it. Still, you have a gift for thinking one step ahead and assessing the potential consequences of your choices. Essentially, this Merit gives you a Get Out of Doing Something Stupid Free card; whenever you announce an action that wouldn't be especially bright (for example, throwing a Time-Sphere spell at Old Man Wrinkle), the Storyteller may ask, "*Are you **sure** you wanna do that?*" Thus warned, you're free to ignore the advice of your smarter angels. Still, you do get a momentary insight into potential dumbassery, which is more than most people get. Use it wisely.

Computer Aptitude (1 pt. Merit)

A true child of the twenty-first century, you're especially adept with computerized infotech. Reduce all difficulties involving computer-based rolls by -2, *up to the usual modifier limit*. This last caveat is especially important when dealing with computer-based magickal Effects, whose difficulties *cannot be reduced by this Merit* beyond the usual magick-roll modifier of -3, or below the minimum difficulty for magick-casting rolls. Even so, this Merit provides an edge for mages whose Arts include the guiding technology of our age.

For detailed *optional rules* regarding computer usage, see ***Computer Systems*** in **Chapter Two**, **pp. 116-127**.

Concentration (1 pt. Merit)

Even by mage standards, you're especially good at tuning out distractions. When you're attempting some sort of feat that demands focus (as most do), this Merit eliminates modifiers



that would be caused by distracting circumstances – gunfire, thunderstorms, rampaging critters from beyond the stars, and so forth. *Truly* distracting situations (trying to hack a computer system during a tornado, for instance) might demand a successful Willpower roll in order to wipe out the potential penalty; the difficulty would depend upon the circumstances. For the most part, though, you get in and get stuff done, whatever else might be going on around you.

Expert Driver (1 pt. Merit)

You were born to drive like a demon wherever the road takes you. All of your driving-roll difficulties are reduced by -2.

Language (1 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, p. 643**.

Lightning Calculator (1 pt. Merit)

Your head is a calculator of impressive capability. With a few moments of thought, you can perform intricate mathematical feats – a useful talent for Hermetic wizards, Syndicate operatives, Enlightened engineers, and other mages who employ math and geometry in their work.

System-wise, this Merit allows you to reduce the difficulties of math- and calculation-based rolls by -2. Simple calculations take no time at all, while sophisticated problems may demand a turn or more. Obviously, your character needs access to the proper data before she can work out calculations... and garbage in, garbage out, so make sure your data is accurate!

For potential applications of math in magick, see the instrument entries for ***Circles and Geometric Designs***, ***Formulae and Math***, ***Money and Wealth***, and ***Numbers and Numerology*** in **Mage 20, pp. 590-596**, as well as the practices of ***Hypereconomics*** **(pg. 573)**, ***High Ritual Magick*** and ***Hypertech*** **(pp. 578-579)**, and ***Reality Hacking*** **(pp. 581-582)**. Remember that Merits cannot reduce the difficulty of a magick-casting roll below the minimum difficulty, or by more than -3. That said, fast and accurate calculations make useful aids when you're using ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects***, as described in the entry of that name **(Mage 20, pp. 532-534)**. Depending upon the feat in question, this could employ a roll of Intelligence + Academics to work out most calculations, Perception + Academics to discern odds or geometrical dimensions, and Wits + Academics to belt out rapid guesstimates with only the roughest of data.

Mechanical Aptitude (1 pt. Merit)

Oh, you technophile, you! Blessed by the machine gods, you've got a knack for mechanical gear. As with most Merits of this type, such aptitude allows you to reduce difficulties by -2 when you're making rolls based around working with mechanical technology. No, you don't have to be a technomancer to use such a gift, much less a member of the Technocracy; still, this aptitude does suggest that mechanical technology means a great deal to you, which – by extension – suggests that your paradigm, practice, and instruments have something to do with applications of mechanical principles and tech. For suggestions, see the paradigms ***A Mechanistic Cosmos***, ***Everything is Data***, and ***Tech Holds All the Answers*** in **Mage 20, pp. 568-571**, as well as the related practices and instruments and the related material in this book's **Chapter Three.** For more practical applications of this Merit, meanwhile, see **Mage 20**'s section regarding ***The Technological World*****, pp. 458-464**.

Time Sense (1 pt. Merit)

You've got an intuitive sense of what time it is in your vicinity. Much like the Rank 1 Time Effect, but without the ability to spot ripples in the time stream, this Merit provides a sort of internal clock that helps you gauge the time of day and the passing of time even when you don't have access to windows, clocks, or other information about time.

This Merit does not grant bonuses or decrease difficulties for Time Sphere-based magick-casting rolls. It does, however, give one of the benefits of basic Time Sphere perceptions to characters who do not employ the Time Sphere.

Code of Honor (2 pt. Merit)

Guided by a strong sense of ethics, you follow a particular standard of conduct. This might be a military honor-code, a religious creed, the law of a given fellowship to which you belong, or possibly your personal moral center. Regardless of its origins, this code guides your decisions, informs your activities, and sometimes forces you to make hard choices that less-ethical people never face.

Thanks to that code, your character gains two additional dice to all Willpower rolls when he acts in accordance with his code of honor, or when he resists some temptation or compulsion that might get him to betray that code. Obviously, you and your Storyteller should work out the specific tenets of this code during the character-creation process. If you do not honor that code, then you'll probably lose the Merit... and suffer disgrace, as well, among other parties who know and respect your vows.

Eidetic Memory (2 pt. Merit)

Gifted with the proverbial photographic memory, you clearly recall details about something you read, view, or otherwise experience. A serious boon for ritual magicians, field ops, and tech-minded magi, this Merit lets your character remember stuff even if you, the player, do not.

Under most circumstances, your character easily recalls the memories in question. Really detailed memories, or ones gathered under stressful conditions, might require a Perception + Alertness roll before the character can remember essential elements of the moment she's trying to recall.

Memory, of course, is subjective, and so while this Merit allows you remember things *as you perceive them*, those memories will still be based upon your perspective – internal as well as external – which is not the same as having access to some objective god-view of that experience! Especially in a game about

subjective reality, that's an important distinction – one that also keeps this Merit from becoming a potential game-breaker.

Folks with such memories are often subject to ***PTSD***, as in the Flaw of that name. That's especially true when people face ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***, as described in **Mage 20**, p. **407**. Vivid recall has its drawbacks, and in the traumatic world of a mage, some things really *are* best forgotten!

Inner Strength (2 pt. Merit)

Faced with adversity, you prevail. System-wise, this Merit reduces the difficulty of Willpower rolls by -2 when you struggle against apparently overwhelming odds.

Natural Linguist (2 pt. Merit)

You're especially good at understanding how people communicate. Every purchase of the ***Language*** Merit (see above, and **Mage 20**, **Appendix II**) secures two languages for you, not just one. You also get three bonus dice when making rolls based upon clear communications, typically ones employing ***Art***, ***Expression***, ***Etiquette***, ***Leadership***, and other Traits that involve "speaking their language" to impress someone else.

This Merit ***does not*** *add three dice to magickal casting rolls when using language as an instrument.* It may, however, apply the bonus to a mundane roll that could enhance a magick- casting attempt – see ***Abilities Enhancing Magick***, **Mage 20**, p. **533**.

Hyperfocus (3 pt. Merit)

Given time and a lack of distractions, you can focus your mind to an uncanny extent. For every hour spent focusing *without distractions* on a mundane task (***not*** *on a magick-casting roll*), you may add one die to your dice pool for each roll made during an extended action (as described in **Mage 20**, p. **389**). This bonus has a limit of three dice, total. So if, for example, Nix has Hyperfocus and spends two hours on a task, zir player adds two extra dice to Nix's dice pool; three hours' focus provide three dice, but four hours of focus keeps those three dice. All two or three dice, however, get used every time Nix's player makes a roll to complete that extended action.

As noted above, this Merit does not assist magickal casting rolls. Due to the time required to focus – and the lack of distractions involved – Hyperfocus doesn't help in combat situations either, although a strategy-minded character could hyperfocus on *planning* for a battle, but not on fighting it once the combat began. On a similar note, a mage could use Hyperfocus to aid in the mundane elements of a ritual – see ***Rituals and Mundane Abilities***, **Mage 20**, p. **541**.

Extreme hyperfocus is often (though not exclusively) associated with people on the autistic spectrum, although some authorities claim that *perseveration* (see the Flaw: ***Mental Lock***) is more a more accurate way of looking at that intense form of focus. With or without autism, this Merit comes in handy for Hermetics, technomancers, shamans, and other mages whose practices depend upon extreme dedication to certain tasks.

Iron Will (3 pt. Merit)

Even by Awakened standards, you possess a formidable will. When you make up your mind or dig in your heels against mental influence, your determination's hard to break. System-wise, your character receives three extra dice for his Willpower rolls whenever he faces a challenge to his convictions, or resists attempts at Mind magick, torture, exhaustion, and other debilitating attacks. If the character ever crosses paths with a vampire or other mind-controlling entity, he can shake off the effects of such assaults by spending a single Willpower point. See also the ***Resisting*** feat on the ***Dramatic Feats chart***, **Mage 20**, **p. 403**.

Jack-of-All-Trades (3 pt. Merit)

You know a little about a lot. When attempting to make a roll using a Skill (not a Talent) that your character does not possess, you don't suffer the usual penalty. (See ***Skills***, **Mage 20**, **p. 279**.) If you're trying to use a Knowledge your character does not possess, you can still make the roll but with an addition of +2 to the normal difficulty. (See ***Knowledges***, **Mage 20**, **p. 283**.)

Because Talent Traits represent innate gifts honed by practice, this Merit does not grant access to Talents that your character does not possess.

Scientific Mystic /Techgnosi (3 pt. Merit)

Certain unorthodox technomancers understand that "mysticism" is just another form of science whose principles may be understood by a properly Enlightened mind. Although you pursue a technological practice and employ tech-based instruments, you can employ instruments that are traditionally considered to be "magic" once you've had an opportunity to study them and fit those tools into your scientific paradigm.

The ***Scientific Mystic*** Merit lets a dedicated technomancer – that is, a member of the Society of Ether, the Virtual Adepts, a tech-based "orphan," or perhaps even a rogue Technocrat like the Disparates of Navalon – study metaphysical principles from mystic-paradigm mages for no extra point-cost if that technomancer has the focus practice ***Weird Science***. (For details, see ***Can a Mage Who Uses One Type of Focus Learn Magick from a Mage Who Uses a Different Kind of Focus?***, **Chapter Three**, p. 174, and the ***Weird Science*** entry in **Mage 20**, **p. 584**.) That technomancer can also choose traditionally "mystic" tools as up to half of her required instruments (as detailed under ***Arete, Focus, and Instruments*** in **Mage 20**, **p. 329**), and can discard those instruments as a mystic instead of as a technomancer (again, see **Mage 20**, **p. 329**). Essentially, this means that your approach to Enlightened science is flexible enough to embrace bizarre approaches to your metaphysical pursuits. Other scientists might consider such things impossible, but you realize that "possibility" is what you make of it.

On the other side of that metaphysical coin, the ***Techgnosi*** Merit allows a dedicated mystic to do the exact same things, but with technological instruments and no extra cost involved

in studying magick from technomancer peers, regardless of your practices. (See the **Chapter Three** entry cited above.) Yes, your soul belongs to the Mysteries, but you've recognized that technology has a place in those Mysteries as well.

Berserker (4 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, p. 644**, and the Flaw: ***Stress Atavism***.

Judge's Wisdom (4 pt. Merit)

Through firm self-discipline, you have mastered your emotions to Vulcan perfection. No passion-based assault can rattle your judgment, and the base attacks of heart-twisting fiends have little hold on you. Rules-wise, you remain immune to Mind- or Life-based Effects that influence emotions (as detailed in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 60** and **120-122**), and can shrug off the vampiric Discipline of Presence unless that bloodsucker has at least six dots in that Discipline. Emotion-based powers from werecreatures, faeries, and other such creatures cannot affect you, although you can still be possessed, mind-controlled, enchanted, and otherwise bent or broken so long as the assault is not based on wrangling an emotional response from your perfect serene command.

Self-Confident (3 pt. Merit)

Mages are confident; you're even more so. When spending Willpower to gain an automatic success, you don't even need to lose that point of Willpower unless:

1) The Willpower-gained success is the *only* success you get for that action; or...

2) the difficulty for that action is 5 or less. This Merit kicks in only in challenging circumstances, and tasks with a difficulty of 5 or lower are just too easy to demand help from your character's self-confidence.

Mental Flaws

Mages tend – with good reason! – to be seen as crazy, obsessive, or otherwise touched in the head. And so, mental Flaws are common among those nutty Awakened types, most especially the ones who, for reasons mentioned earlier in the ***Neurodiversity and Mental Traits*** sidebar, have mental Merits as well.

Compulsion (1 pt. Flaw)

An almost reflexive mental tic drives you toward compulsive, often subconscious, behaviors. In some cases, especially among mages, these behaviors manifest as ritualized activities: hand-washing, obsessive grooming, doing a task exactly the same way every time, and so forth. Other compulsions inspire annoying habits (humming, making farty noises with your mouth, speaking out loud even when you don't mean to, etc.), or potentially harmful activities like shoplifting, gambling, or hitting on everything that moves, which manifest when you're under stress. (A seriously harmful compulsion could be considered a ***Derangement*** Flaw instead, as referenced below.)

Minor compulsions tend to get chalked up to the rationalization, "*That's just what she's like.*" If you want your character to avoid a serious compulsion, however, you must spend a Willpower point in order to put off that behavior for a little while. However, once that little while is up (Storyteller's discretion), your character is again compelled to perform that activity... unless you spend another Willpower point... to put it off again for a little while longer...

Hero Worship (1 pt. Flaw)

You adore another character, to the point where that person can do no wrong as far as you're concerned. Attempts to sway your opinion will just piss you off, shut you down, or drive you to heights (or depths) of absurd justification for whatever someone says about him. A common trait among folks in an ***Echo Chamber*** (see the Social Flaw of that name, **pp. 66-67**), this psychological blind spot can become annoying, even hazardous, if centered on the wrong person... like, say, a Syndicate Manager, a Nephandus, or certain presidential candidates!

If your hero tells you to do something, you're inclined to obey, and must make a Willpower roll in order to refuse their desires. The difficulty for this roll depends upon the extremity of those desires; "*Gimme a kiss*," would probably be difficulty 5, while "*Go stab your best friend in the back for me*" would be 9 or 10. If and when you're confronted with proof of your hero's weaknesses, you *are* capable of seeing reason eventually – it's just not easy to get you to think so clearly. Any social roll that's aimed at getting you to discard your hero worship adds +2 to its difficulty unless the hero has recently done something very wrong... like, say, telling you to stab your best friend in the back for him!

Impatient (1 pt. Flaw)

You're driven to act *now*, not wait till later. In situations where other folks seem to *just take for-freakin'-ever* to get something done, make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to restrain yourself from just running off to *do it your own damn self!* Yes, that difficulty may go up if... maybe *when*... you have to wait even longer than before. *God, would the rest of the world would just* ***get moving*** *already?*

Inappropriate (1 to 4 pt. Flaw)

Wow – did you just *go* there? Yep, you did... and will go there again soon enough. Thanks to some quirk of personality, you tend to say and do things that other folks frown upon, typically at the least appropriate times. You make cooked-cat jokes in Asian restaurants, say what's on your mind when it's best to keep your mouth shut, and stumble over courtesy like it was a kiddie-gate you weren't tall enough to avoid. This could involve activities too, like picking your nose in front of an elder or showing *Martyrs* to your 8-year-old niece. God damn it all, what *were* you thinking?

Minds do weird shit, and so this Flaw reflects a mental condition or psychological kink that drives the character toward embarrassing behaviors. Contrary to popular belief, this does not

necessarily mean the character is Asperger's /autistic, although it could compliment the physical Flaw: ***Impediment*** if that Flaw represents an autistic spectrum condition that manifests in especially inappropriate behavior. (*An autistic character does not have to take this Flaw*, as many folks on the spectrum do not behave this way.) The quirk in question might come from a strange upbringing, psychic trauma, past lives acting out ("*What? In MY day, this sort of thing was perfectly acceptable!*"), alien cultural mores, social isolation, Avatar dickery, or any other mental stutter that screws with social-pattern recognition. A physical condition, like autism or Tourette's syndrome, is more suited to the ***Impediment*** Flaw.

As with ***Impediment***, the value of this Flaw depends upon the degree to which it causes problems for your character:

- (1 point) You occasionally say and do silly shit that causes small degrees of embarrassment to you and your friends. +1 difficulty to social rolls if and when you act out.
- (2 points) Your quirk inspires some pretty mortifying behavior on a fairly regular basis. +1 difficulty to many social rolls, even when you're not acting out at the moment.
- (3 points) Dude, you need to STFD and STFU or you're going to be in big trouble... again. +2 difficulty to all social rolls that aren't related to making an ass of yourself.
- (4 points) You are a source of constant headaches to anyone who dares to identify as your friend. +2 difficulty to social rolls, plus a bad reputation among folks who've met or heard of you.

For obvious reasons, this Flaw could be a major-league trigger for certain players, especially if the inappropriate behavior includes bigotry and /or sexual misbehavior. A player who decides to take this Flaw should discuss it with her Storyteller and fellow players... and if it becomes a source of real-life friction around the table, the Flaw should be discarded, or else played "offstage" rather than acted out in real time. (See ***Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries*** in **Mage 20**, p. **345**.) ***IT SHOULD NEVER BE USED AS AN EXCUSE FOR REAL-LIFE DICKERY, EVER***. (Was that clear enough?) This Flaw is intended as a "mature audiences" option that reflects the unfortunate effects of mental malfunctions and social maladjustments. If a player cannot employ this Flaw in a mature manner, then it should not be employed at all.

Mental Lock (1 pt. Flaw)

Somewhere in between impulse and action, things get stuck inside your head. Thoughts or images wind up caught in mental loops, and you occasionally find yourself tripping over words, getting stuck in patterns of speech, or repeating apparently uncontrollable activities (flapping your hands, shaking your head, rubbing your wrists, and so forth) which, under most circumstances, would be easy to stop or manage. Sometimes known as *perseveration* or *stimming* (see the Merit: ***Hyperfocus***), these mental tics often manifest from brain damage, emotional trauma, intense stress, and /or autism and other sensory-processing conditions. Conventionally and incorrectly called "nervous habits," these mental quirks may be attempts to control your apparently chaotic surroundings by giving your brain something that feels like you *can* control it. Problem is, you essentially have to shake yourself out of the locked pattern, concentrate on a new sensation in order to break the loop, invoke a sort of "ritualized" word or action that triggers a break in that loop, or employ some other method to break free of the mental lock. Until that point, you could find yourself stuttering even though you don't have a speech impediment, feel "frozen" on words or thoughts you can't easily articulate, lock into near-obsessive ruminations on nonsense phrases or perilous thoughts, get stuck doing the same thing over and over again, or otherwise wind up focused on an internal feedback cycle.

System-wise, the Storyteller will occasionally drop small but annoying quirks into your character's ability to speak, suggest small, repetitious actions for your character to perform, and otherwise screw with your character's capacity to move beyond a single nagging thought. To break those mental locks, you'll need to roll your character's Willpower against difficulty 7, spend a temporary point of Willpower, or else stand around "locked up" in mid-thought or action until you can break that irritating mental block through force of will or (after five turns) the simple passage of time.

Nightmares (1 or 3 pt. Flaw)

Night, for you, is a long parade of imagined horrors. Almost every time you reach Dreamland, the inhabitants drag you through hell until you finally manage to escape back to the waking world. Your nightmares could come from psychic trauma, abuse, brain damage, Quiet, Paradox, Social Processing, encounters with ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***, or other things that mess with your head. Whatever their source, these nocturnal hellrides affect your waking life as well.

Story-wise, these constant nightmares play havoc with your character's mood, sleep, and long-term sanity. (For examples, see the ***Prelude*** for **Mage 20**.) At the three-point level, these nightmares force the player to make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, each time her character wakes up from sleep; a failed roll subtracts one die from all of her dice pools that day. (Yes, previously published versions of this Flaw inflict that penalty on any character with the 1 pt. ***Nightmares*** Flaw. A full-die penalty on *all rolls for a day*, however, seems out of proportion with a one-point Flaw, and so this book introduces a three-point variation on the Trait. Storytellers may decide to use the older version of this Flaw for consistency's sake.)

This Flaw makes an especially ugly companion to the Background: ***Demesne*** **(Mage 20, pp. 310-311)**. In this case, the nightmares twist the Dream Realm into a perpetual horrorshow. Attempts to alter the dreamscape are at difficulty 7 (for the one-point Flaw) or 9 (for the three-point Flaw), and the

dreamscape will remain unpleasant, if bearably so, no matter what the dreamer does to affect it. Those same difficulties apply to a character who wants to change the dreams by using the Talent: ***Lucid Dreaming*** **(Mage 20**, p. **294)**; change is *possible*, then, but far from easy.

Overconfident (1 pt. Flaw)

You're the best there is at what you do. If other folks disagree, then that's *their* problem, not yours! Nothing is beyond your reach, and so you almost never back down from a challenge, no matter how absurdly outmatched you appear to be at the time. If things go poorly, of course, you can always blame someone else. After all, it's clearly not *your* fault!

Shy (1 pt. Flaw)

Interpersonal relations are not your forte. Commonly known these days as *social anxiety*, this Flaw adds +2 to the difficulty of your social rolls, thanks to your discomfort when dealing with other folks. If, all the gods forbid, you wind up as the center of attention (a situation you avoid whenever possible), your social rolls gain a +3 addition to their difficulty. Story-wise, this shyness comes across as avoidance, introversion, and awkwardness in many social situations even when you actually *want* to hang out and make a good impression.

Soft-Hearted (1 pt. Flaw)

You hate to witness suffering. Sadly, the World of Darkness is filled with pain, and so you often find yourself either avoiding potentially traumatic situations or trying to ease suffering even when that puts you in the line of fire too.

When confronted with someone else's physical or emotional pain, make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If you fail, your character either withdraws from the situation or possibly (if his beliefs /faith /paradigm /Nature demands action) does something reckless in order to prevent further suffering. A successful roll means that you can act normally... which could still involve withdrawal or recklessness, but displaying a bit more self-control.

Speech Impediment (1 pt. Flaw)

For psychological reasons (as opposed to a physical reason, as per the Flaw: ***Impediment***), you speak with some sort of frustrating imperfection: a lisp, a stutter, a too-broad accent, a whisper, and so forth. Clearly, this interferes with your attempts to wax eloquent; System-wise, add +2 to the difficulty of rolls that involve speaking clearly. This Flaw should be roleplayed out whenever possible, and it carries over if your character changes into some other form... after all, it's your mind, not your body, that's causing the problem; if it *is* your body, then take the Flaw: ***Impediment*** instead.

Vanilla (1 pt. Flaw)

Oh my gods, you're *such* an innocent! In a world filled with sex magick and power plays, you're the little lamb who's strayed far away from home. Jokes get past you, clues escape you, and references to anything rawer than a Disney flick go straight over your head. Maybe you grew up in a secluded place with overprotective parents; or you could be in denial about the things you see all around you because life can't possibly be *that* twisted... can it? Regardless, hold firm to your innocence. Once it's gone, it ain't never coming back again!

Whimsy (1 pt. Flaw)

You get silly under stress. It's an avoidance tactic, and while such behavior can be endearing in small doses, your whimsical streak can get kinda annoying after a while, especially for folks who have to deal with you pulling out hand puppets in the middle of an argument or tossing grapes down your covenmate's cleavage when she's trying to have a serious conversation with you. In especially stressful situations, you might need to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to *not* clown around. Hey, you can't help it, right, if you're trying to lighten the mood? Jeeze, why does magick have to be so damned *serious*...?

Amnesia (2 pt. Flaw)

Life before Awakening remains a mystery to you. Friends? Family? Mundane existence? Whoever and whatever they were, you cannot recall. This amnesia might be related to ***PTSD***, fugue-state dissociative ***Derangement*** **(Mage 20, pp. 648-649)**, brain-trauma, Quiet, Social Processing (as shown in the ***Prelude*** for **Mage 20**), psychic assault (see ***Uncanny Influence*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 114-136**), ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***, or other forms of identity disruption. Regardless of the reason, being a mage is all you can remember.

Beyond all of the obvious complications involved in near-total amnesia (lack of memories, social disorientation, legal nonexistence, a fractured sense of self, and so on), this Flaw also allows you to take up to five points in "mystery Flaws." Your Storyteller will know what they are, but you won't. Throughout the chronicle, she'll spring them on you in various entertaining ways. Perhaps when all is revealed, you'll be able to buy off this Flaw (or have it "paid off" by the Storyteller, in lieu of experience points), and then remember who you were. Whether or not you'll like the answers, of course, remains to be seen...

Curiosity (2 pt. Flaw)

You simply can't resist a good mystery! A nagging sense of curiosity drags you into all kinds of sticky situations. Given your abilities, you've got a decent chance at finding things out, too... which is not, especially in the World of Darkness, an especially healthy thing to do. Isn't that just *like* a damn mage, anyway?

When confronted with an enticing clue or enigmatic circumstance, make a Wits roll to avoid giving in to temptation. The difficulty for that roll depends upon the situation: a casual mystery (like, say, the identity of that intriguing girl behind the counter at Starbucks) would be difficulty 5, while resisting a more compelling sort of mystery (like the identity of the person who dropped off a dozen roses at your Chantry house) would



be difficulty 9. Once you're on the trail, few things short of a deadly threat will make you stop... and said deadly threat might simply encourage you to dig even deeper.

Icy (2 pt. Flaw)

You are one ice-cold bastard – an assassin, gangbanger, sociopath, or sadist who can commit atrocities without the slightest twitch. Although you're not *necessarily* insane (see the ***Derangements*** in **Mage 20, pp. 649-650**), your callousness marks you as a creepy motherfucker. People avoid you unless they've got killing that needs doing... and then they step back and let you do your thing. Room 101 has positions for people like you (and so, despite their good-guy façade, do the Traditions and Disparate groups), but no one truly *trusts* you, and your soul is definitely in peril, with the Fallen only a step or two away from owning your cold ass.

Intemperate (2 pt. Flaw)

Everything you do, you do to excess. Oh, sure, you can (usually) resist the urge to be terminally stupid, but moderation isn't part of your vocabulary. Having a drink? Why not have six? A hand of cards? Why not bet your next paycheck on the outcome? From expressing opinions to risking body and soul, you play chicken with life and expect the other guy to swerve. Folks expect this sort of thing from Ecstasy Cultists, but most Ecstatics actually have a better sense of their limits than you do.

Whenever you happen to be doing something that probably won't result in criminal charges or immediate death, make a Willpower roll to resist the urge to go whole-hog. The difficulty for the roll depends on the likely consequences of excess; taking little risks means difficulty 8 or 9, while risks with life-threatening potential are easier to resist (difficulty 5 or 6)... though you've been known to go too far in that department, too!

Obsession (2 pt. Flaw)

An all-consuming interest of yours tends to overshadow whatever passes, in your mind, for common sense. If you love *Star Wars*, then you've seen all the movies many times over, own tons of merchandise, and spend inordinate amounts of time arguing about *SW* trivia. Is Tarot your obsession? Then you've got dozens (if not hundreds) of decks, research every potential element of Tarot significance, and drive your friends crazy with constant offers of readings and advice. You can't have just one or two cats – you're the local Crazy Cat Person who drops half a paycheck on food, litter, and veterinary bills. This obsession probably won't get you killed or anything (unless you're crazy enough to get obsessive about werecritters or similarly fatal topics), but it consumes vast amounts of time, attention, and cash. When faced with an opportunity to pursue your obsession down unexplored avenues, or if that obsession interferes with important things like relationships, work or both, you may

need to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to suppress the urge. And if the obsession involves something that's compulsive by nature – gambling, for example – the Willpower roll could involve a difficulty of 8 or maybe higher before you can shake off your compulsion and focus on something else.

Phobia (2 or 3 pt. Flaw)

Irrational terror grips you whenever you face the subject of your Phobia: crowds, heights, Black Suits, and so forth. Such terror probably stems from psychic trauma, Social Processing, or some other incident that carved its niche within your mind. Although mages pride themselves upon their strength of will, everybody's got their weaknesses; this primal fear is one of yours.

The subject of your Phobia must be defined at the time this Flaw is selected. Anytime you're confronted with that situation, make a Willpower roll or else flee that fearsome situation. Even if you do succeed, you'll need to roll at least three successes in order to approach the object of your fears and deal with it head-on. The Storyteller bases the difficulty of that roll upon the circumstances of the encounter. An unexpected brush with a normal wolf spider would rate a difficulty of 6 or 7 for an arachnophobe, while being dropped into a pit full of titanic wolf spiders would be, shall we say, somewhat higher. (Difficulty 9 or 10, you poor bastard.)

This Flaw has a three-point variation when applied to vampires and werekin; mages, however, are not subject to uncanny frenzies the way such creatures are, and so the Flaw is worth only two points to a mage or other non-frenzying character. As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller may allow a character with the ***Berserker*** Merit or the ***Stress Atavism*** or ***Beast Within*** Flaws (**pp. 53 and 92**) to take this Flaw for three points, with the character freaking out and destroying everything in her way as she tries to escape if and when the Willpower roll is failed.

PTSD (2 to 5 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20, p. 647-648**.

Rose-Colored Glasses (2 pt. Flaw)

Known sardonically as **Rose-Colored Mirrorshades** among Technocracy operatives, this Flaw reflects a rather delusional loyalty to your faction of choice. Essentially, your team can do no wrong as far as you're concerned. Their cause is just, their paradigm unshakable, their deeds necessary under the circumstances, no matter how extreme those deeds might be. Your character views almost anything the group does in its most favorable light... which, considering how awful Awakened groups can be, means that you're choosing to overlook a great deal. Confronted with inconvenient truths, you can get downright irrational, abusive, or even fanatical. If you're ever confronted with truths you cannot deny, avoid, or slander away, the shock could devastate you for years to come – very possibly driving you into the arms of a diametrically opposed faction for which you'll hold a similar sort of loyalty. (See ***Changing Focus and Allegiance*** in **Mage 20, p. 339**.)

Vengeful (2 pt. Flaw)

They've hurt you, and now they'll pay! Someone has committed a crime you cannot and will not forgive, and whenever you get the chance, you'll shower them with red-hot vengeance. This grudge has become your highest priority in life – everything else is merely a distraction. You may put this quest for revenge aside temporarily if you spend a Willpower point in order to do so. Until the guilty parties have been punished, though, vengeance drives you to become that most dangerous of creatures: a mage on a mission that ends only with blood.

Short Fuse (2 pt. Flaw)

Anger management is not your strong suit. When something or someone pisses you off (which happens with distressing regularity), you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) or else deal with that shit gloves-off style. You probably won't use deadly (or vulgar) force *too* recklessly, as you're not long for this world if you do. Your infamous temper, however, can have severe long-term effects on your popularity, health, and status among your peers and superiors... which is itself a lethal proposition among members of the Technocratic Union and other groups that pride themselves on self-control.

For a more extreme version of this Trait, see the Supernatural Flaw: ***Beast Within***.

Absent-Minded (3 pt. Flaw)

Um... what was that thing you were trying to remember, again? Damn... This Flaw reflects a scatterbrained sense of memory and connection – nothing quite as dangerous as full ***Derangement*** **(Mage 20, pp. 648-650)**, but a distressing and occasionally hazardous disconnection nonetheless.

System-wise, your Storyteller will often have you make Intelligence rolls to recall things like names, faces, mission details, and so forth. Story-wise, you're forever drawing blanks, mistaking people for other folks, scrambling data, leaving projects half-finished (or totally abandoned), forgetting to feed your familiar, and making potentially hazardous errors in judgment. Although you won't forget vital things like your name, the elements of your magickal focus, or vital character Traits (Talents, Abilities, and Knowledges), other stuff slips your mind with frustrating regularity. And when that mind commands the powers of True Magick, such slips can have fatal consequences.

Bigot (3 pt. Flaw)

You really fucking hate *those people*, whoever "those people" happen to be. *Those people* probably don't like you either. Okay, maybe you don't make your feelings obvious, but your conviction that *those people* are inferior troublemakers who are Everything Wrong with the World Goddammit comes through in your actions and decisions even if you say nothing of the kind out loud. Such prejudices determine your choice of friends and enemies, guide your beliefs, influence your politics, and tend to spill out at inconvenient times if you lose your temper. (See

Short Fuse, above.) You might end up changing your mind someday, but for the moment, bigotry is the lens through which you view your world... and especially for mages, that sort of thing means quite a bit to the world at large.

Despite the conventional (and not inaccurate) view of bigots as raging racists, sexists, and homophobes, supposedly liberal people can be bigots too; the worst kinds of bigots, in fact, are often self-righteous folks whose claims of open-mindedness get undercut by a quiet yet implacable prejudice against *those people*. Older versions of this Flaw rated it at only two points; in the twenty-first century, however, bigotry is more likely to get you in trouble if and when it's revealed, especially on the Internet or in mass media... unless, of course, you're running for president, or otherwise speaking up for folks who share your views, in which case you become a saint to some people and a demon to others.

It's worth noting that bigots tend to have understandable reasons for their prejudices. Those reasons could stem from personal grievances, cultural bias, racial anxieties, scriptural proclamations, psychic trauma, gender clashes, philosophical paradigms, and – especially within **Mage**'s world – physical and metaphysical distinctions between "us" and "them." Those reasons probably seem like bullshit to most people, but remain perfectly justified to the bigot in question.

It's also worth noting that *this Flaw should not in any way be taken as a license to abuse your fellow players*. As with other mature-audience subjects, a character's prejudices might become a trigger for real-life tensions within the group, and should thus be handled carefully, as described under the ***Problems*** and ***Triggers*** sections of **Mage 20, pp. 344-345**.

Chronic Depression (3 pt Flaw)

Regardless of your external circumstances, you often feel drawn toward despair. Everything seems overwhelming, pointless, and at best a fucking joke at the world's expense. That feeling pervades each aspect of your existence: your attitude, your physical health, your relationships, and even – *especially!* – your approach to magick and all its manifestations. (See the **Mage 20** sections about ***Focus and the Arts***, ***Resonance***, ***Quiet***, and the ***Vidare*** perceptions of the Otherworlds.) TL/DR: It really sucks to be you.

Often viewed as a purely psychological issue ("*It's all in your pretty little head...*"), chronic depression tends to be linked to physiological ***Impediments***, as in the Physical Flaw of that name. This Flaw can also reflect the psychic aftermath of Paradox backlashes, Quiet episodes, ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***, Mind-Sphere attacks, and other forms of trauma (breakups, violation, disaster, and the like), although trauma-induced depression is most often a manifestation of the Flaw: ***PTSD***, referenced above. Regardless of its origins, the psychological element of depression is inescapable. The emotional weight of constant despair tends to sap physical vitality, which comes back around and inspires more depression. No wonder chronically depressed people have a hard time "living life to the fullest." On some days, just getting out of bed without falling into a crying heap is a challenge.

Story-wise, this Flaw influences roleplaying and character descriptions as suggested above. System-wise, it often requires you to make a Willpower roll when your depressed character needs to push himself beyond the depression. A successful roll means that he acts without hindrance. A failed one adds +2 to the difficulty of the primary task at hand, which could involve Attributes from the Physical (depression drains vitality), Social (undercuts relationships with other folks), or Mental (mental fuzz) categories, depending upon the situation. A botched roll means that the depression takes over and drops him into a deep black pit of despair in which he'll be stuck for hours or even days at a time.

You can spend a Willpower point to shove depression aside, avoiding this roll entirely. However, as anyone who understands the analogy of spoons can attest, sooner or later you run out of Willpower points. (For those who are not familiar with the analogy, it's the idea that you have a limited number of spoons to use each day; every task demands that you give up one spoon, and so you soon run out of spoons). The fact that people tend to get frustrated with your Black Cloud of Doom™ doesn't exactly help matters much; hell, *you're* more frustrated with that shit than anybody else is! So seriously – in all aspects of one's life, Chronic Depressiontown is not a fun place to be... not even for fans of the World of Darkness.

Deranged (3 or 5 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20, p. 648-650**.

Driving Goal (3 pt. Flaw)

Even by Awakened standards, you possess (or are possessed by) a cause so intense that it drives every aspect of your life, up to and including your beliefs about, and approach to, magick and Ascension. This goal, sadly, is almost impossible to achieve on an individual basis: the collapse of the Technocracy, the return of the Old Ways, the fall of the industrialized era, and so forth. As a mage, you actually *could* gather enough influence to lead a larger movement that shifts Reality toward your goal. More likely, you will break yourself against that goal, as so many other mages have done before you... but hey, if a cause is as worth fighting for as yours is, then it's worth whatever cost you must pay.

As a Flaw, this Driving Goal inspires roleplaying choices and informs your character's focus, allegiance, magick, Path, Resonance, Seekings, Paradox backlashes, and pretty much everything else you can imagine. You can take short breaks from your crusade (usually by spending a Willpower point in order to take a different road for a while), but eventually this obsession brings you back to the goal you must pursue at all costs until you finally accomplish it or destroy yourself trying.

Extreme Kink (3 to 5 pt. Flaw)

Everyone's a little kinky; your needs are more, shall we say, exotic than a run-of-the-mill fetish. You might still adhere to the third part of the BDSM mantra *safe, sane, and consensual*, but your kink is neither safe nor sane by most people's definition of those words. We're not talking about tame bondage-and-spanking stuff – more like *Fifty Shades of What the Fuck is* ***Wrong*** *with You?* Unlike the old Flaw: ***Sadism /Masochism*** (which it replaces), this Flaw isn't about the nature and specifics of your kink – it's about how much trouble you can get into trying to satisfy your needs. A three-point kink can damage your health, reputation, and play partners; a four-point kink can seriously harm you (and whoever's unfortunate enough to hook up with you), and a five-point kink can get you prison time or worse. (Gods help the people you choose to help you satisfy *that* kink...)

Certain mages are more prone to this Flaw than others, especially if they favor Left-Hand Path-type practices. For what ought to be obvious reasons, this is not an appropriate Flaw for all chronicles or players, and may well invoke *safewords* and *blackouts* from your Storyteller or companions. (See **Mage 20, p. 345**.) Although this Flaw, like others of its kind, does not bear a judgment on our part, this sort of thing can offend and trigger other players, so don't be a dick about it.

Feral Mind (3 pt. Flaw)

More animal than human being, you lack the social graces and mental conditioning that most folks consider essential. Perhaps you're a throwback, or wild-raised since childhood; or maybe you lost a part of yourself to animalistic shapechanging, suffer from a mental or psychological quirk, or simply renounce your humanity in favor of a more honest primal truth.

Regardless of its origins, this feral-mindedness limits your ability to function in human society. You prefer non-linguistic vocalizations and body language over cultured speech, and may lack the ability to "speak" in human terms at all. Your actions and reactions are animalistic too; you mark territory, snarl when annoyed, cower or lash out when threatened, feel no sense of so-called "modesty," detest clothing, and smell musky even when you've just had a bath (which you rarely do under your own power). Such behaviors usually raise the difficulty of your social-interaction rolls by +3, although certain situations – like intimidation or seduction – may lower the difficulty by the same amount (-3).

This Flaw, however, isn't simply a social drawback; you may not have more than three separate ***Language*** Merits, and you speak very little (and very simply) when you choose to speak at all. Your human developmental skills (speech, reading, math, socialization, etc.) hover at a child-like level despite your sharp instincts and innate primal cunning. Although your Mental Attributes (especially Perception and Wits) may be high, you probably won't ever reach an adult level of human development; even if you do, the animal in you remains very close to the skin.

Flashbacks (3 pt. Flaw)

Sudden flashes of sensory trauma haunt you constantly. These might be legacies of psychoactive drug use, visions of a past or future incarnation, kickbacks from ***PTSD*** (see the Flaw of that name), echoes of Quiet, all-too-vivid memories, ***Things Man was Not Meant to Know***... in short, they could be anything that floods your mind with bursts of unexpected impressions that overwhelm your current circumstances.

High-stress situations can trigger such hallucinations – and since mages essentially *live* in high-stress situations, this Flaw can be a fairly nasty one. The stress in question doesn't have to be a bad experience, although it *does* tend to be the bad days that bring such things out in the worst way possible. You might see your loved one's face start to melt in a moment of passion... or feel the branding irons that seared your flesh in a past life burn their way into your skin during an argument with your boss. Heavy traffic could become a roller coaster, and the exam you're taking might morph into a living page of laughing cartoons. Flashbacks don't have to make sense, and they often don't. They can, however, blot out your true surroundings unless you successfully make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to shake them off.

Thankfully, flashbacks don't often last long. By the time you realize that you're *not* dodging HIT Marks in the ruins of Concordia, though, you may have driven off the road, punched your best friend, shat your pants, or run like a maniac through downtown Seattle without realizing that it was all in your head... this time, anyway.

Hatred (3 pt. Flaw)

As with ***Bigot***, above, you utterly despise some source of hatred. Maybe you loathe vampires, werebeasts, rich or homeless people, fae folk, spirits, dogs, trucks, machines, TV, lawyers, witches, cops, politicians... whatever it is that you hate, you hate it a *lot*, and will take advantage of any opportunity to hinder or harm the object of your hostility.

Like a bigot, you have what you consider to be a perfectly rational reason for hating whatever it is you despise. Other folks probably consider you crackers unless they share your point of view – in which case, they might become disciples instead. (See the Backgrounds: ***Allies***, ***Backup***, ***Cult***, ***Influence*** and ***Retainers***.) As with a ***Driving Goal***, this Flaw guides roleplaying choices, determines targets, and makes you seem rather obsessive whenever the object of aversion comes into play. Because fear and hatred are so closely intertwined, chances are good that you've got a ***Short Fuse*** and /or a ***Phobia*** related to this Flaw. And if you also have ***Berserker / Stress Atavism*** or ***Beast Within***, then you need to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) when confronted head-on with the thing you abhor, or else lose your proverbial shit in its general direction.

Obviously, this Flaw must be chosen carefully. If your character tends to go thermonuclear at, say, the police on an ongoing basis, he is in for a very rough (and probably short) life indeed.

Lifesaver (3 pt. Flaw)

Life, to you, is a gift and miracle worth saving. As far as you're concerned, even the most wretched people are worth another chance at redemption, and so you go out of your way to save lives and improve the lot of people (human and otherwise) who need a leg up in this world. More than a simple "code verses killing," this Trait gives you a moral imperative to salvage lives, not just a reason to not end them. In short, it makes you a big-hearted, generous person who deeply believes in the sanctity (whether you would use that religious term or not) of life. And that, in the World of Darkness, is a magnificent burden to bear.

OCPD (3 pt. Flaw)

Mages tend to be kinda obsessive by nature. You, however, feel compelled to follow stringent personal rituals, maintain an obsessive sense of order, work yourself to the point of exhaustion (and beyond), organize every possible element of your life and space, employ compulsive behaviors without realizing that you're doing so, and otherwise lose track of time, things, and people unless they fall into the sphere of your obsessive-compulsive personality disorder.

An especially common Flaw among technomancers, scientists, ritual magi, religious devotees, autistic people, military personnel, artists, executives, and other folks whose philosophies and pursuits demand continual attention, OCPD could also result from various forms of psychic trauma, brain damage, spiritual epiphanies, cultural or professional perfectionism, and metaphysical dedication. As a rule, a person's behaviors grow more compulsive when he's under stress. After all, when it seems like your world's spinning out of control, it becomes all the more important to establish control over whatever elements you *can* control.

When this Flaw is chosen, you'll need to define which compulsions your character has, and figure out the triggers that make those compulsions more obvious. System-wise, you'll often have to make Willpower rolls in order to shake off the need to organize and obsess over the object of your attentions. The difficulty, of course, depends upon the situation and the character's level of stress at the time; the more challenging the circumstances, the more obsessive the compulsions.

Stress Atavism (4 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20**, p. **644**, and the Merit: ***Berserker***.

Ability Deficit (5 pt. Flaw)

For whatever reason, you have fallen short of your potential. Maybe you're too young to have learned a lot about life (an excellent reason for a child-mage to have this Flaw); or you've led a sheltered existence, honing your Knowledges but lacking in Talents. You could be a construct who only recently left the lab, or too physically frail to have mastered much in the way of Talents or Skills. There's certainly some story-based reason for your deficient Traits, and that cause will have other effects on the chronicle as well.

In game terms, this Flaw subtracts five points from one of your Ability categories (Talents, Skills, or Knowledges), and limits your starting Traits in that category to three dots or fewer even if /when you spend freebie points to raise them. (You may, of course, raise them after the chronicle has begun.) As noted above, this makes a good Flaw for Awakened kids, constructs, and other folks who haven't been able to "be all that you can be" just yet.

For details about young mages, see ***Child-Mages*** in **Chapter Two**, **pp. 115-116**.

Social Merits

Although mages aren't always among the most sociable of creatures, certain Awakened folk lean heavily upon the company of friends and fellow-travelers. And so, Merits that help a character move more easily through social circles can be pretty valuable. Especially in the twenty-first century, a mage of any sort can use all the friends they can get.

Loyalty (1 pt. Merit)

You're especially devoted to a certain cause, group, creed or person. When someone tries to turn you against the object of your loyalty, you receive a two-die bonus to your dice pool when resisting that attempt with your Willpower. If the assault uses your Willpower Trait as the difficulty for the attack, then your attacker adds +2 to her difficulty while striving to undermine your loyalty. (See the feat ***Resisting*** on the ***Dramatic Feats chart*** in **Mage 20**, **p. 403**, and the ***Mind Sphere entry*** in the same book, p. **519**.)

Naturally, you must define the source and reasons for your devotion when you select this Merit. Such loyalty will influence many of your roleplaying choices too – your friends, enemies, priorities, magickal focus, and other things besides. For extra fun (*ha ha*), you can complement this Merit with the Flaw: ***Conflicting Loyalties***, described below.

Family Support (1 to 3 pt. Merit)

Your family knows about your Awakened life – and for the most part, they approve of it. You might belong to an ancestral "fam trad" (a family tradition of magical /occult pursuits), a supportive New Ager-type of clan, an appropriately religious family (that is, relatives who follow the same creed as you do), a wealthy dynasty that backs your current life-choices, and so on. This family could be your proverbial "family of origin" (your blood relations), an adopted "family of choice" (people who are not your genetic kin but who function as your family now), or both. Either way, your family stands behind you. This Merit doesn't extend to major economic help unless you also purchase the appropriate Backgrounds too (***Resources***, ***Retainers***, and so on). Still, it's good to have someplace to call home, and someone to be there when you need them.

The more influential your family, and the more supportive of you they are, the more this Merit costs:

- (1 point) You've got a "typical" family for your culture, and their support is mostly emotional although you can get a few bucks, a favor, and a place to crash when you need it.
- (2 points) Your family has status, wealth, and influence. While they expect you to stand on your own for the most part, you can still get help if and when you need some.
- (3 points) A scion of wealth, power, and privilege, you can call upon favors and influence when need be. Your clan pulls strings on your behalf even when you don't ask for help, and people defer to you because of your heritage.

As anyone who's been born into a wealthy yet dysfunctional clan can attest, you can have both Family Support and ***Family Issues*** (as the Flaw described below). Your rich dad could be an abusive prick, your loving uncle might be creepily possessive, and Mom's support comes with more strings than a puppeteer's convention. Both Traits could also represent a character whose family of origin is a mess, but whose family of choice supports her.

For the purposes of coincidental magick, a family reflected in this Merit does *not* count as Sleeper witnesses when their beloved mage casts Effects. That benefit doesn't usually extend to your companions, however, unless they employ the same sort of focus as you do, use magick that fits into your family's world-view, or purchase this Merit to reflect being "adopted" into your family as a childhood friend, a spouse, or an otherwise beloved part of the clan.

Favor (1 to 3 pt. Merit)

Also known as a **Boon**, this Merit means that somebody owes you, big-time. You scratched their back, and will eventually call in some scratching of your own in due time. Maybe you aided a Master-level mage... or helped a vampire prince... or did a solid for a wealthy Sleeper, a spirit, a faerie, or a ranking member of the Changing Breeds. Regardless of their identity, this party is more powerful than you are, and can get things done on your behalf that you could not get done yourself.

The value of this Merit depends upon the value of that favor. Minor acts of benevolence cost one point, significant boons are worth two, and a life-debt is worth three. You may purchase several Favors, either from a single party or from several different folks who owe you. A Storyteller may grant this Merit in place of experience points if your character has helped a supporting character and requested, earned or demanded a Favor in return. Once that favor has been performed, however, the Merit is spent. Long-lasting assistance would be counted as a Background like ***Mentor*** or ***Patron***, or as one of the allies described in the section about ***Supernatural Merits***.

Pitiable (1 pt. Merit)

Oh, you poor thing! People want to help you, and you're willing to let them do so. Although this Merit lowers the difficulty of your social rolls by -2 when you're trying to get someone to take care of you, it adds +2 to the difficulty of rolls that attempt to intimidate people or otherwise impress folks into taking you seriously.

Prestigious Mentor (1 pt. Merit)

Your ***Mentor*** (as in the Background Trait of that name) has a reputation that benefits you as well. When you're making social rolls to invoke your influential teacher, reduce the difficulty by -2. Of course, some folks will be somewhat less than impressed; for rolls that involve rivals or enemies of your mentor, add +2 to the difficulty unless that mentor scares the shit out of them... in which case, you had damned well better be able to live up to the fear his name invokes!

Regal Bearing (1 pt. Merit)

Aristocratic charisma is your birthright. Although you might not actually hail from a noble family, your presence radiates dignity. Posture, features, tone of voice, aura of dominion – you're got them all. People defer to you as a reflex; subtract -2 from the difficulty of your Social-Trait rolls whenever you're trying to make an impression, and while certain folks will want to take you down a few pegs on general principle, most people are inclined to *respect* you even if they don't necessarily like you.

Unobtrusive (1 pt. Merit)

You can pass without notice in most social situations. This is less about the uncanny Background: ***Arcane*** (although it can complement that Background) than it is a matter of simply seeming unremarkable. Unless you make a fuss of some kind, folks just don't remember you. You're... um, that dude... or that girl... or, well, damn, I don't even remember exactly *what* sort of person you are, actually. And in some lines of work or walks of life, this is a very useful talent to have.

Although it does not in any way render you invisible or untraceable, this Merit lets you blend in and slip from memory. Folks need to make a Perception roll (difficulty 6) in order to recall your features or name. On the flipside, you add +2 to the difficulty of any social rolls you need to make, because folks just don't notice you under most circumstances. For obvious reasons, you can't take any socially distinctive Merits, Flaws or Backgrounds – such Traits would make you memorable – or have especially distinctive features or clothing. Granted, "distinctive" depends upon who and where you are; the proverbial gray flannel suit, for example, stands out at places like Burning Man! Under most circumstances, though, you blend in wherever you go.

Animal Magnetism (2 pt. Merit)

Though it might not involve conventionally good looks, you possess a primal sort of attractiveness. Your social rolls subtract -2 from their difficulty when you're trying to charm, seduce, or

otherwise impress folks by appealing to their carnal natures. This benefit doesn't usually apply to threats or intimidation attempts, although clever applications of raw sex appeal can be rather unnerving, which could facilitate rather effective threats...

Confidence (2 pt. Merit)

You exude an aura of unshakable authority. Nothing seems to rattle you. Folks defer to you by default, and you expect nothing less. Even when you're making things up off the top of your head, or lying your ass off about your true feelings or intentions, your self-confidence inspires an unusual degree of trust. *Cool* is your middle name, and the few people who try to get one over on you have a very hard time doing so.

When dice start falling, subtract -2 from the difficulty of all social rolls based upon impressing other characters with your capabilities. Other players, however – the Storyteller included – add +2 to the difficulty of social rolls for characters who try to shake your confidence or shatter your calm.

Hideaway /Safehouse (2, 4 or 6 pt. Merit)

When you need time to yourself, there's a place you can go to that no one knows about except you. It's small, yeah, and remote enough that your friends and enemies can't find you there. Chances are, it's a secret apartment or condo, a distant cottage, a mobile home, or a literal cave or grove or camping spot where you go to escape the stress of your usual life. It could even be a pocket Realm, accessible only to you and whomever you choose to share it with, should you be foolish enough to trust anyone else with this secret hideaway. Unless you give its location away, however, or wind up getting tracked to it by a dedicated stalker, this little getaway is your personal escape hatch. Use it wisely, and be careful when you come and go!

Unlike the Merit: ***Property*** (see below), or the Backgrounds: ***Chantry***, ***Node***, and ***Sanctum***, this discrete hidey-hole isn't expansive, elaborate, or innately magickal. That said, it's hidden from most forms of casual detection. You could combine this Merit with ***Property***, ***Node*** or ***Sanctum***, although those Traits would need to be purchased in addition to your Hideaway, and their existence must remain secret from other characters. Chantries are social by default, and so cannot also become a Hideaway. This place is stocked up with whatever you would need for a roughly two-week stay, and may, of course, be stocked up for longer periods if you bring in additional supplies. Although you might be traced to your hideaway with magick or other tracking methods, your little retreat is not linked to you by any searchable official channels: bills, lease, mail, Internet services, etc.

Once per story – if events occur which could lead other people to your hideaway, if you do something that could reveal its location, or if someone dedicates time and effort



trying to track you down – the Storyteller may roll two dice against difficulty 6. (Yes, this roll is done in secret, so you won't know the results.) If that roll gets at least one success, then your secret remains hidden; one failure means that someone has gotten a clue but not your exact whereabouts; four successive failures reveal the location of your hideaway, and a botch on that roll exposes its location immediately. So long as you continue to cover your tracks, however, this place remains yours and yours alone.

For four points, this Merit could also be purchased under the name **Safehouse**. In this case, it's a secured getaway that features better facilities and protections than a typical Hideaway. Its store of supplies can provide for a dozen or so people for roughly two months, and the Merit includes a small dedicated staff (in game terms, two dots in ***Retainers*** or four dots in ***Backup***) to maintain that site. Unlike a Hideaway, this area can withstand a minor-league assault, and features up to three offices /work areas, reinforced walls, bulletproof glass, and a vault-like panic room. This safehouse also includes a shielded communications array (-2 to attempts to hack or trace that system), and a simple but effective alarm and security camera system (again, -2 to subversion attempts). The downside is that the Merit is not your property; it belongs to your superiors, and can be taken away from you if you fall out with the folks who foot the bill for it. Generally, a Technocrat in good standing with her superiors can get a Safehouse Merit (or, for especially good service, be awarded with one), but other mages could obtain a similar facility as well.

For six points, your refuge can be both a Safehouse *and* a Hideaway; in this case, the property belongs entirely to you. Enjoy your Batcave, Mr. Wayne!

Natural Leader (2 pt. Merit)

Inspiring by nature, you're the sort of person other people look to for guidance. As a result, your ***Leadership***-based dice pools receive a two-die bonus. Obviously, you need a certain level of presence to inspire such loyalty, and so you must have three dots or more in your Charisma Attribute before you can hope to be such a commanding individual.

Officially Dead (2 pt. Merit)

According to the authorities, you're no longer among the living. Perhaps you've successfully faked your own death, or had it faked for you when you assumed a new identity. An especially common Merit among Technocratic operatives, Hermetic magi, and the Chakravanti, this erasure of your former life is often a required part of service within the New World Order, Iteration X, and certain Houses of Hermes. As far as your family, government, and old friends are concerned, you're six feet under. Naturally, you'll need to be discreet about your continued existence if you don't want that death to become more permanent.

Perfect Liar (2 pt. Merit)

Oh *gods*, you're good at lying! Falsehoods slide from your tongue like water off a vine leaf, and even the folks who know you well tend to be taken in when you start talking. You also lack the usual "tells" that betray a liar: your vital signs remain stable, your eyes don't twitch, and your voice never falters. Unless someone is outright reading your mind (as in, using Mind-Sphere magick or some other paranormal power), you still often appear to be telling the truth; even then, the mind-reader might assume that you at least *believe* you're telling the truth!

Story-wise, people usually believe what you say when you're lying about small, casual things that are not immediately, obviously false. With regards to the dice, reduce the difficulty by -2 when you're trying to lie about something important. Again, this Merit will not alter auras or change the thoughts in your head, although those folks who can't actively monitor your soul will be inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt. (Suckers...)

Prestige (2 pt. Merit)

Also known as **Reputation**, this Merit reveals you as an honored personage within your Tradition, Convention, Craft, or another sort of sect. Among your peers, you add three extra dice to all social rolls used to influence folks within that group. Story-wise, allies of your group will tend to like you, and rivals or enemies will tend to... not.

When you first select this Merit, decide upon the source of this prestige. Perhaps you earned it through deeds before the chronicle began, or won the Merit in place of experience points. It might represent an honored lineage to which you belong, or reflect a glorious mentor whose rep rubs off on you. Either way, folks expect great things of you, and usually defer to you so long as you live up to the reputation you currently enjoy.

For the flipside of this Merit, see the Social Flaw: ***Infamy***, pp. 62-63.

Property (2 to 5 pt. Merit)

You've got a decent-sized piece of property that, while non-magickal, is certainly useful: a manor house, a farm, a nightclub, bookstore, restaurant, grove, and so forth. The larger and more prosperous the property, the more points this Merit costs. Elsewhere known as the Merits: **Nightclub** and **Mansion**, this Merit demands a minimum rating in the Background: ***Resources***, as noted below.

- (2 points) A relatively small property of roughly 3000 square feet /900 meters, with perhaps – if it's a business – a trickle of income that slightly exceeds its expenses. *Examples*: a nice house, a comic store, a coffee shop, a penthouse apartment, etc. Minimum Resources: 3

- (3 points) A rather sweet place with dedicated servants /staffers, all necessary facilities (sewer, trash, Internet connection, etc.), and – if it's a business – an income that contributes to your Resources Background. *Examples*:

A nightclub, a mansion, a small farm, a radio station, a large store, and so forth. Minimum Resources: 4

- (4 points) A substantial location, staffed with skilled (though mundane) employees and connected to an acre or two of associated land. *Examples*: A small office building, a family manor, an arena, a school, a medium-sized farm, a vineyard, a small laboratory, a library, and the like. At this level, it could also represent several smaller, two-point Properties as well. Minimum Resources: 5
- (5 points) An impressive holding that features an extensive staff and a fair amount of property. *Examples*: An office complex, a stadium, a college, a major laboratory, a shopping center, an archive, and so forth. This level could reflect a number of two-point or three-point Properties, too. Minimum Resources: 6

Although this Merit, by itself, *is in no way magickal or hypertech-equipped*, your Property could provide the base of operations for the Backgrounds: ***Allies***, ***Backup***, ***Chantry***, ***Cult***, ***Library***, ***Node***, ***Resources***, ***Retainers***, ***Sanctum***, and even ***Spies***. (Baristas overhear a lot of crazy stuff...) Unless you've got a dedicated manager for the Property, it also demands a certain amount of time and attention, and quickly falls into disrepair and /or bankruptcy if you leave it alone for a week or more while jaunting off on various adventures. Property also tends to attract interest from parties both mundane and otherwise, especially if there's an ongoing rivalry with competing businesses, family enemies, an archnemesis, and so on. Cops take a dim view of wild stuff going down on your property, and the insurance costs can be murder if (read: *when*) your place gets trashed by extradimensional entities, HIT Marks, or raging Ascension Warriors.

Unless they're part of the Backgrounds: ***Allies***, ***Backup***, ***Cult***, or ***Retainers***, employees of your Property Merit ***do*** *count as Sleeper witnesses* with regards to magickal deeds on and around such properties.

Research Grant (2 pt. Merit)

You've been given a prestigious grant from a foundation, an academy, a corporation, or some other moneyed institution. This stipend frees you from the burdens of a regular job, and although it's probably not a large amount of money, it'll keep you in rent and ramen for a while... so long as you don't piss off your sponsors.

This grant also includes a certain degree of privileged access to archives and facilities that are connected to your field of endeavor. And yeah – it's got some strings, too. You need to report your findings on a regular basis, suck up to the necessary authorities, and behave in a manner that reflects well upon your sponsors. In many cases (especially for corporate endowments), said sucking up includes reporting what your sponsors want to hear, not necessarily what your research actually reveals. Failure to please your supporters tends to result in the loss of said endowment. Isn't research wonderful?

Sanctity (2 pt. Merit)

Although you might not actually *be* innocent, you project an impression of purity. People trust you even if you're not trustworthy, and they're inclined to think of you as some sort of paragon. Naturally, this can be an almighty pain in the ass too. When you get in trouble, though (and you will), the authorities will almost certainly go easy on you, friends will aid you, and even strangers may come to your defense because you couldn't *possibly* be guilty of what you're accused of doing!

Secret Code Language (2 pt. Merit)

Language itself is a series of codes; folks who've been initiated into it (that is, folks who've learned the language) are considered members of the society in question. Some languages, however, are more exclusive and secretive than others. This Merit reflects your knowledge of a particular code known to only the "right people."

Mages are secretive by nature, and so mage society is full of secret codes. Even Sleepers, though, have their own initiatory languages: military jargon, the Language of Flowers, various hand-signals, ciphers, and passwords employed by people who need to communicate with each other in ways no one outside their group can understand... except, perhaps, for those who've learned those codes through some "unauthorized" source.

As with the Merit: ***Language*** (p. 44), this Merit confers knowledge of a particular communication mode, which might not be in any way verbal. It could involve hand-signals, body postures, artwork, flags, symbolism, numbers, and so on. To uninitiated observers, that language appears to be gibberish (a word, incidentally, that refers to the coded writings of the alchemist Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan); in many cases, a coded method of communication appears completely mundane unless you know what to look for, as with the encrypted artwork in *The DaVinci Code*.

One vital caveat: A character *must have a very good in-game reason* for knowing the things she knows. Learning a Secret Code Language requires some story-based foundation for that knowledge: elite military training, mind-reading, time among the group in question, etc. Fortunately, code languages tend to be utilitarian, revealing essential things in a general manner. ("*I'm hungry*," "*Kill him*," "*This area's forbidden*," etc.) Even so, codes may have subtleties that aren't readily apparent; a single gesture or stressed syllable might mark the difference between *Knock him out and move on quickly* and *Torture him to his least breath, no matter how long it takes*.

Socially Networked (2 pt. Merit)

Well-Connected on the Internet (as in the Virtual Adept Merit of that name), you enjoy a high online profile – a website, at least one blog, more Twitter followers and Facebook friends than you could possibly meet in Meatspace, and so on. When you post, folks read, share, and take it seriously. While this might or might not translate into folks you know in the

Digital Web (and really – would you *want* it to?), you command global influence via the World Wide Web. As a result, you've got the sort of influence and resources that most folks cannot imagine: crowdfunding backers, instant information, places to crash all over the world if and when you want them... the details depend upon the sort of presence you maintain and the people you attract, but they go beyond anything you could accomplish without the Internet.

Of course, you could fuck things up on a grand scale if you're not careful – such attention can backfire on you if you post the wrong thing at the wrong time – and certain haters despise you on general principle. Considering that the Internet is a prime front in twenty-first century reality wars, though, this sort of network can provide a major edge for your side.

Subculture Insider (2 pt. Merit)

You're innately familiar with a social environment that most folks never visit, much less understand. They *know* you there, and so even when you haven't met a given person (human or otherwise) in that environment, they consider you to be an insider. Thanks to your familiarity, you can navigate certain elements of the physical environment there too – the security apparatuses, the "secret handshakes," the hidden corners that an insider would know about and an outsider would never think to look for, and other obstacles that a subculture puts into place to make certain that only the "right" people can get around. When moving through your subculture of choice, subtract -2 from the difficulties of rolls that grant social or physical access to that subculture's established turf.

The subculture in question can be any kind of exclusive social environment that also includes the physical surroundings employed by that particular group: country clubs, drug cartels, the international mercenary network, the global espionage underworld, high-level finance executives, the fetish community, homeless transient communities, clannish rural communities, hip-hop networks, the jet set, rave festival culture, fantasy fans, the touring road-dog musical community, world financial leaders, "gypsy" Travelers, and so on. Although it can include mages and other Night-Folk, the community must be essentially "mortal" in terms of the majority of insiders. You can buy this Merit several times to reflect membership in several different communities. That insider status, however, takes time to acquire and a lot of attention to maintain. If you neglect your community, you'll soon find those familiar doors slammed in your face.

Dark Triad (3 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, p. 643**.

Local Hero (3 pt. Merit)

You've done great things for your community, and people love you for it. You might have cleaned out the resident drug dealers, defied slumlords, established a halfway house or a center of worship – whatever it was that you did for the Masses, you get free food, "friends of the house" discounts, places to crash (possibly with happy bedmates!), and other offerings of thanks from the people you have helped.

Also known as **Folk Hero**, this Merit reflects your popularity among the local Sleepers. You reduce the difficulty of your social rolls by -2 when you're dealing with the people of your community, and receive constant aid and respect from those people whenever you need them. The catch, of course, is that you must live up to your heroic reputation; turn your back on these grateful souls, or take their goodwill for granted, and you'll be "yesterday's hero" in no time.

Noted Messenger (3 pt. Merit)

A known emissary between groups, you're treated with a certain amount of deference and courtesy that other mages would not receive. Even enemies of your group won't try to kill you on general principle, though they might not be especially happy to see you. The things you have to say will be given a certain amount of weight, and your presence may open doors (literal or otherwise) that would remain shut for almost anybody else.

That's the upside; the downside is that you need to behave yourself (and keep a tight leash on your companions) when you're on someone else's turf. Passing false messages will undermine your credibility, and obnoxious behavior will get that welcome mat yanked out from under your feet rather quickly. It should go without saying that breaking a truce while acting in your official capacity (or even when you're *not!*) will trash your reputation and reflect very poorly on your superiors. Also... well, some folks really *do* prefer to kill the messenger when things don't go their way. Tread that red carpet carefully.

Rising Star (3 pt. Merit)

Within your group, you're an up-and-coming luminary. Your superiors favor you, your peers respect you, handfuls of haters despise you (of course!), and folks who pay attention to the group's activities have noticed your progress, and they approve. Many people within your group go out of their way to be your friend, and plum assignments keep coming your way. When dealing with members of your Tradition, Convention or whatever, subtract -1 from the difficulties of your social rolls, unless those rolls are meant to influence folks who want to see you fail. People are, of course, expecting great things from you, so don't let them down...

Ties (3 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, pp. 643-644**.

Master of Red Tape (4 pt. Merit)

A savant of bureaucracy, you slash your way through official obstructionism. When red tape unspools across your path, you know who to talk to, which forms to fill out, and where the loopholes are. A few calls to the right people, and official obstacles disappear as if by magic(k). After all, it's not *what* you ask for but who you ask, and *how*.

When faced with the near-inevitable morass of bureaucracy, subtract -2 from all difficulties that involve dealing with the system. To use this Merit, you need to decide what you want to accomplish and how you want to go about doing that. Your character makes the requisite calls to the requisite people, and the dice determine the rest. Backgrounds like ***Alternate Identity***, ***Backup***, ***Certification***, ***Contacts***, ***Influence***, ***Rank***, ***Requisitions***, ***Retainers***, ***Secret Weapons***, and ***Spies*** often involve bureaucracies, and ***Allies***, ***Chantry***, ***Resources***, and other Backgrounds might feature red tape if the Background in question comes from a larger organization. Although it's most helpful for members of the Technocratic Union, any modern mage can find this Merit useful. Hermetic Chantries are infamous for byzantine bureaucracy, and the courts of classical China pretty much invented such things, making this an appropriate Merit for Wu Lung and certain monastic Akashayana.

True Love (4 pt. Merit)

In spite of epic tragedies around you, you've found True Love – the kind that folks make movies, songs, and ballads about. Whenever things look bleak, Love can pull you through. This capital-L Love is not defined by gender, culture, anatomy, or even species... though that last one might make things difficult for your star-crossed relationship. For extra drama, it could be a forbidden romance: a cyborg, for example, in love with a Cultist, or a straight-laced Chorister whose soulmate teeters on the brink of being Fallen (see also the Flaw: ***Sleeping with the Enemy***, p. 66).

System-wise, this Merit – which exists in a crux between the Social and Supernatural realms – gives you one automatic success on all Willpower rolls, which can be negated only by a botch. (Magick-casting rolls do not apply, although the success *does* apply if someone's trying to influence your character with Mind magick.) Your True Love will move heaven and earth to help you, and other folks might do a *Princess Bride* if and when they discover that you've got True Love on your side. Note, of course, that said *Princess Bride*-ism usually involves people making the Path of True Love even more difficult for you, too. Such hardships are the reason so many tales revolve around True Love. You shall, by all the gods, have a *very* dramatic life... as per the **Chapter Five *Genres, Storytelling, and Mage*** entries for ***Romance*** and ***Tragedy***! (See pp. 285-286.)

Social Flaws

Despite all their enlightenment – and sometimes because of it – mages can be rather clueless when it comes to social niceties. Oh, sure, they can be cool as a vampire, smooth as an oil slick, and more connected than a World Bank conference; even then, however, a mage can make plenty of gaffes, enemies, and other social pitfalls. And when that happens, you get stuff like the following Social Flaws.

Blacklisted (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

Having crossed some Powers That Be, you've now been pariah-fied among some segment of the Masses. The results impact your employment potential, social standing, legal status, credit rating, background checks, rental possibilities, and other significant elements of existing in the everyday world.

Originally presented as an Adversarial Background for ***Certification***, this Flaw affects your regional, national, and perhaps international official status. The degree to which you've been professionally shunned depends upon the value of this Flaw:

- (1 point) Trivial – poor driving record, suspected shoplifter, banned from a local union.
- (2 points) Minor – misdemeanor criminal record, suspended license.
- (3 points) Significant – disbarred lawyer, defrocked clergy, unpopular political affiliation, dishonorable military discharge.
- (4 points) Major – convicted felon, registered sex offender, government watch-list, revoked medical license.
- (5 points) Pariah – FBI's most-wanted, suspected terrorist, convicted pedophile, declared legally incompetent or insane.

A four- or five-point Blacklisting will also wind up in the Technocracy's supervision database – a very dangerous place for a mage to be! And although the Awakened don't typically check in with mundane authorities before recruiting or making alliances with their own kind, a mage who's had major problems with such authorities is likely to have problems with mages too... especially if such problems include offenses like terrorism or pedophilia, which certain mages take very, *very* poorly.

Compulsive Speech (1 to 2 pt. Flaw)

Dude, please *just shut* ***up***! But no, you just keep talking... and talking... and talking some more. This compulsion could come from a nervous social habit, a know-it-all personality, a sense of awkwardness in silence, or some other (potentially metaphysical) urge to fill up space with words. Worse still, those words often feature rude observations, sensitive information, and other stuff that's best left unsaid. Day-*um* – did you just say what I think you just said? Yep. You did. Arg...

As far as this Flaw is concerned, the one-point version means you run at the mouth too much, while the two-point one (also known as **Big Mouth**) means you say the wrong things to the wrong people on a fairly regular basis, often to people who sit higher than you do on the proverbial totem pole, or who do not exactly have your best interests at heart. You can spend a Willpower point to keep your mouth shut for a scene or two; sooner or later, though, the words start flowing again...

Conflicting Loyalties (1 to 3 pt. Flaw)

Though deeply loyal (probably to the point of having the Merit: ***Loyalty*** – see p. 53), you're facing a crisis of commitments: two or more of the parties you feel loyal to are at odds with one another, and you're caught in the middle trying to

support them all. Your best friend could be in trouble with the police force your father worked for; your lover may have betrayed the trust of your Convention; your Allies may have decided that your Mentor has to go. And so there you are – poised in an impossible situation, attempting to do the right thing for everyone involved.

The value of this Flaw, as always, depends upon the intensity of the conflict:

- (1 point) A minor crisis forces you to shuttle between loyalties while remaining true to all parties.
- (2 points) A significant clash leads you to mediate untenable situations with frustrating frequency.
- (3 points) Irreconcilable differences will eventually compel you to choose between loyalties, and that's not a choice you're sure you can make. Until that time, you're fighting an apparently doomed campaign to support all sides without betraying anyone.

The nature of your loyalties, relationships, and disputes should, of course, be worked out when you take this Flaw. Your Storyteller will make sure to bring them into play often enough to keep you scrambling for the best solution to an apparently impossible dilemma.

Conniver (1 pt. Flaw)

As far as most folks who know you are concerned, you're a perpetual knife in someone else's back. That rep might not be accurate (see the Flaws: ***Cultural Other***, ***Infamy***, ***Troublemaker***, and ***Profiled Appearance***), but people expect treachery from you even if they're wrong to think so. Subtract one die from any non-magickal dice pool you employ when you're trying to get other characters to trust you. This penalty does not extend to Arete dice pools when you're casting Mind-Sphere magick (or any other Sphere's magick, for that matter), but if you're having to cast spells in order to be believed, then you've kinda just lived up to that reputation.

Cultural Other (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

In the eyes of your society, you're clearly divergent. Disreputable. *Other*. People suspect you of criminal, or at least unsavory, behavior; the authorities harass or detain you for little or no reason, and your loved ones probably "wish you could just be like *normal* people." Granted, *every* mage is "other" to some degree. In your case, though, the othering threatens your life, liberty, and happiness.

Also known as **Mistreated Minority**, this Flaw reflects prejudice within your society. The amount of trouble it causes, and the frequency of said trouble, determines the value of your Flaw:

- (1 point) Folks around you tend to harass you in small but noticeable ways (acting uncommonly brusque, using slurs in your presence, taking uncomfortable liberties with your privacy, property or person, etc.) and seem to feel there's nothing wrong with that at all. Other people might stand up for you, but more often than not they won't.
- (2 points) As above, but now your family and other intimate companions feel that you deserve to be avoided, shamed, insulted, and so forth because you are who or what you are.
- (3 points) Strangers feel free to shame, insult, avoid, and perhaps physically attack you on general principle. Authorities might intervene, but probably won't do so unless major laws are broken... and maybe not even then.
- (4 points) Authorities discriminate against you too. Your house may be searched, your job may be terminated, you might be evicted, robbed or assaulted and very few people will care.
- (5 points) Merely living in this society is physically, socially, emotionally, and legally hazardous to your safety, your sanity, and possibly your life. You could be imprisoned, enslaved, tortured or killed with little-or-no response from the authorities.

Unlike the physical Flaw: ***Profiled Appearance***, this discrimination isn't based on physicality. A character with this Flaw *cannot also take the Profiled Appearance Flaw*; if your character stands out physically while also being discriminated against socially, simply take more points in this Flaw.

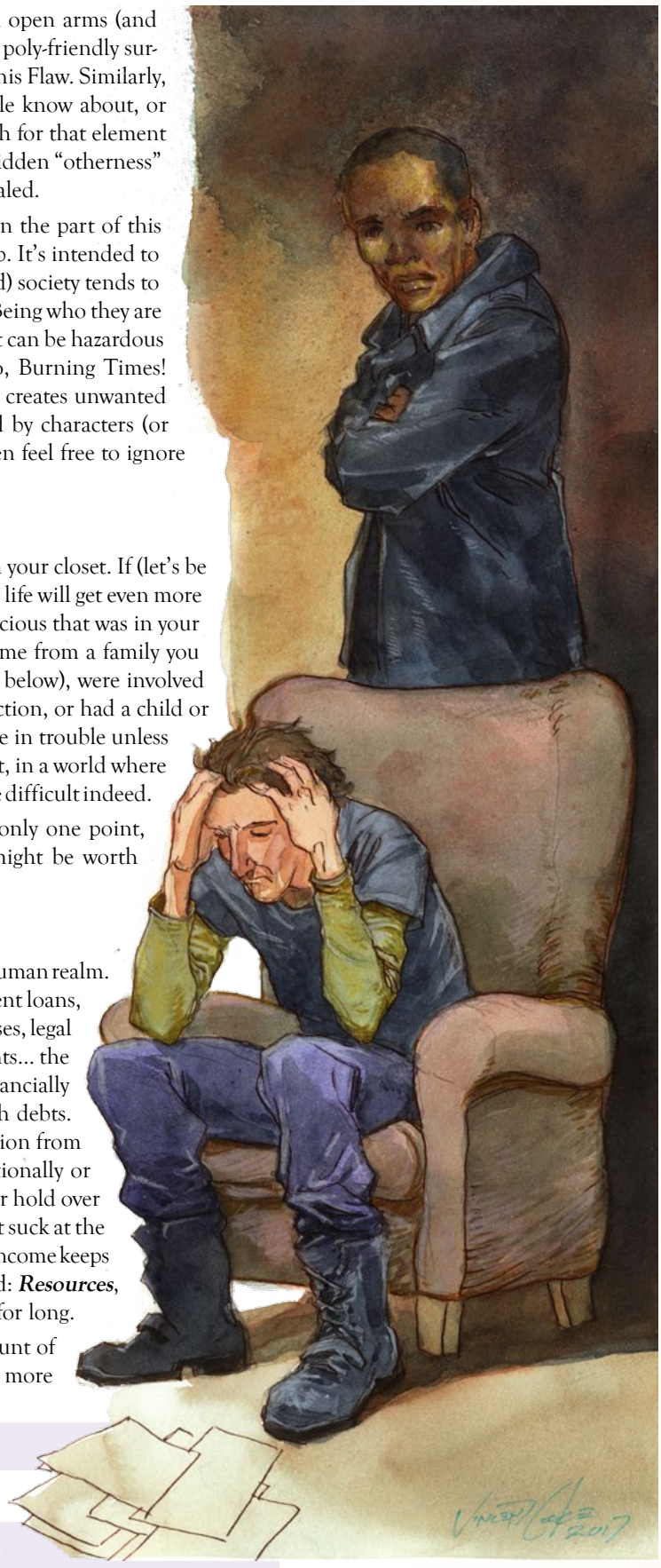
Nor is this Flaw tied to any particular creed, gender or ethnicity; while a Wiccan could be a Cultural Other in a town filled with fundamentalist Baptists, a fundamentalist Baptist could be a Cultural Other in a Wicca-based Horizon Realm. You could follow a "heretical" creed, belong to a "disreputable" subculture, identify as a sexual/gender/ethnic/religious "minority," hold an unpopular political opinion... anything that inspires others around you to treat you poorly and get away with it could be considered grounds for this Flaw.

That said, a character with this Flaw must indeed be treated *poorly*; having folks call you out on an unpopular opinion, or criticize your behavior, is part of the human experience, whereas having cops shake you down merely for existing is an actual problem. In order to take this Flaw, your character must face actual discrimination and attack on a fairly regular and hazardous basis. No, being called names on the Internet does not count, although an intense bout of cyberbullying – that is, doxing, swatting, career destruction, and serious threats to life and sanity – might count as this Flaw, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Because Cultural Other is tied to the character's social surroundings, a radical change to those surroundings may mitigate or eliminate this Flaw. A polyamorous person may be

discriminated against in one city, and welcomed with open arms (and open legs) in another; if that poly character remains in poly-friendly surroundings, then the player needs to buy off or replace this Flaw. Similarly, your "otherness" must be either something that people know about, or something that they could find out about easily enough for that element of your life to become a big problem for you. A deeply hidden "otherness" is a ***Dark Secret*** (see below) until or unless it gets revealed.

To be clear: *This Flaw in no way reflects judgment* on the part of this game, its creators, or – one hopes! – your gaming group. It's intended to reflect the ways in which mortal (and, often, Awakened) society tends to treat people who stand out from their cultural norms. Being who they are and what they do, mages often *do* stand out in ways that can be hazardous to their social and sometimes physical health – hello, Burning Times! However, if this Flaw seems redundant in your group, creates unwanted real-life tensions between your players, or gets abused by characters (or players) who are catching hell for acting like dicks, then feel free to ignore or discard this Flaw.



Dark Secret (1 pt. Flaw)

A skeleton or two is hanging rather precariously in your closet. If (let's be honest – *when*) it slips out and clatters to the floor, your life will get even more difficult than it already is. Did you steal something precious that was in your trust? Or live on the streets for a while? Maybe you came from a family you would rather not discuss (see the Flaw: ***Family Issues***, below), were involved with a criminal organization, Awakened into a rival faction, or had a child or lover you're trying to forget about. In any case, you'll be in trouble unless you manage to keep that dark secret hidden... a feat that, in a world where reading minds is damned near entry-level magick, can be difficult indeed.

(*Note*: Although this Flaw is traditionally worth only one point, Dark Secrets with potentially deadly consequences might be worth more points, at the Storyteller's discretion.)

Debts (1 to 3 pt. Flaw)

Mages still need money in order to function in the human realm. And in your case, you're kinda fucked financially. Student loans, credit-card debts, child-support payments, gambling losses, legal judgments, medical bills, car and/or mortgage payments... the ways in which a modern mage can get in over her head financially are as numerous as the parties who prosper from such debts. And then there's the possibility of financial manipulation from Awakened sources – mages or Night-Folk who, intentionally or otherwise, are keeping you broke in order to assert their hold over you (see **Technocracy: Syndicate, p. 28**). Maybe you just suck at the whole paying-your-bills thing. For whatever reason, your income keeps going back out. You might indeed have the Background: ***Resources***, but the money just doesn't stay in your bank account for long.

As a Flaw, these Debts represent a minimum amount of money you owe your creditors. The more you owe, the more this Flaw is worth:

- (1 point) Minimal debt (less than $10,000).
- (2 points) Moderate debt (less than $50,000).
- (3 points) Significant debt (over $50,000).

- (4 points) Crushing debt (over $100,000).
- (5 points) Overwhelming debt (over $500,000).

From the three-point level onward, your creditors will expend a fair amount (perhaps a great deal) of effort to collect those funds from you. Certain creditors, like loan sharks, will start far lower than that. Tactics could range from round-the-clock phone calls and red-envelope letters to lawsuits, repossessions, threats, eviction, and physical violence. For folks with small and /or irregular incomes, the pressure from debt and debt-collection harassment can cause intense emotional and psychological distress... which, in turn, affects one's ability to make money... which deepens the debt... which deepens the stress... in a desperate cycle that can lead to desperate acts.

Discredited (1 pt. Flaw)

In your chosen field, your name is mud. Perhaps you're a scientist whose bizarre theories have cost him the respect of his peers... or an academic who wound up on the wrong side of departmental politics... or a journalist who stepped too far over the line of credibility. Whatever it is you did (or are *reputed* to have done), your professional associates look down on you. Add +2 to the difficulty of your social and Background-based rolls when you're trying to get those associates to take you seriously. Although this is a common Flaw among the feud-happy Etherites, anyone who depends upon a professional reputation can be discredited in this fashion – professorial Hermetics, corporate-ladder Syndicate ops, White Tower agents, and other competitive-field mages can fall afoul of a bad rep too.

Enemy (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20, p. 647**.

Esoteric Discourse / Technobabbler (1 pt. Flaw)

Your obsessive love of a specialized field inspires you to fill every waking hour with obscure jargon and obtuse metaphraseology. Most folks can't understand half of what you say, and their incomprehension of such elementary terminology impels you to facilitate obligatory (if remedial) pedagogy. Oh, for fuck's sake – *just talk* ***normal*** *for a change!*

In game terms, this Flaw imposes difficulty modifiers (+1 or +2) on social rolls, thanks to the character's compulsive jargonization, hyperinitiated nomenclature, and condescending pedanticism. The Flaw's first variation reflects arcane specialization, the second reflects tech-based terminology, and other variations (Specious Legalese, Obtuse Academia, and so forth) could reflect similar fascinations with other fields. For people who actually *understand* you, however, the usual penalty might become a social bonus instead... at which point everyone else probably leaves the room and lets the experts talk amongst themselves.

Family Issues (1 to 3 pt. Flaw)

Many mages leave their families behind. You didn't do that, although you may often wish you could. A flipside of the Merit: ***Family Support*** (pp. 53-54), this Flaw saddles you with a basket of goodies from Dysfunction Junction, family-style. You might have a meddling uncle, an abusive sibling, an alcoholic parent, or "simply" the leftovers from dealing with such people. You might have tried to escape them, but if so, someone in your family is still looking for you. (See the **Werewolf 20** Flaw: ***Persistent Parents***, and the story "We Are the Shadows Cast by the Memory of Giants" in **Truth Beyond Paradox**.) The family doesn't have to still be part of your physical reality, but the mess they left behind if you managed to get away from them remains a part of your existence today.

As with ***Supportive Family***, the clan in question could be blood relatives, an adopted family, or a family-of-choice you kinda wish you hadn't chosen. The more points you have in this Flaw, the more your family issues interfere with your Awakened life. They could be mages themselves, though that's not often the case. More likely, they're folks who still look for you even in your Newlife, hangers-on who won't leave you alone, sickly relations who need tending (see also the Flaw: ***Ward***, p. 66), kids or siblings (or even parents) who have constant troubles with the law... the possibilities are as endless as the real-life complications that a troubled family can bring. And no, you can't just ditch out on 'em even if you've already tried to do so. If you could, they wouldn't still be your problem, now would they?

Infamy (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

You've made a bad name for yourself among the Masses. Like the Background: ***Fame***, this Flaw represents a degree of recognition; in your case, though, that's not a good thing... especially not when you want to keep your life as a mage a secret from the Sleepers.

Once again, the weight of the Flaw determines its value:

- (1 point) Certain people within a region or subculture recognize and dislike you. (*Examples*: the local drunk, Vox Day.)
- (2 points) Your notoriety was wide once, but has faded to occasional recognition and disdain (H.R. Clinton, M.C. Hammer).
- (3 points) You're famous, but many people do not like you (Kanye West, Nickelback).
- (4 points) The authorities don't like you either (Roosh V, Jared Fogle).
- (5 points) You're a household name, and that name is shit (O.J. Simpson, Charles Manson).

Especially in the age of social media and intelligence networks, this sort of infamy can be a very bad thing. Obviously,

some folks adore you, if only because the rest of the world hates you. On the whole, however, your reputation among the Masses is more bad than good, and folks go out of their way to give you a hard time. As with other bad reputations, you may not have actually done anything wrong; then again, there might be reasons that folks hate your guts.

Insane /Infamous Mentor (1 pt. Flaw)

The mage who taught you the ropes is dangerously tangled up in them. Maybe she's out of her head (though probably not a Marauder... yet); or he's got an awful rep that has splattered all over you. That person could be angry at you for some reason (good or otherwise), or live downstream on Shit Creek, with a nasty habit of dragging you along for the ride. This Flaw makes an excellent addition to the Background: ***Mentor***, and has a way of fouling up your relationships with other mages as well as your bond with the mentor herself.

Mistaken Identity (1 pt. Flaw)

You're not who folks think you are, but that doesn't stop them from thinking that you *are* that person. For some reason – similar features, related habits, a bureaucratic fuck-up that linked their data to you, or maybe some far more insidious connection – confusion follows you around. This situation is awkward at best, and can get downright dangerous if that not-you person is wanted for serious crimes...

Naïve (1 pt. Flaw)

Surely, the world can't be *that* dark... can it? (Spoiler: *Yes, yes it can.*) Oblivious to the depths of misery around you, you retain an intrinsic faith in the best possible outcome. And while this sort of optimism can provide the foundation for literally world-changing beliefs (see the paradigm ***It's All Good – Have Faith!*** in **Mage 20**, p. **570**), it can also blind you to the realities you face. When making a roll that could detect another character's bad intentions or malignant nature, add +2 to the difficulty of your roll. Story-wise, you have a hard time believing that the terrible things you see around you could really be as bad as they seem, and may perhaps lack empathy for other people's pain (+2 to the difficulty of Empathy-based rolls, at the Storyteller's option) because you recognize so little about pain yourself.

New Kid (1 pt. Flaw)

You've just recently Awakened, and you still have something to prove. Your peers don't think much of you just yet, and although you've got allies who consider you worth their time, their investment in your goodwill is minimal. Add +2 to the difficulty of your social rolls with more experienced mages until you've earned the right (and the experience) to buy off this Flaw. On the good side, however, you're likely to be popular with certain companions, although – as "new meat" in a social scene often discovers – that's not always the kind of attention you'll want.

Offline (1 or 3 pt. Flaw)

You hate the goddamned Internet. As far as you're concerned, it's a complicated waste of time. You loathe social networking, lack a webpage, refuse to Twitter, and don't really even know (or care) how to Google stuff. Anyone who wants to contact you can damned well write a letter, use a telephone, or just leave you the hell alone! (*Damn kids, get off my digital lawn...*)

While this Flaw is worth only one point in cultures where the Internet is an occasional (and often privileged) indulgence, it's a three-point Flaw in cultures where Internet access and participation are major elements of most people's social lives. Those cultural divides are more tied to generational and economic divides than they are to ethnic or geographical ones. A poor, elderly, or simply old-fashioned New Yorker might not really care about net access, so long as she can still stay in contact with her friends and family; a college student in Rio, however, would be at a pretty significant disadvantage if he chose to avoid the Internet. And yeah – twenty-first-century mages use the Internet too, even if they don't visit the Digital Web. Online presence isn't just for Virtual Adepts anymore!

Rival House (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

You belong to a Chantry (or Construct, or whatever) that has a longstanding animosity with another such organization. This could be a rival Hermetic Chantry, a temple whose members consider you to be heretics, a hostile street gang, an opposing martial arts order, a coven that has declared a witch-war against your group, a Construct that has marked you all for death, and so on. This antagonism is mutual, too, and you're expected to act accordingly. Mediation remains unlikely, and things could get worse before they get better... if improved relations are even possible.

Obviously, such hostility is personal, with deep roots in the backstory of your chronicle and its characters. Groups of mages don't generally pursue mass grudges without serious reasons to do so! The Flaw's value depends upon the power of that other stronghold and the level to which they hate members of your own.

- (1 point) A minor rivalry with an associated Chantry of equal or lesser power in relation to your own. For the most part, the antagonism involves pranks, competition, minor sabotage, and occasional "friendly" brawls.
- (2 points) A significant rivalry (serious fights and slanders, major sabotage) with a Chantry of similar power, or a minor rivalry with a Chantry so powerful they don't consider yours to be a true threat.
- (3 points) Deadly antagonism between roughly equal Chantries.
- (4 points) A significant rivalry between your Chantry and one that's powerful enough to inflict serious damage upon your own.

- (5 points) Deadly hatred from a Chantry that could level yours if they really wanted to... and they probably *do*.

From the three-point version onward, it's pretty unlikely that the rivalry can be resolved without a shared enemy or some significant interference from an even more powerful third party. It might not be resolvable even then. This Flaw requires the Background: ***Chantry /Construct***, but any character with such associations can take it – the Flaw is not restricted to mages from the Traditions and Technocracy. Your rivalry might cross factions, too; a Hermetic House might hold a longstanding enmity with a Progenitor lab. It can also exist within a single group (two rival Etherite collectives), or between two related groups that do not belong to the same faction; alchemist sects, for example, have been arguing over the name *Solificati* for centuries, with no end in sight!

Sect Enmity (1 pt. Flaw)

Mage groups tend to have issues with each other by their very nature. You, however, have managed to piss off an entire sect of mages within your larger group. You could be a Verbena witch who hacked off the Hermetic House Flambeau (*yipe*), a Black Suit on the wrong side of the Friends of Courage, or a Red Spear who trash-talked the Ghost Wheel Society and lived to regret it. Although your enemies won't try to kill you – you *are* theoretically on the same side, after all – they really don't like your face, or much else about you.

Generally, the members of the sect in question will have as little to do with you as they can, and won't be terribly cooperative if they must deal with you at all. Social dice rolls you make while dealing with members from this group add +2 to the difficulty. You cannot, obviously belong to this sect when you first take this Flaw, although you could conceivably smooth things over, buy off the Flaw, and join that group later. A player may buy this Flaw multiple times to reflect poor relationships with several different sects. Storytellers are advised to create several reoccurring characters from the rival sect, in order to give this Flaw some teeth. For a more severe version of this Flaw, see ***Hit List***, below.

Special Responsibility (1 pt. Flaw)

You and your big mouth! Shortly after you joined your current group, you stepped up and assumed a duty to that group. Doing so earned you some points with the leadership, but that duty comes at great cost to you. This responsibility weighs on you to a significant degree, consuming time, energy, and social, emotional and perhaps monetary resources you'd rather devote to other things.

Obviously, you need to define what you're doing for whom, and what you need to do in the course of doing it. Although it's (probably) not dangerous in life-threatening ways, this Flaw demands constant attention. Until you buy off the Flaw, you really can't skip out on your responsibilities.

Sympathizer (1 pt. Flaw)

Hey, they're okay once you get to know them! You've expressed some degree of sympathy for an enemy faction, and that sympathy does not make you terribly popular! Maybe you're a Technocrat who sees validity in the Traditions, a Trad mage who shares some part of the Technocratic vision, a Disparate mage with secret ties to one of the other factions, or even – gods help you! – a mage from pretty much *any* group, who dares to view the Mad and Fallen as something other than walking targets for instant execution. This Flaw goes well with other Flaws like ***Rogue***, ***Branded*** or ***Fifth Degree***, and could well wind up getting added to your character sheet if you're not discreet about your associations with rival mages.

Twisted Apprenticeship (1 pt. Flaw)

Someone taught you all the wrong things. For whatever reason, the mentor who introduced you to the Awakened realm did a terrible job, and now you reap the benefits. They may have told you lies about other groups, filled your head with nonsense about the nature of magick (though in all honesty, pretty much *everyone* does *that*), or simply behaved like a raging shmuck and left you with the payoff. Now folks blame you for things you did not do (or you did out of ignorance), and the mentor's bad rep and worse teachings hang about you like a god-slaying stink. You'll probably recover eventually, but your Awakened career got off to a wretched start.

Catspaw (2 pt. Flaw)

You trusted the wrong person, did the wrong thing on their say-so, and have now become a liability to others and to yourself. A dupe for someone vastly superior in power, you need to watch your back now while hoping for an opportunity to extract yourself from this position. For the moment, you have to follow orders, and your "cat" needs to keep you safe. Not long from now, however, one or both of you will change your priorities, and then things will *truly* become interesting for everyone concerned.

Diabolical Mentor (2 pt. Flaw)

Your mentor wasn't merely bad at his job – he turned out to be actively malevolent. That person could be an actual Nephandus, a demented Marauder, a ruthless wizard, a diehard "black hats and mirrorshades" type of Technocrat, an Infernalist sellsoul... maybe you don't even *know* what your mentor really is, but it's just plain bad. Obviously, this personage has fucked you up. Additionally, if you've uncovered things he would rather keep secret, that could lead to other Flaws as well: ***Enemy***, ***Cursed***, and worse...

Dogmatic (2 pt. Flaw)

Look, it's great that you've got such strong spiritual convictions... but do you have to be such a *dick* about them? This Flaw represents a religious, spiritual, and /or philosophical approach that defines your moral and magickal beliefs. Trouble

is, your beliefs don't play well with others; rules-wise, you add +2 to the difficulty of all social rolls which involve dealing with people of differing beliefs. Even when you're *trying*, dammit, to get along with those misguided heretics, folks can tell that you don't approve. You sneer, you argue, you try to convert everyone around you to your way of thinking... you can't help it, really – your convictions are just that formidable! After all, you *do* use them to change the world, so how could they possibly be wrong?

Double Agent (2 pt. Flaw)

You work both sides of a very spiky fence; one of these days, you're gonna get stuck on it. Perhaps you're a Syndicate spy in the Ecstatic Cult, or an Etherite working with Iteration X. In the days of the Disparate Alliance, you might belong to a Tradition while ferreting data to your true Craft. Eventually, this dangerous game will catch up with you. Make plans, establish contingencies, and try not to get yourself perished!

Obviously, this Flaw must be kept secret from the other characters in your group. For extra drama, try to keep it hidden from the other *players*, too...

Failure (2 pt. Flaw)

Having blown a high-profile job, you're now considered a washout by your peers. Until and unless you manage you redeem yourself, you're essentially a laughingstock within your group. Were you a Syndicate tycoon gone bust? A priest caught doing the nasty with the choir? A cowardly Templar? A Pagan gone Evangelical (or vice versa)? Life is made of reversals of fortune, of course. Yeah, you'll get back on top someday – it's just gonna be a hard climb.

Gullible (2 pt. Flaw)

You believe everything folks tell you. You repost memes without checking their accuracy or source. You fall for cons and pranksters every single time. Seriously? How can a mage be so goddamned *gullible?* Beats me, but yeah – subtract three dice from every dice pool you roll (down to a minimum of one die) when you're trying to penetrate falsehoods (lies, not stealth), or to fool people with your own bumbling attempts at deception.

Old Flame (2 pt. Flaw)

A former love of your life now works for the enemy. Worse, she knows your weak spots, and can still call on you "for old times' sake." Unless you manage to succeed in a resisted Manipulation-based social roll contest (see **Mage 20, pp. 390-391**) when your old flame tries (again) to win you over (again), you'll find yourself doing things (again) against your better judgment again... and again... and again...

Troublemaker (2 pt. Flaw)

Pretty much the inverse of the Merit: ***Sanctity*** (p. 57); you project an impression of guilt even when you haven't done anything wrong. Folks blame you for pretty much everything, and the authorities go harder on you than they might if you didn't seem like such a noxious little turd! You come across like a natural-born sinner regardless of how you behave. Gee, if you're gonna get punished no matter what you do, maybe you ought to at least have some fun before the whip comes down.

Expendable (3 pt. Flaw)

An upper-level member of your group wants you dead, and sticks you with missions that will probably get the job done sooner rather than later. You could be the lab assistant who keeps being told to send those big metal kites up into the thunderstorm, the apprentice who keeps getting sent off to obtain forbidden artifacts, or the Black Suit who keeps facing off against yet another goddamned werewolf pack while his dispatcher makes excuses for the lack of timely backup. Either way, you're pretty screwed. Worst of all, no one will openly admit that's the case, and you may not even know who's got it out for you, much less *why* they're trying to get you perished.

Although this Flaw works best for Technocratic operatives (who remain subject to orders no matter who they might be), it suits any Awakened group that operates with a top-down hierarchy wherein high-ranking mages assign missions to lower-ranking ones and expect those orders to be obeyed – say, the Templar Knights, the Order of Hermes, the Celestial Chorus, and so forth. It does not suit shamans, Ecstatics, or other mages who don't give a flying fuck what their so-called superiors say.

(*Note*: This Flaw resembles the Flaw of the same name in **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Mages, however, die much more easily than vampires do when one of their superiors wants to get them killed, and so the Flaw is worth considerably more in **Mage** than it is in **Vampire**.)

Narc (3 pt. Flaw)

Cursed with the rep of an informer, you're on the outs with your would-be associates. As with other reputation-based Flaws, this shunning may be based on mistakes and rumors; in this case, though, it's probably at least somewhat accurate. Known spies and spymasters, intelligence officers, witnesses against their fellow mages, members of groups that are assigned to investigation and justice (like House Quaesitor or the Ivory Tower), and other real or assumed snitches generally catch such reputations by default. System-wise, this Flaw adds +1 to the difficulty of social rolls when dealing with people who fear you might be spying on them; story-wise, such people could be feeding you misinformation, stonewalling you, or plotting to take you out when the moment to do so seems right.

Notoriety (3 pt. Flaw)

Thanks to this inverse of the Merit: ***Prestige***, you're saddled with a bad reputation among your fellow mages. System-wise, this Flaw adds +2 to the difficulties of all social rolls within your faction (Traditions, Crafts, Technocracy, etc.), and predisposes pretty much everyone outside your closest friends to think the worst of you. Rumors dog your steps, and whispers

precede your appearance. Whether or not the stories are true, you've been linked to some disgrace, and will be shunned and probably punished accordingly if you haven't been punished already. (See the Supernatural Flaw: ***Branded***, p. 89, for a potential punishment, or for an alternative to this Flaw that could be taken by a Tradition mage character.) You might be able to shuck this bad rep eventually, but it's gonna be a pretty rough road until you do.

Rivalry (3 to 5 pt. Flaw)

An associate of yours has it out for you, and while this rival cannot openly move against you (probably because of an external authority she doesn't want to risk annoying, or social pressures that she can't avoid), she'll make your life as difficult as she can under the circumstances. Rumors, sabotage, exposed scandals, and perennial traps are just a few of your rival's weapons against you. And while you can dance around most of them, a few still manage to hit their mark.

The value of this Flaw depends, as usual, on the amount of trouble this rivalry causes for you:

- (3 points) Someone of a lower or equal degree of power and influence wants to complicate your life.
- (4 points) A rival of greater power and influence throws obstacles in your path whenever possible.
- (5 points) A far more powerful rival is seriously dedicated to keeping you miserable... possibly even to making you dead.

Why does this person hate you? It could be a "simply business" sort of situation, like the rivalry between Syndicate executives or Hermetic Adepts. There may be a romantic tangle or family history involved, or perhaps an academic dispute, as is often found among members of the Etherite Tradition or Progenitor lab-groups. Chances are, this person doesn't actually want you dead – just disgraced or removed from further consideration. Fatal rivalries *do* arise, however... and as Doissetep's implosion proved long ago, such things can get really ugly when mages are involved.

Rotten Liar (3 pt. Flaw)

Man, you suck at lying! You could not tell a credible untruth if your life depended on it... which it might, so this can be sort of a problem for you. It may be that you're just too honest for your own good, or cursed to speak the truth as you know it, regardless of the cost or your intentions; then again, you might just stammer your way through attempted deceptions, telegraphing your lies through body language and vocal tone. Whatever the reason, add +2 to the difficulty of any die roll you make when you're trying to deceive another character. Yes, this penalty extends to magickal deceptions too, like illusions or mind control. Honesty might not always be the best policy among the Awakened, but for you it's generally the best option.

Sleeping with the Enemy (3 pt. Flaw)

A paramour of yours belongs to an enemy group – Awakened antagonists, perhaps, or maybe one of the Night-Folk (as per the old Flaw: **Massasa Contact**). This isn't simply a matter of rivalry; if you're discovered, you're both probably gonna die. Still, love (or lust) is a powerful force, and so you and your loved one live out one of those *Romeo and Juliet* situations. Just remember, though: *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, not a romance, and things are likely to go the same way for you. (Again, see the entries for both those genres in **Chapter Five**'s section regarding ***Genre, Storytelling, and Mage***.)

Ward (3 pt. Flaw)

Mages rarely move through life alone. And when certain companions – lovers, children, partners, parents, close friends, even employers – depend upon you, that lack of loneliness can become a liability. This Flaw represents a character, or a group of characters, who require constant attention on your part. Your life is a hazard to them, and their needs often provide hazards for you as well. Wards tend to get in trouble, require rescuing, and go digging into aspects of your life you'd prefer they left alone. Is it love that binds you to your ward? Duty? An oath? Family obligations? A job like bodyguarding, teaching or medicine? Regardless of the reason, each ward is an essential part of your life. Their life is your priority.

Although Ward characters may have a useful skill or two, such folks are unAwakened people, not mages, Night-Folk, familiars, or other powerful entities. That said, you could take a Ward Flaw to reflect a special bond with a ***Retainer***, a ***Cult*** member, or one of your ***Spies***. Merits like ***Supportive Family*** or ***True Love*** (and Flaws like ***Family Issues***) go well with the Ward Trait. Wards don't have to be human, either – your dog, your cat, your horse... an animal who depends upon you could be a ward as well. You can take this Flaw more than once, to reflect several dependent characters. Yeah, there are reasons that mages tend to avoid having big families!

Obviously, each ward is a Storyteller character, with all the agendas and complications that situation entails. This person might not count as a *Sleeper witness* with regards to your magick... but if you've been keeping that person in the dark with regards to your true life and nature, they could still count as a witness for at least their first experience with your sort of "reality."

Echo Chamber (4 pt. Flaw)

You surround yourself with groupthink. All opinions on important topics (politics, religion, magick, and so forth) must remain unified. No disagreements on such matters are permitted within this echo chamber, and anyone who bucks that decree is shown the door – often with great force – and shunned, probably vilified, afterward. Loyalty to the group is measured by the devotion each member shares with regards to the "truth" as your group understands it. As a result, that "truth" soon gets distorted. Like an echo reverberating within a closed space, it verges into a distortion of the original source, growing wilder and more extreme until something has to give. Will that breaking point be *you?* Gods forbid...



Essentially a story-based Trait, this Flaw cuts your character off from information that runs contrary to the group's determined "truth." Characters and data that disagree with that "truth" must be pushed aside, ignored, silenced, possibly attacked, maybe even destroyed "for the good of the group." Because isolation breeds distortion, the Storyteller should gradually make "the truth" seem more extreme than it once had been. Anyone – especially a player character – who disagrees with "the truth" should be punished by the group; the more extreme the distortions become, the harsher the punishment becomes as well. Eventually, the distorted "truth" will require distorted acts as well: assault, torture, murder, terrorism. At that point, any character who tries to step away will become the enemy too (possibly receiving the Flaw of that name) – shunned by former friends at the very least, probably disgraced socially, and potentially even attacked physically for being a traitor to the cause.

This Flaw reflects a social phenomenon that's increasingly common in the twenty-first century, though it's certainly not exclusive to our era: a social group committed to enforced orthodoxy and the removal of dissent. The group in question could be a religious or military order, a socio-political activist tribe, a corporate office, a think-tank, an art collective, a fannish subculture, a media outlet, mystic sect, or Political Action Committee – any social clique that holds "certain truths to be self-evident" and vital to that group's existence could become an echo chamber. "Us" and "them" is a ruling principle, and if you're not one of *Us*, then you're one of *Them*.

Hit List (4 pt. Flaw)

A rival group wants you dead. You might be a Templar who's made enemies among the Etherites, an Etherite who crossed the line with the New World Order, and so forth. Whatever happened, it's personal and extends to the entire group. As with the **Vampire 20** Flaw: ***Clan Enmity***, this is a deadly business, far worse than the one-point ***Sect Enmity***, above. Social rolls when dealing with members of this group add +2 to their difficulty – if you get a chance to make such rolls at all. Whether or not the enemy group actively attacks you on sight, its members will go out of their way to make your life solitary, unpleasant, nasty, brutish, and short.

Mr. Red Tape (4 pt. Flaw)

Bureaucracy hates you. Any official complication that could go wrong *will* go wrong if you're the one who's dealing with the authorities. Essentially the opposite of the Merit: ***Master of Red Tape*** (p. 58), this Flaw adds + 2 to the difficulty of any roll you make when trying to get something done through an established system, and throws stupid mistakes and delays into the works whenever you've got to work with any sort of bureaucracy.

Overextended (4 pt. Flaw)

You've tried to do too much, and the strain has begun to show. Even when you add Time Sphere magick to the equation, there really *are* only so many hours in a day, and you spend most of them just trying to keep up with various commitments. You're on too many committees, stuck with too many reports, nurturing too many connections, maintaining too many resources for one person – even a mage – to handle. Other characters, on top of it all, have begun to undermine your ability to juggle all those plates, and folks are gunning for your position if and when you finally fuck up badly. While this Flaw best suits members of the Technocratic Union, it's appropriate for any mage who belongs to a group that prizes involvement, most especially the Hermetic Order, Celestial Chorus, Wu Lung, and Templar Knights.

Probationary Member (4 pt. Flaw)

Having recently defected from a rival group or faction, you're on probation with the current group. Peers expect you to turn on them, and certain folks have probably decided to throw you under the bus on general principle. Your continued membership (possibly even your survival) depends upon doing everything right and nothing wrong... and just how often do things *really* go that well in the real world, anyway?

Rogue (4 pt. Flaw)

The loosest of cannons, you're gonna do whatever you damn well please, and to hell with any and all consequences! You might still belong to a group, but your membership is more a matter of habit or convenience than of loyalty. Alternately, you may have gone your way and now exist in a nebulous state between fondly remembered comrade and total outlaw. Certain Backgrounds (***Requisitions*** and ***Secret Weapon***) are forbidden to you now, and others (***Allies***, ***Backup***, ***Chantry***, ***Resources***, and potentially many more) are hard to access – perhaps even *impossible* to access – if their connection to you depends upon your allegiance to a group. Former peers consider you a liability, and the main reason no one has taken you out yet is because nobody's gotten around to doing so successfully.

For Technocratic operatives, this Flaw is a slow-motion death sentence; for other mages, it could involve similar threats to longevity, although many Crafts (aside from the Templars, Wu Lung, and Hippolytoi) and most Traditions (aside from the Chakravanti, Akashayana, and Order of Hermes) take a more liberal approach to rogue members. Either way, your relationships with former allies are strained at best (+3 to the difficulty of most social rolls involving their goodwill), and you're on rather hostile terms with your so-called (or former) superiors. Some mages manage to live for quite a while in this state of mutual antagonism. Most, however, do not.

Witch-Hunted (4 pt. Flaw)

The Masses want you dead. You've been exposed for what you are and can do, and so various unAwakened parties have decided to take you out like the abomination you've become. These hunters could be law-enforcement authorities, religious groups, fanatical sects, furious mobs, imbued hunters, pawns of the Night-Folk... whoever they might be, these people offer a significant threat to your existence, possessing the power to end you and the dedication to back it up. Your Arts alone cannot stop them, and a painful showdown (or three) is sadly inevitable.

Fifth Degree (5 pt. Flaw)

Whether you know it or not, you have outlived your usefulness to the Technocratic Union. Your superiors have set you up to fall, and your date with Room 101 or a suicide mission waits right around the corner. Combine all the deficits of the Flaw: ***Rogue*** (above) with the assurance that you're only alive because someone would rather have you take out the bad guys when you go down in a blaze of glory than spend the resources necessary to take you down themselves. You have *one more chance* to make good and stay alive. Step out of line again, and your fate will be the sort of thing that makes cyborgs cringe.

Supernatural Merits

Nothing's really "supernatural" to a mage. Still, some Merits and Flaws defy the easy categories that Sleepers impose upon their world. A more appropriate name, perhaps, would be *Metaphysical* Merits: benefits of the unseen world that work in ways the mundane world rarely understands.

Given the powerful nature of such Merits and Flaws, the Storyteller may disallow certain Traits from the following section. Several previously published Supernatural Merits and Flaws have been revised from their original appearance, or else omitted entirely, because their initial extravagance runs at odds with the **Mage 20** rules and atmosphere. Players could, with Storyteller approval, still employ those Traits, but we advise against it. A handful of those Traits, however – notably ***Claws/Fangs/Horns/Hooves/Barbed Tail***, ***Immunity***, and ***Resistant Pattern*** – can be found in the **Mage 20** sourcebook **Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers**, as they represent abilities that are more suited to non-human entities than to all-too-human mages.

Burning Aura (1 pt. Merit)

To those who can sense it, your aura burns with amazing brilliance and clarity. Even folks who can't actually perceive this bright corona of energy realize that you're "different." Entities that *can* read your aura react accordingly; some will treat you with uncommon respect, while others will view you as a nice meal. The nature of your aura cannot be hidden easily (+2 to the difficulty of any attempt to do so), and while this is a dreadful disadvantage for, say, a Nephandus, people who prize forthright integrity may reduce their difficulties by -2 when they're trying to make an impression that's in accord with that vivid aura and affecting characters who can sense it.

Assuming that you employ these optional Traits, your ***Resonance*** and ***Synergy*** each get a vivid, one-dot boost from this Merit – see **Chapter Three**, pp. 133-134, for details. For aura colors and tones, see **Mage 20**, **p. 507**.

Green Thumb (1 pt. Merit)

Plants flourish from your touch. Although they don't bloom and grow on contact (a wildly paranormal effect which was part of this Merit's original form), they *do* attain a healthy boost when you work with them. Reduce the difficulty of all non-Arete rolls by -2, and reduce the difficulty of Arete rolls by -1, when you work with plants, trees, and other forms of vegetation –algae, mold, fungus, seaweed, and the like. Story-wise, your aura pulsates with green vitality, plant matter grows fast and robust in your presence, and your ***Resonance*** and ***Synergy*** reflect a powerful connection to the green world. A common Merit among Verbena, Bata'a, and other primal mystics, this could also represent a strange acumen for vegetative biomass that certain technomancers enjoy.

Bardic Gift (2 pt. Merit)

Blessed with uncanny inspiration, you create profoundly evocative artwork. Truth echoes through your words, blazes from your canvas, resonates in song, speaks silently in dance. Although artistic skill is, of course, important, this gift runs deeper than mere technique. Art is your passion, your spirit, your Truth. And that Truth manifests itself in whatever arts you pursue, up to and including the Magickal Arts.

When making a roll with the Art Talent, reduce the difficulty by -2. Even when the attempt itself falls short of your expectations (that is, when you fail a roll), your creations feature an unmistakable gleam of brilliance and a preternatural expression of Truth. Although you're not required (as a player) to employ artwork as part of your magickal focus, chances are good that your approach to magick *does* feature elements of painting, dance, music, and other manifestations of artistic expression.

Circumspect Avatar (2 pt. Merit)

You've never seen your Avatar, and probably doubt that such a thing exists. Sure, you have a shadow, and a reflection, or maybe a little dog who's followed you around since you were a kid and seems no older even though he should have died of old age years ago, but an *Avatar?* Nah – that's a buncha New Age hippie crap! You have yet to encounter any such thing, you don't go on "seekings" or whatever they're called, and you get your metaphysical insights the same way any normal person does: through everyday events in the everyday world.

Essentially, this Merit grants a "silent" Avatar – one that, for whatever reason, does not hound or guide your character but merely drops hints, cues, and clues that the mage either figures out or *doesn't* figure out on her own. Seekings and Epiphanies take place in the physical realm, typically as puzzles and dilemmas that happen to be related to issues that the mage needs to sort through in order to advance to the next level of understanding. During such situations, the Avatar may indeed appear (possibly even manifest – see the Merit: ***Manifest Avatar***, p. 71), but only as some apparently mundane person, creature or thing, not as an obviously paranormal entity. You could, for instance, get a call from your mother that sends you into an introspective mood which, in turn, leads you to figure out an important riddle from your past; Mom, of course, denies even having called you. Huh. So who could that call have been from, anyway? Or did you, perhaps, just imagine it after all?

Faerie Affinity (2 pt. Merit)

Fae beings like you. Drawn by an ineffable appeal, they seek you out and share secrets with you that few mortals even comprehend. System-wise, you lower the difficulty of your social rolls by -2 when you're dealing with changelings and related entities; in return, changelings reduce their difficulty by -2 when they attempt – through whatever method – to obtain Glamour from you, or to enchant you so as to bring you into their ephemeral realm. Story-wise, the Fae tend to favor you over other mortals, even when your temperaments would seem to be at odds with one another. A gruff Nocker, for example, normally has no use for frivolity... but in *your* case, you silly Cultist, he'll make this one exception!

Technomancers, being considered "banal" in the eyes of the Fae, may not purchase this Merit. Even if they don't belong to the Technocratic Union, the presence of such mages is metaphysical poison to the Dreaming Ones. (See **Changeling: The Dreaming** for details about the effects of Glamour and Banality on changelings.)

Medium (2 pt. Merit)

You possess an unnerving affinity for the Restless Dead... or perhaps it's that *they* possess an unnerving affinity for *you*. Although you cannot actually see ghosts unless you have at least one dot in the Spirit Sphere, those ghosts can talk to you, and you can talk to them. A successful Perception + Awareness roll allows you to sense their presence even if you can't see or hear them nearby, and your aura shines faintly like a spirit-beacon in the Shadowlands. As a result, the dead tend to favor you (unless they're trying to kill you), and can become quite chatty if they have something to say. Given how deeply mages prize information, such chattiness can be rather helpful and occasionally life-changing.

Because "chatty" can quickly become "obnoxious," this Merit is a double-sided blade. You reduce the difficulty of your social rolls by -2 when dealing with ghosts, and may perceive things that the living normally cannot understand. The *things* you perceive, though, aren't always pleasant, and – seeing as how ghosts tend to stick around because they have unfinished business to attend to – the dead can get downright annoying with their requests.

For details about the Restless Dead, see **Wraith: The Oblivion**. For system details about Sphere-based necromancy, see the section of that name in the **M20** sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 84-89**.

Unaging (2 pt. Merit)

The years seem to pass you by. Time moves on, but you remain essentially the same physical age as you were when this

Merit stopped your aging process. Maybe you discovered the Fountain of Youth, upgraded yourself to perpetual stability, assumed an odd relationship with the time stream, or entered an uncanny bargain that preserved your current age. And so, although you continue to accumulate the scars, experience, and perspective of age, your body maintains a consistent state of chronological development. Note that *this is not the same thing as immortality* – injuries and sickness can kill you just as surely as they'll kill any other person. Age-based decrepitude, however, is not something you'll have to worry about.

Celestial Affinity (3 pt. Merit)

You get along especially well with a certain type of spirit entity. Depending upon your practice, you might relate well with nature spirits, High Umbral Courtiers, Digital Web entities, the Restless Dead, the Loa, angelic or demonic beings, and so forth.

When you're dealing with entities within a single selected category, you reduce the difficulty of your summoning and negotiation rolls by -2. (See the section that deals with ***Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 90-95**.) *This bonus does not apply to attempts to bind or ward against such beings*, as it's based upon goodwill, not force. It does, however, apply to the Arete rolls when casting the summoning Effect (within the normal modifier limits, as usual), because the entities in question are more inclined to show up when you call upon them.

For three additional points per category, you may add another category of spirits, *assuming that your practice favors an affinity for such spirits*. (A BCD Void Engineer "ghost-buster," for example, could not purchase an Affinity for ghosts, though a necromancer could certainly do so.) If you abuse this goodwill, as one might imagine, this bonus, and the Merit, both go away – and might wind up being replaced by a Flaw like ***Immortal Enemy*** (p. 93) if your mage behaves in an especially foolish manner.

Cloak of the Seasons (3 pt. Merit)

Adverse weather does not bother you. Regardless of your clothing or lack thereof, you're essentially immune to the effects of exposure to harsh climates, as described in **Mage 20, p. 435**. You still need to eat, drink, and breathe – this Merit won't save you from starvation or suffocation – and climate-based obstacles (fog, high winds, snowdrifts, ice, etc.) hinder you as badly as they'll hinder anybody else. Aside from outright attacks by the elements, however, you remain untouched by extremes of temperature and climate. You might not always be *comfortable*, but you'll survive.

Cyclic Magick (3 pt. Merit /Flaw)

The strength or weakness of your Arts is tied to some periodic cycle – the phases of the moon, night or day, your menstrual periods, the rise and fall of the stock market, and so forth. At the peak of your cycle, your magick flows most easily; at its nadir, you find it challenging to work with your magick at all.

System-wise, this Trait is both a Merit *and* a Flaw, granting bonuses at one point in the cycle and penalties on its opposite point. At the highest point, you reduce your casting difficulties by -3 for one hour, while at the lowest point you increase them by +3 for one hour. On either end of that cycle, you subtract or add -1 /+1 to your casting difficulties for each hour on both sides – the surge and the ebb – of that cycle: -2 or + 2 for the two hours on each side of the peak or nadir, -1 or +1 on the two hours on the side of *those* two hours, and no modifiers during the rest of the time in between. If, for example, Victoria Ashley-Croft *bani* Flambeau has a peak at midnight and a low at noon, her player would receive a peak modifier of -3 difficulty at midnight, -2 difficulty at 11:00 PM and 1:00 AM, a -1 difficulty at 10:00 PM and 2:00 AM, and no modifiers otherwise, aside from the reverse modifiers (+3 at noon, +2 at 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM, and +1 at 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM) at the opposite end of that cycle.

Naturally, you'll need to decide just what this cycle is when you select this Trait, and then determine what the highest and lowest points of that cycle would be. This Merit must also be tied into your focus – intrinsically connected to the beliefs you hold and the practices you follow. Your choice of instruments is often tied to such cycles too; cycle-bound instruments include ***celestial alignments***, ***crossroads and crossing-days***, ***formulae and mathematics***, ***group rites***, ***money and wealth***, ***music*** (peaks and lulls in a song, movements in a symphony, etc.), ***numbers and numerology***, and ***offerings and sacrifices*** ("*when the stars are right*"). A stockbroker will be watching the peaks and ebbs on Wall Street, while a witch pays attention to the cycles of the moon or her blood. By observing your cycles, you'll have a good idea about the best and worst times to use your Arts. And by observing *you*, your allies and enemies may be able to figure those things out too.

Danger Sense (3 pt. Merit)

A heightened state of awareness allows you to sense impending harm. This gift could originate from primal perceptiveness, intense conditioning, spirit voices that warn you of danger, nanotech sensors, or other methods of refined cognizance. Whatever the source of this Merit might be, your Storyteller must make a secret Perception + Alertness roll for you when some otherwise hidden threat is heading toward your character.

The difficulty for this roll depends upon the immediacy of the danger; a distant, abstract sort of danger (like a plot to kill you) is far harder to sense than an onrushing disaster (like a sniper's bullet), and would thus have a higher difficulty (say, difficulty 10 for the plot, difficulty 6 for the bullet). A simple success would tell you that something's wrong, while a large number of successes could pinpoint the nature and location of the threat.

Your Storyteller, of course, is under no obligation to give you objective details about that threat. She could be as vague as "*A chill tightens across your scalp*," with perhaps a hint of the direction and nature of the danger's source ("*A sudden metallic clicking sound echoes in from behind your right side. What do you do?*").

Hands of Daedalus (3 pt. Merit)

You've got an innate gift for crafting machines and technology. Such devices seem to come to life in your hands, fitting easily into place and functioning with incredible precision once you've worked with 'em. Although this gift does not extend to the ins and outs of software technology, you can work on computer hardware (assuming that you know what you're doing) as naturally as you can tune a '58 Ford.

From a systems standpoint, any rolls you make to craft, repair, invent, or otherwise modify mechanical technologies are at -2 difficulty when you've got the opportunity to put those Hands of Daedalus to work. Tech-based magickal instruments (see the **Mage 20** entries for ***Armor***, ***Devices and Machines***, and other hardware-based technologies) and practices (see ***Craftwork*** and ***Hypertech*** in the ***Focus and the Arts*** section of **Mage 20**, **Chapter Ten**) function, in your hands, as ***Personalized Instruments*** **(Mage 20**, pp. **503 and 587-588)** once you've had a chance to get familiar with them... and to have *them* get familiar with you.

Lucky (3 pt. Merit)

Lady Fortune has a thing for you. As a result, you may re-roll a failed die roll (botches included) up to three times per story (***not*** *per session*). Each do-over may be rerolled only once, so don't push your luck *too* far.

Manifest Avatar (3 pt. Merit)

For most mages, the Avatar remains a mysterious figure, goading them from the sidelines and appearing primarily within a Seeking or during other moments of intense stress. For you, however, the Avatar is a vibrant presence in your life, as real to you as anyone else. Essentially a character in its own right, this manifested Avatar interacts with you on an almost daily basis. In certain situations, it might interact with other people, as manifestly real as any other person in your world.

The Manifest Avatar Merit embodies the Avatar as a full character under the Storyteller's control. On its own, this Merit reflects that Avatar as a person who only the associated mage can see, hear, and interact with on a physical level; in conjunction with the Background: ***Allies***, however, the Avatar becomes a character that *everyone* can see, hear, and feel. In both cases, the Avatar may come and go as it pleases, bound only by the physical laws with which it chooses to be bound. The physical Avatar's shell can be injured or killed, but that in itself does not kill the Avatar – merely its body. For obvious reasons, that solid Avatar should have a guise that won't be too vulgar or bizarre for the Consensus to endure – a cloaked, whispering figure, perhaps, but not a screeching, tentacled monstrosity. The manifested Avatar's Traits depend upon the value of the Allies Background, as well as the physical form of that incarnation. An equine or lupine Avatar, for instance, will have different Traits than an Avatar that manifests as a crow, shadow, mirror, or child.

Your Avatar does not hang a sign around her neck that proclaims *Avatar*. In the first edition **Cult of Ecstasy Tradition Book**, for example, Cassie deals with a manifested Avatar named Aria who never reveals herself to be anything other than a wild child who looks disturbingly like an alternate-reality version of Cassie and knows things no one else should know about Cassie's past, present, future, and inner self. (For details, see that book, **pp. 5-45**.) Unless either the mage or the Avatar announces its true identity, other characters don't usually think that your manifested Avatar is anything other than what it appears to be. Mages or Night-Folk who can see auras or souls might catch on, but most other folks remain clueless.

An Avatar manifesting only for the mage can affect the material world only when no other characters or devices can see that entity, although it might appear to others as an online presence, a ghostly figure, as odd sounds, or through other phenomena. An Allies-based Avatar remains as solid as it wants to be, lacking the powers of a human mage but possessed (literally) of the power to fade in and blink out as it desires. Again, the Manifested Avatar is a Storyteller character, with agendas and behavioral quirks that confound both the mage and his player. Although that Avatar has its mage's best interests at heart, it might play the role of a rival, lover, best friend, or nemesis... quite possibly all of them at once.

Mark of Favor (3 pt. Merit)

A godlike entity has claimed you as its own, and has stamped your features with evidence of that claim. You might have the bushy red hair and sly eyes of Reynard the Fox, the hearty temper and brawny build of Thor, the compassionate fury of the Christ in your eyes, or Legba's lame leg and penchant for corncob pipes and tobacco. Folks who understand the lore of your associated god-form recognize this Mark of Favor, and even those who don't know who you're marked by realize that there's something special about you.

An excellent companion to the Background: ***Legend***, and already an element of the Background: ***Totem*** (see ***Totem Mark*** in **Mage 20**, **p. 327**), this Trait provides a recognizable connection to a renowned god-form. Whether or not this actually *is* a sign of divine favor, of course, depends upon your Storyteller's preferred theological metaphysics. As far as your character is concerned, it totally *is*. Note that such favor isn't always a happy thing; mythology is full of people who shared dysfunctional relationships with divine parents and patrons!

When dealing with people who recognize the Mark and respect the deity that bestowed it, you subtract -2 from the difficulty of related social rolls. Opponents of your divine patron consider you an enemy, and although intimidation-style rolls still receive the -2 reduction in difficulty, rolls that attempt to get on the good side of such people add +2 to the difficulty instead.

A Mark of Favor may, *at the Storyteller's discretion*, bestow other miraculous talents, too. Strange things happen, and those things remain beyond the Marked character's control. Someone chosen by the Virgin Mary could possess a minor healing touch,



while the chosen of Thor has a literally shocking touch when he gets mad. Again, *these powers exist completely at the Storyteller's whim*, and suit the flavor of the story, not the desires of the player. Essentially, they're miracles granted by your god, both given and taken in mysterious ways.

Natural Channel (3 pt. Merit)

You've got an innate affinity with the Otherworlds. Sliding through from the mortal realm to the Three Worlds is easier for you than it is for other Awakened folk. System-wise, you subtract -2 from the difficulty of your rolls to penetrate the Gauntlet. Story-wise, crossing over feels, to you, like a primal sort of homecoming, as if you exist between worlds on an elemental level.

Natural Shapeshifter (3 pt. Merit)

Guided by an innate affinity for metamorphosis, you can change your shape more easily than most mages do. Such changes still demand the usual Life Sphere Ranks and Effects, but your difficulty for such rolls is reduced by -2 (the usual limits apply), and you don't need to worry about losing yourself in the new form, as described in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 20**. Such talents don't necessarily link you to the Night-Folk, although this Merit fits in well with ***Fae Blood*** or ***Shapechanger Kin*** (and the Mental Flaw: ***Feral Mind***, as well; see p. 52). The gift does not, however, affect your ability to change other people's shapes in any way. Such talent works for you alone.

For a potentially related paradigm and practice, see the **Chapter Three** entries ***We are Meant to be Wild*** (p. 93) and ***Animalism*** (pp. 197-199).

Oracular Ability (3 pt. Merit)

Everything, to you, has a richer significance than it might otherwise appear. The flight of birds, the fall of cards, the patterns of sand after a wave, a spatter of sacrificial blood... in your eyes, they're all clues to the Universal Mystery. You're good at deciphering such clues, and so while many enigmas remain unanswered, you often spot insights that other people – even mages – fail to see.

In game terms, you can make a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7) whenever the Storyteller feels you're in a position to perceive a hidden message in apparently random phenomena. If you *do* spot what appears to be a message, you can make a second roll of Perception + Esoterica (or Occult, whichever is higher) to see if you can interpret the message you think you see. The difficulty of this interpretation roll depends on how random the phenomena is; a deck of cards, for instance, is less random (difficulty 6 or 7) than a scatter of crow feathers (difficulty 8 or 9), and so is better suited for divination purposes. This doesn't mean you *can't* read that scatter of feathers, only that doing so is more challenging than interpreting a deck of cards!

A successful interpretation roll wins a vague yet potentially valuable answer from the Storyteller – couched, of course, in symbolic metaphors and wide-open meanings. (Storytellers, see ***The Deeper Level*** in **Mage 20, pp. 363-366**, and ***Prophecy and Hindsight*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 55-56**, for guidance.) Such answers are not at all reliable, naturally, but they stand a decent chance of being accurate enough to help you read patterns in apparently random chance.

Parlor Trick (3 pt. Merit)

You've honed a special trick – a simple, specific, non-combat application of your Arts – which you can perform without making a casting roll. Such tricks include things like conjuring a business card, stirring a pot without touching the spoon (or the pot), igniting your cigarette without lighters or a match, producing a small amount of light without mechanical contrivance, changing your hair color with a shake of your head, and so on. To a Sleeper, these tricks look like something a normal person could do with a mysterious bit of skill. You, of course, realize that the skill in question is not quite what they think it is.

Three important rules govern this Merit:

- It cannot be a feat with direct damage-producing combat applications (though a "light your cigarette" trick could also work with a stream of flowing gasoline). No popping claws or conjuring firearms!
- It must be a quick, simple action that a *Sleeper witness* could explain away as practiced sleight of hand.
- These tricks are limited to things you could do with Sphere Ranks 1 to 3, apply to *only one specific trick* (conjuring a rose, say, not conjuring anything that's roughly rose-sized), and you must have the Spheres necessary to perform the feat in the first place. *This Merit does not allow you to cast Effects above your normal abilities!*

Each trick costs three points, and must suit your character's metaphysical focus. You can take this Merit up to three times, total. Obviously vulgar feats (making yourself disappear in broad daylight) are prohibited, although a clever use of circumstances (the old Batman disappearance trick – see **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 77**) could be included in your bag of tricks.

This Merit is intended to give your character and chronicle a little extra flair. It should not be allowed as an end-around to skirt the rules, or as a secret weapon that he can use without consequences like Paradox. Under unfamiliar and /or hostile circumstances, like stirring someone else's pot in someone else's kitchen, this Parlor Trick might not work at all.

Spirit Magnet (3 to 7 pt. Merit or Flaw)

Ephemeral entities flock to your presence. The essence of who you are – benign or malignant – draws spirits to you, and they, in turn, affect the essence of who you are. For the most part, these entities cluster around you in the Penumbra, invisible to mortal perceptions; whenever you cross the Gauntlet, though (either with your perceptions or with your body), they're waiting for you there. Spirits that can manifest physical forms may come across the Gauntlet to visit you, and those that cannot take on physical bodies still energize the spiritual atmosphere in your vicinity. Whether or not this is a good thing for you depends upon whether you select this Trait as a Merit or a Flaw:

- The Merit form of Spirit Magnet draws generally benevolent spirits – Naturae, Lunes, totem and animal entities of the gentler variety, and so on. These spirits protect you from malignant entities, warn you of impending danger, offer advice, help you out when you visit the Otherworlds, and generally make your life easier. Folks who can sense those spirits (mediums, shamans, medicine-folk, werecreatures, etc.) tend to favor you; after all, if the better sorts of spirits like you, then you must be someone worth knowing.
- The Flaw version represents the presence of malevolent spirits – Banes, demons, and other nasty Umbral beasts. Summoned by curses or spiritual corruption, these entities seek to tempt you, poison you, feed off your vitality, and otherwise turn your life into a self-contained Hell On Wheels. Spirit-sensitive folk will avoid you unless they're into that sort of thing, and werewolves will consider you to be "of the Wyrm" (whatever the hell *that* means), if only because of the company you keep. Although you might not consider yourself a bad person at heart, your spiritual companions say otherwise!

The value of this Merit of Flaw is, as always, based on how helpful or troublesome the spirits can be, how powerful they are, and how many of them you have to deal with when they appear.

- (3 points) Minor entities occasionally offer aid or hindrance.
- (4 points) Minor entities show up frequently, or in small numbers.
- (5 points) Minor entities surround you often, whether you want them to or not, and more potent ones have taken interest in your existence.
- (6 points) You have the interest of one or two entities of significance, and plenty of minor ones pay great attention to you.
- (7 points) You're never alone, even when you probably wish you could be.

This spiritual companionship could be directly opposed to your true nature. A really awful person might attract benevolent entities who want to save her, while a veritable St. Anthony could be plagued with demons intent on fucking up his soul. Even so, such constant presence *does* have an effect on your overall health. Mind, body, and spirit are interwoven

whether we want to recognize that or not, and a mortal who attracts Otherworldly entities has got *something* unusual going on under the skin.

Spirit Mentor (3 pt. Merit)

A ghost, Loa, or other ephemeral entity has taken a special interest in you. As an expression of favor, this entity teaches you things few mortals ever have the opportunity to learn. Although those lessons do not include Sphere-based magick, you could learn insights that help you to expand your knowledge and better understand the nature of Reality. (See ***Raising or Learning Spheres*** in **Mage 20**, p. 337.) More often, though, this entity tells you secrets, offers you enigmas, and helps you work through situations that would leave most mortals scratching their heads or crying in corners.

Your Spirit Mentor could also teach you new Abilities, or help you improve the ones you have, if such teaching seems appropriate to the spirit in question. A data-entity might be able to teach you about computers, while an incarnation of Zhengyi Zhenren's tiger could teach you tiger-form kung fu. Such teaching tends to take place in the Otherworlds, or in dreams, rather than in the material realm, although a spirit who can ***Materialize*** (as the Charm of that name) could certainly teach a person in her own home realm.

As with other character-related Traits, your mentor is a Storyteller character with its own agendas, personality, and so on. This Merit could be combined with the Backgrounds: ***Ally***, ***Familiar***, ***Mentor***, or ***Totem*** to represent a spirit who plays several roles in your life. Depending on how active your ephemeral friend is in your everyday life, other folks might know about this mentor, consider it to be "part of the family," or think you're utterly out of your mind... and if that spirit clashes with the company you keep (like a Loa hanging with a Technocrat, or a demon with a Chorister), your friend might get you into hot water on the human side of your life!

Supernatural Companion (3 pt. Merit)

You've got a friend among the Night-Folk: a vampire, a changeling, a werebeast, a ghost, or some other entity who exists outside the Sleeping Masses. This friend isn't quite as reliable as an ***Ally*** Background character, but can aid you if need be. That door swings both ways, of course; your companion will also call on you from time to time, and not always on the most convenient occasions!

Folks (and Night-Folks) probably frown upon this friendship. Werewolves, for example, aren't fond of you Caern-robbing mage-types! That's especially true if you're a Technocrat who's buddy-buddy with one of those damned Reality Deviants, or a Tradition mage who pals around with a bloodsucking fiend. Yeah, this friendship is worth the trouble, but it can really be a hassle at times. Whoever and whatever this friend might be, the Storyteller creates and controls the character in question... with all the strange priorities, conflicting needs, and secret agendas that situation suggests.

Stormwarden /Quantum Voyager (3 or 5 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, p. 643**.

Deathwalker (4 pt. Merit)

The Underworld welcomes you. While most Umbral travelers are more or less barred from the Shadowlands and Low Umbra unless they possess special magicks (or have died), you can step sideways into the Dead Lands with a simple application of Spirit 3. When you do so, your aura assumes the pale tone of death, and you become essentially indistinguishable from a ghost unless some knowledgeable entity makes a successful Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 7) to see you for what you really are. If the Avatar Storm is still raging in your chronicle, you can pass into the Low Umbra without suffering the Storm's effects.

This sort of "gift" often leaves macabre traces on the mortals it favors. Hence, this Merit is well-suited for the Flaws: ***Echoes***, ***Uncanny***, and ***Primal Marks***. Thanks to their innate ties to the Dead Lands, Deathwalkers, as a rule, view the Otherworlds through the Vidare Mortem, suffer from ***Morbidity*** Quiets, and tend to have a rather fatalistic view of life.

Fae Blood (4 pt. Merit)

Your veins pulse with the enigmatic blood of the fae. Although not a full changeling, you possess a distant tie to the Dreaming by way of your strange heritage. In **Changeling: The Dreaming** terms, you're *kinain*: a mortal human related to their kind. Your Banality rating is low (no higher than 4, and often lower than that), and you remain permanently *enchanted* in the sense that you perceive, and are affected by, the changeling world. As a default member of that eldritch fellowship, you also tend to get swept up in their odd intrigues, and know an uncomfortable amount about their hidden world.

As with the Merit: ***Faerie Affinity***, this Merit is forbidden to technomancers of all kinds. Their Banality is too high to sustain this gift of the blood.

Shapechanger Kin (4 pt. Merit)

Through a distant but noticeable quirk of lineage, you share a touch of the Changing Blood. In plain English, you're related to one of the were-breeds: werewolves, werecats, werecrows, and so forth. This gift does not grant you their powers or Gnosis, but you probably know a few secrets (in game terms, ***Lore*** Knowledge) about your kin. You remain immune to the primal-fear Delirium that affects most people in a werecreature's presence (not that mages suffer from it anyway); can travel in the Otherworlds longer than most mortals manage, without suffering the ***Disconnection*** and Acclimation side-effects of such travel (detailed in **Mage 20, pp. 482-483**); and possibly enjoy some goodwill from your feral family, so long as you haven't done anything to piss them off. *Their* enemies, however, are *your* enemies, which makes this an *extremely* double-edged Merit.

Twin Souls (4 pt. Merit)

To you, the term *soulmate* is literally true. Your Avatar has a twin that has been embodied within another mortal body. That other person (typically a human being, but potentially an animal) shares your Nature and Essence, and possibly your Demeanor as well. Even so, your "twin" can be a very different person – different gender, different ethnicity, different culture, and again possibly even a "higher" animal like a wolf, bear, hawk, bison, and so forth. That person might live on the other side of the world, and may not even know that you exist. If soul-twins meet in person, though, both feel an unmistakable connection to one another. This connection, however, might not necessarily translate to goodwill. Blood-siblings often clash, and soulmates can clash as well.

If that twin is also a mage (many twin Avatars are not yet Awakened), then both mages have the same Avatar rating. You can both share Quintessence and cast spells together if you happen to be physically touching (or, in the Umbra, ephemerally touching). In this case, the character with the highest Arete rating and Sphere Ranks is the one whose Traits get used to cast those Effects. Both mages, when they're within arm's reach, also get an amount of bonus Quintessence points that's equal to their Avatar rating; if Ryan Summers and his twin Sylvia Jane have three dots in Avatar, they each get an additional three points of Quintessence when they're close enough to touch one another. For details about collaborative spellcasting, see ***Acting in Concert*** in **Mage 20**, **pp. 542-543**. Shared souls, however, also share equally in any Paradox gathered by their magicks, with each twin separately getting the full amount of Paradox. If Ryan and Sylvia cast an Effect that earns 10 points of Paradox, then both Ryan and Sylvia get 10 Paradox points each.

Whether or not your twin is a mage, you can use magick to keep track of them once you've met your twin. A single dot of Correspondence will let you know where your soulmate is, a single dot in Life will let you know their current state of health, and a single dot in Mind allows you to share thoughts with one another. A twin's death, however, is a shattering event; if your twin dies, you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or else suffer the psychic shock of ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***. Until that twin's Avatar reincarnates (which might not happen in your own lifetime), and is met in person once again, you cannot use the shared powers you had once enjoyed.

As with other character-based Traits, your twin is not a walking Merit but a character in their own right. Both twins could be roleplayed by different players in the same group, and probably should not be played by the same player. The quest to find a soulmate, a bitter dispute between soulmates, two soulmates on opposing factions of the Ascension War – such stories could provide the foundation for pivotal events and themes in your chronicle. This Merit goes well with the Background: ***Allies***, the Merit: ***True Love***, and the Flaws: ***Enemy***, ***Sleeping with the Enemy***, and ***Ward***. Because of the already-Awakened natures of the Night-Folk, however, a soul-twin *cannot* be a vampire, werecreature, changeling, or other paranormal entity.

Umbral Affinity (4 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20**, **p. 644**.

Unbondable (4 pt. Merit)

Your soul remains free from the vampiric blood bond, and resistant to other forms of metaphysical fealty. Although you may still be compelled into service through Sphere magick, or impressed by dominating powers like vampiric Presence or changeling Chicanery, your Willpower is considered to be two dots higher with regards to resisting such domination. (See **Mage 20**, p. **519**, and ***Influence-Magick Difficulties*** and ***Resistance, Recognition, and Duration*** in **How Do You *DO* That?**, **pp. 116-117**.)

A rare and potent Merit, this gift may cost double its usual cost in a chronicle that's filled with vampires, especially if the mages in that chronicle make a habit of guzzling vampire blood...

Ghoul (5 pt. Merit)

The blood of vampiric Kindred has made you something more than human. Willingly or otherwise, you have supped on a vampire's blood, and although you're probably not blood-bound to her service any longer (unless you *are*), that creature's unnatural vitality has become your own. Trouble is, you need more vitae to sustain your uncanny abilities... and, as many mages have discovered, such blood is *exceedingly* addictive.

A ghouled character ages very slowly, gets one automatic success on any Strength-based roll, and inflicts one extra die of damage with all hand-to-hand, non-magickal attacks. If your chronicle employs **Vampire: The Masquerade** rules, your character also has a blood pool, one dot in Potence, and the potential to buy and employ Fortitude, Potence, and an ability from the initiating vampire's clan.

That's the good part; the bad parts involve the constant craving for more vitae, the loss of those supernatural bonuses after roughly a month without vampire blood, several dots in ***Resonance*** (or the ***Echoes*** Flaw, detailed in **Mage 20**, **pp. 646-647**) that reflect the corrupt nature of the undead, and the obvious drawbacks of hanging around with vampires just so you can drink their blood.

Clear Sighted (5 pt. Merit)

Even without employing your Arts, you have a preternatural gift for seeing things as they *are*, not as they appear to be. Illusions, disguises, cloaking spells, and other forms of trickery rarely deceive your eyes.

In game terms, you can make a Perception + Awareness roll to see through metaphysical deception powers: vampiric Disciplines, faerie cantrips, werecreature Gifts, Sphere-based illusions, and other powers that are based on deceiving a witnesses' perceptions. *This roll works* ***only*** *against powers that deceive the target's perceptions,* ***not*** *against any other form of Gift, Discipline, cantrip, and so forth.* (Vampiric Obfuscate, for example, but not Presence or Dominate.)

Mages, the Blood Bond, and the Effects of Vitae

As mentioned nearby, mages can become ghouls, enjoying the benefits of vitae powers at the cost of hunger and the blood bond. A ghouled mage becomes a mystic addict, her thirst driving her to debase her higher calling. Even a Nephandus avoids this state if she can help it. At best, the ghoul-thirst drives a mage to hunt and drain vampires – a risky calling even for the most accomplished mystics!

More often, a ghouled mage becomes blood bound to the vampire from whom she feeds. Any character – mage or otherwise – who drinks the blood of a certain vampire on three separate occasions becomes a blood-bound thrall to that vampire. From that point onward, the character will do almost anything, short of obvious suicide, on behalf of her regent. The regent can ask for, or even demand, service, and the thrall will feel compelled to fulfill that request. If the regent tries to ***Dominate*** the thrall (using the vampiric Discipline of that name, as described in the **Vampire: The Masquerade** rulebook), his difficulty is two levels lower than it would normally be. Good treatment deepens the bond, and abuse lessens it but cannot fully dispel it. Only time, distance, and a significant effort of will can do that; even then, a strong fascination remains.

Mages, willful creatures themselves, can try to resist the blood bond's effects. If the mage tries to beat the bond, that mage's player needs to roll her Willpower against difficulty 8 and accumulate one success for each time the mage has fed from that vampire (three successes minimum). If she makes that roll, the player must spend one Willpower point each turn in order to resist the bond. The length of time for which the mage remains free depends upon what she's trying to do; if she's simply plotting against the regent, the resistance can last a scene; if she's trying to attack him, the resistance lasts only a turn or two. After that, the compulsion returns – often mixed with a sense of regret for having defied the master, and disgust at herself for having gotten into the situation to begin with.

Powerful magick can break the bond. Through a combination of Life 4, Mind 3, Entropy 3, and Prime 1 – plus at least three dots in ***Lore (Vampires)*** – a mage can break the bond's hold on another person (difficulty 8, successes as above). A mage cannot, however, use that magick to break her own bond. One of the secret favors that the Order of Hermes owes to the Verbena Tradition involves the Verbenae breaking blood bonds on several dozen Hermetic magi.

Even without the bond, a ghouled mage suffers a vicious addiction to vampire blood. In game terms, this counts as the ***Addiction*** Flaw at its highest level, and she also becomes ***Deranged*** (again, as per that Flaw) through her obsession with consuming more vitae. She enjoys the benefits of a typical ghoul, but she suffers the same pains, too.

As an *optional rule*, she might also suffer metaphysical corruption from that blood. If a mage remains ghouled – with or without the blood bond – for one year for each point of Avatar + Arete, she begins to lose points from her Avatar Background, at a rate of one point per year. Once the Avatar is gone, she begins to lose Arete... and after Arete is gone, she loses the powers of Awakening forever. The thirst has consumed her soul... and for that reason, among others, smart mages avoid the thirst for literal damnation.

The difficulty for that roll is generally 5 + the highest Sphere Rank or other level involved in that power; a Forces 2 /Prime 2 illusion, then, would be difficulty 7, while a vampire's Mask of a Thousand Faces (Obfuscate 3) would be difficulty 8. If a character could normally get a roll to see through the illusion (as shown in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 129-132**), then your character subtracts -3 from her difficulty when trying to do so.

Your clear sight also reduces your difficulty by -3 when you try to see through a disguise, a cloaking spell or device, or other attempts to conceal the truth from an onlooker. It does *not*, however, allow you to see through darkness, notice stealthing or invisible characters, or otherwise perceive something that you would not be able to see without this Merit; combining this Merit with the physical Merit: ***Acute Senses***, however, could make you a formidably perceptive character.

"Immortal" (5 or 7 pt. Merit)

Thanks to some uncanny gift, you age slowly (if at all) and are extremely hard to kill. This gift comes not from Sphere magick but from a metaphysical legacy or curse that transcends the fleeting nature of the flesh. You're not *truly* immortal, as death will probably claim you eventually; by normal standards, though, you exist outside of the usual range of human mortality.

This Merit features two levels:

- (5 points) You age very slowly – perhaps one year for every passing decade – and eventually recover (at the usual speed) from any injuries and illnesses that do not immediately kill you outright. A wasting disease or infection, for instance, won't kill you (though you might wish it would), but a bullet in the heart would do so.
- (7 points) In addition to the slow-aging process, you're also immune to death itself unless you meet your *special doom* (as described below) or have your body completely obliterated. Shooting won't kill you, poison won't kill you, starvation won't kill you, but being incinerated or dissolved in acid would end your life for good. Otherwise, your wounds heal at the usual rate, eventually bringing you back from the dead... which, if you've been buried, embalmed, entombed, or otherwise trapped could be a *very* bad thing for you!

Regardless of the level of this Merit, you must have at least one *special doom*: an event that will kill your ass dead for good. This doom could involve decapitation, burning of your body, immersion in salt water, removal of the eternal revivification unit installed within your heart, and so forth. This doom must be determined before the chronicle begins, and if it ever befalls you... well, life was fun while it lasted, right?

This Merit goes well with Traits like the Background: ***Legend***, the Supernatural Merits: ***Mark of Favor***, ***Nephilim***, ***Spark of Life***, and ***Twin Souls***, or the Supernatural Flaws: ***Phylactery*** and ***Primal Marks***. (See the appropriate entries throughout this section.) It *cannot* be taken in addition to the Merit: ***Nine Lives*** (also in this section) and, for obvious reasons, this Merit might not be available to player characters within your chronicle at all.

Inner Knight (5 pt. Merit)

In your heart of hearts, you're a hero. While your companions work toward their own selfish ends, you embody a higher purpose. This purpose guides you in uncanny ways that feel, at times, as if you're being moved by a force greater than yourself – a *noble* force, naturally, but one that transcends even your personal Enlightenment. In dreams, you see yourself as a Warrior of Reason, a Champion of Truth. A paladin. A genius. A knight of everything that is worth defending.

Intended more for Technocratic operatives and skeptical technomancers than for mages who accept reincarnation as a metaphysical truth, this Merit grants you special gifts when it seems like all hope has been lost. These gifts allow you to...

- access Traits you don't possess, as per the Background: ***Dream*** (at a rating of 5) but without entering a trance;
- add five temporary points to your Willpower Trait, to use during that "hope is lost" crisis;
- ...and perhaps recall things from a previous life that the character could not possibly have known – a language she does not know, an escape route in a place he's never visited, a person they've never met before, and so forth.

These boosts last only through the current scene, but include a burst of vitalizing energy and a sense of your inner hero coming through to save the day again.

This isn't the sort of thing you talk about, of course, especially not if you're an agent of the Technocratic Union. The benefits, though, cannot be denied, even if their source is clearly... well, improbable, at best. And while this Merit was originally created for the sourcebook **Guide to the Technocracy**, any mage with a sense of higher purpose can take it. Just remember that the biggest difference between a knight and a murderer is the side of his sword you happen to be on at the time.

Legendary Attributes (5 pt. Merit)

Gifted with the strength of Shango or the beauty of Lucifer, you may exceed the human capacity for one Attribute Trait. That Trait is not automatically higher than usual (you still need to spend points to raise the favored Attribute), but you may purchase up to six dots in a given Attribute for your character, exceeding the usual limit of five dots.

Beyond that higher maximum, you also get one heroic capability that's linked to that Attribute. The Shango-strength mage might always inflict at least one health level of damage with hand-to-hand blows, while the Luciferian seducer could score an automatic success whenever he tries to charm someone who ought to know better. These bonuses are always subject to Storyteller approval, however, and they don't kick in until you reach six dots in the given Trait. Not even Lucifer, after all, possessed his full charm when he was just a little devil...

Powerful Ally (5 to 8 pt. Merit)

You've got seriously badass friends – a vampire lord, a faerie noble, a werewolf pack, Umbrood courtiers, or other similarly magnificent entities. In most respects, this is the ***Supernatural Companion*** Merit but with a much higher power-level... a level which might be beyond the capacity of mages below the Master rank. And while the Storyteller determines who your friends are, what they can do, and what they want out of their relationship with you, the value of this Merit depends upon their relative benefit to you:

- (5 points) One buddy of considerable power and influence within his community – a Prince of the City, a Garou elder, and so forth.
- (6 points) A small group of ***Supernatural Companions*** (five or so), or an especially powerful representative of his kind.
- (7 points) A larger group of Companions (around a dozen), or two or three powerful friends.
- (8 points) Over a dozen Companions, a handful of powerful friends, or one ally of near-godlike power.

Again, the Storyteller decides who these allies are, why they're interested in your goodwill, and what the cost of their aid might be. You get nothing for nothing, after all, especially not when such beings are involved! For a commensurate level of enemies, see the Flaw: ***Immortal Enemy***, p. 93.

Shattered Avatar (5 pt. Merit)

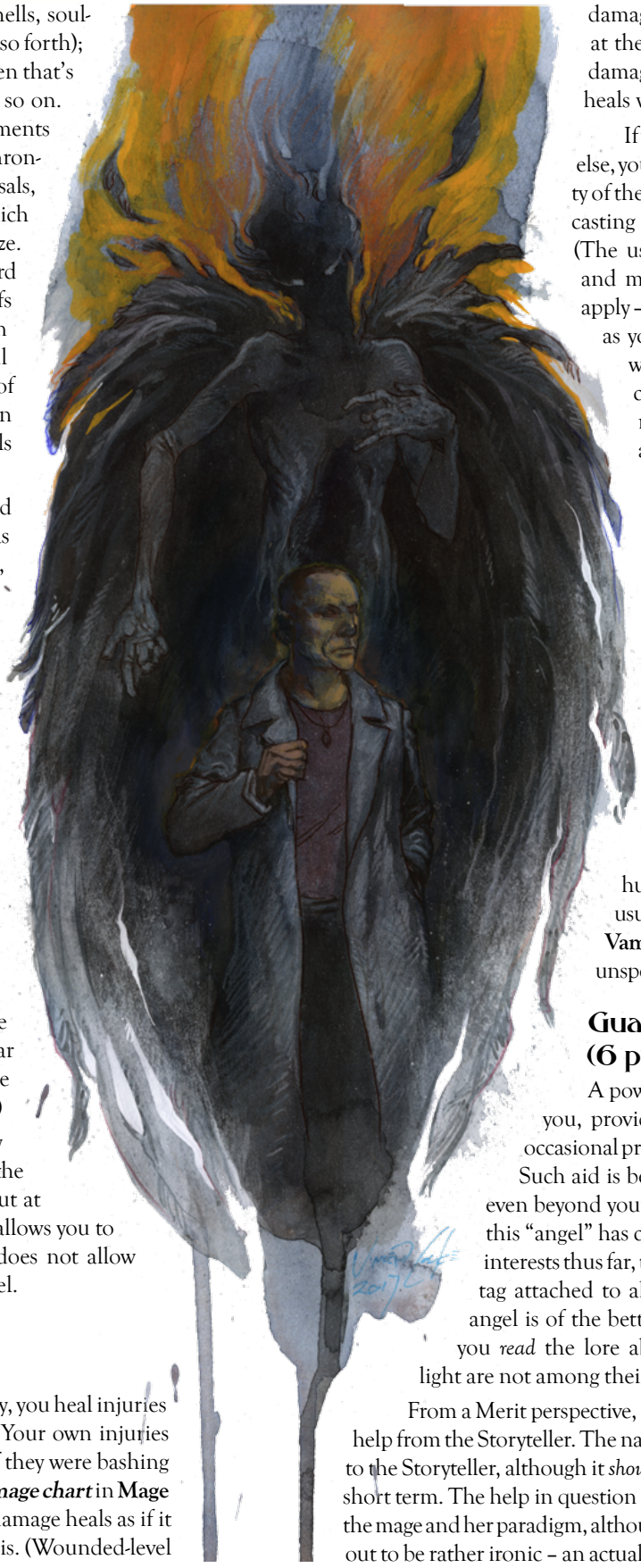
Your Avatar has been broken into pieces by some past-life trauma. As a result, the part within you is incomplete... but that situation can be rectified. If and when you locate the missing pieces of your Avatar, you could make that inner spirit stronger. In gamespeak, this Merit allows you to increase your ***Avatar Background*** after character creation – a thing that cannot, ordinarily, be done. (See **Mage 20**, **p. 336**.)

As with ***Twin Souls***, above, this Merit provides plenty of dramatic story hooks. The missing pieces of your Avatar might be incarnated in other people; trapped in spiritual prisons

(Paradox Realms, demonic hells, soul-snares, enchanted gems, and so forth); embedded in a tree in a garden that's warded by five dragons, and so on. The quest for your soul-fragments can be an epic part of your chronicle, with puzzles, twists, reversals, betrayals, and battles for which your soul is literally the prize. This sort of thing might be hard to reconcile with your beliefs if, for example, you happen to be a Technocrat. Still, until you unite the missing bits of your Avatar, there'll be an essential part of you that feels incomplete.

The Storyteller should determine exactly what it was that shattered your Avatar, and what you need to do in order to reunite the various bits into one spirit again. Whether or not she shares that information with you is up to her – it might be something you'll discover over the course of the game. With each piece restored, you add one dot to your Avatar Background rating, unless that Avatar was embodied in another mage; in that case, his Avatar rating gets added to your own if you manage to kill him... and if he kills you first, then *your* Avatar gets added to *his* own. (There can, apparently, be only one.)

No matter how many pieces are involved, however, the Avatar Background maxes out at 5 dots. Although this Merit allows you to raise your Trait's rating, it does not allow you to raise it above that level.



Spark of Life (5 pt. Merit)

Blessed with great vitality, you heal injuries with heroic speed and ease. Your own injuries from lethal damage heal as if they were bashing damage (see the ***Healing Damage chart*** in **Mage 20, p. 406**), and aggravated damage heals as if it were one level higher than it is. (Wounded-level damage, for instance, would heal at the Injured-level rate.) Bashing damage, regardless of its extent, heals within an hour.

If you're trying to heal someone else, you subtract -2 from the difficulty of the roll, even if that roll involves casting a Life Sphere healing Effect. (The usual +3 maximum modifier and minimum difficulty of 3 still apply – see **Mage 20, p. 503**.) As long as you remain in physical touch with the injured party, that character uses your healing rate as her own. Your touch also soothes minor pains – muscle spasms, headaches, and so forth – within a minute or two.

Beyond its healing powers, this rush of life-energy simply *feels* good, too. Your aura shines with bright vitality, and your Resonance reflects your strong connection to the primal life-force. On the inevitable downside, vampires find your blood delicious – twice as potent as normal human vitae (worth double the usual blood points, for players of **Vampire: The Masquerade**) – and unspeakably refreshing.

Guardian Angel (6 pt. Merit)

A powerful entity is watching over you, providing advice, assistance, and occasional protection when things get ugly. Such aid is beyond your control (perhaps even beyond your comprehension) and while this "angel" has certainly supported your best interests thus far, there could be a terrible price-tag attached to all this help. You think your angel is of the better sort, but seriously – have you *read* the lore about angels? Sweetness and light are not among their more noted characteristics.

From a Merit perspective, this Trait provides occasional help from the Storyteller. The nature of said help is entirely up to the Storyteller, although it *should* be beneficial in at least the short term. The help in question should also suit the nature of the mage and her paradigm, although that suitability might turn out to be rather ironic – an actual angel, for example, watching

over an Infernalist mage, or a nature spirit protecting an avowed Technocrat. The helpful party may be waiting for the mage to "see the light," honoring an ancient vow to the mage's ancestors, leading the protected party toward a new and unexpected Path, or perhaps setting him up for a final revelation that could be more terrible than the things the angel has been driving away.

From a Storyteller standpoint, we recommend playing up the mysterious and potentially frightening nature of this guardian "angel." Legendary angels tend to be notoriously bloody in their work, and can scare the living hell of mortals even when their intentions are technically righteous. As a Storyteller, determine *who* is helping the mage out, and why; that information, of course, can be for you to know and your players to wonder about. Whenever the angel manifests, play up the implacable weirdness of such entities, couching their appearances in eerie symbolism and elemental phenomena (winds, fires, earthquakes, and so forth) whenever they appear. (For suggestions, see **Mage 20**, **pp. 356-359** and **363-367**.)

Conversely, the angel could be an apparently mundane person or animal who just happens to unleash hell on the mage's behalf. The animal spirits, minions, and elementals described in **Mage 20**, **Appendix I**, represent the more sedate end of the guardian angel spectrum; stranger beings could include protoplasmic globs, shimmering energies, horrific beasts, and unnamable *things* that serve powers best undreamed of. Even if the angel is exactly that – a messenger from the Biblical God – such messengers can be pretty frightening. Check out Ezekiel 1-10, Genesis 3, Revelations 4, and other awe-inspiring manifestations. If the Powers That Be behind this guardian angel are more along the lines of Pagan gods or cosmic horrors, this unearthly Merit could unleash some rather scary things...

Nine Lives (6 pt. Merit)

Oh, you lucky bastard! Somehow, you manage to cheat the Reaper with hair-raising regularity. If a die roll would result in your character's death, the person who made that roll must roll again. If the second roll allows your character to live, then you and /or your Storyteller mark off one of your nine "lives" and your character survives the thing that would otherwise have killed her. If that roll fails, then one "life" gets marked off anyway and another roll is made. The rolls continue until either the character survives or the lives get used up. As the name suggests, however, this Merit lasts only nine times, tops. And if the final die roll *still* results in your character's death... well, your luck was bound to run out sooner or later anyway.

Sphere Natural (6 pt. Merit)

For a single element of magick – the Sphere of your choice – you enjoy an innate proficiency. The powers of that Sphere come to you more easily than usual, and you advance faster in that field of knowledge than you do in other Spheres. System-wise, you pay 70% of the usual experience cost, rounded up, when advancing in that Sphere. Naturally, such advancement costs even less when you're raising your Affinity Sphere.

Rank	Cost /Affinity Sphere Cost
New Sphere:	7 pts.
2	6 /5 pts.
3	11 /10 pts.
4	17 /15 pts.
5	23 /20 pts.

The **Mage 20** version of this Merit costs more than the version presented in previous editions because the cost of improving Spheres with experience has gone down, and so the benefits involved in this Merit have gone up. You may select this Merit only once, for a single Sphere, and that Sphere should have some intrinsic connection to your mage's concept, backstory, and magickal focus. This is, after all, an Art that comes naturally to you, and so that predisposition should come through in many different aspects of your character's personality.

Avatar Companion (7 pt. Merit)

From lifetime to lifetime, you share a bit of your Avatar with a companion who follows you through incarnations, recalling more about their details than you do. Although he's not as powerful as you are, and lacks the metaphysical prowess of the Merits: ***Twin Soul*** or ***Shattered Avatar*** (above), this companion knows a great deal about your reincarnated self... quite a bit more about it than then you do. This loyal (if not always agreeable) character literally follows you for life, typically ending his life when you do; in the meantime, he provides insights, advice, information about previous lifetimes, and whatever other forms of aid he can possibly offer. Like the Merit: ***Guardian Angel***, the Avatar Companion is essentially a walking boost from your Storyteller, subject to her whims but acting in your best interests... for the most part, anyway.

Unless it's purchased in addition to the Background: ***Allies***, your companion isn't anything special; he could be a person or animal, but not a vampire, a werebeast, or some other Night-Folk entity. Your Avatar Companion could also be a ***Ward***, the focus of ***True Love***, or perhaps an embodiment of a ***Manifest Avatar***. Treat him badly enough, and he might become an ***Enemy***. (See all appropriate entries for details.) As with all other character-based Traits, this companion has his own personality, desires, and so on. He may be loyal, but he's not suicidal, and isn't likely to be thrilled if the mage decides to abuse his loyalty!

Dual Affiliation (7 pt. Merit)

You've been initiated and trained in two different Awakened groups. Perhaps you were a Verbena who gravitated toward the Virtual Adepts, or a Man in Black who sought refuge among the Templars. Whatever your history and affiliations might be, you're intimately familiar with both groups, have connections (not necessarily friends) in both groups, and may use and understand the practices, tools and beliefs (in short, the focus) of either group.

Rules-wise, your mage enjoys the benefits of each affiliation. If he's a former Technocrat who went over to the mystic side, he can still use technomagick while transcending the usual Technocratic bans regarding Arete and focus. When raising a Sphere, your character gets to use the Affinity Sphere rate for one Sphere per group. His former associates probably don't view him very favorably, though, unless he "cross-trained" within friendly groups, like a Dreamspeaker who went Ecstatic or a Hermetic who joined the Children of Knowledge.

For additional details about this subject, see **Chapter Three**'s ***Focus FAQ***, p. 174.

Nephilim /Laham (7 pt. Merit)

Long ago, it has been said, immortals walked the earth, siring offspring whose descendants still live among us now. The Hebrew Bible refers to them as *nephilim*, an ambiguous word that seems to be related to root words for "fallen," "prisoners," and "overseers." Later transliterations refer to them as *giants*, *monsters*, *watchers*, and *the fallen* (or *violent*) *ones*. Were they gods? Angels? Demons? Not even the Awakened know for sure; you, however, have a bit of High Umbral essence within you, and this nephilim inheritance – known sometimes by the demon-blooded name of *laham* – marks you as something more than merely human (Awakened or otherwise).

A living crossroads between the Astral Realm and the mortal world, you exist in a heightened state of spiritual essence. Your aura burns with unearthly intensity, and your presence frightens many Otherworldly denizens. Your connection to High Umbral entities might involve a distant relationship to primordial sires, or the far more recent activities of mortals and spirits who shared a distinctly carnal relationship. ("*Mom, seriously – I need to know the truth about Dad*") Are you part-demon? Descended from an angel? Sired by an entity whose nature transcends mortal concepts like "good" and "evil"? You probably don't even know, although events in your chronicle might reveal the truth whether you want to learn it or not.

System-wise, this Merit confers the following drawbacks and benefits:

- As noted above, your aura blazes with inhuman clarity and brilliance.
- Your temperament favors your Umbral ancestor, and you tend to act accordingly.
- You must take at least three points' worth of Physical Flaws to reflect the unstable nature of your physical form and the surging metaphysical energies it contains. These Flaws do not count toward your total Flaw points, nor do you get points for taking those Flaws.
- Those energies give you a Quintessence rating of 7, and those points automatically refresh up to that seven-point maximum each time you go to sleep, regardless of your Avatar rating.
- If your chronicle employs the ***Resonance*** rules in **Chapter Two**, you begin play with three points in Resonance, not one. If not, you get three points' worth of the Flaw: ***Echoes***. Again, those phenomena reflect the temperament of your Umbral ancestor.
- You subtract -1 from the difficulties of your casting rolls when you cast Effects using the Mind Sphere, the Spirit Sphere, or both in relation to the High Umbra. If, for example, the demon-blooded laham mage Jenatrix wanted to read someone's mind, her casting difficulty would be normal; if she wanted to project her astral self into the High Umbra, however, she'd reduce the difficulty by -1.
- You can travel *physically* into the High Umbra by using a Mind 4 /Spirit 3 Effect.
- When attempting to intimidate, command, or bargain with High Umbral entities, you add two dice to whichever dice pool you happen to be using in that attempt. (For details, see ***The Bargaining Process*** in **How Do You *DO* That? pp. 91-95**.) Despite your advantage, however, using your uncanny heritage as leverage will not exactly endear you to the entities in question. In such negotiations, it's generally more constructive to use a carrot than a stick.
- On a related note, you suffer a penalty of +2 to the difficulty of your rolls to resist, soak or counter rituals cast by Hermetic High Ritual wizards or Awakened clerics from the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian denominations. These folks have spent millennia studying your kind, and be ye angel or be ye demon, they know how to deal with you more effectively than most mages do. (By *rituals*, we're referring to extended-roll ceremonial magicks, not off-the-cuff spells. Your chances are as good as anybody else's if a wizard tosses a lightning bolt at you; if he draws up a summoning circle, though, you're kinda screwed.)
- *At the Storyteller's option*, you may also receive up to seven points in the ***Advantages*** described in **Mage 20**, p. **658** (and expanded further in the **Mage 20** sourcebook ***Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers***). Demon-blooded laham characters may, instead, take up to seven points in the demonic ***Investments*** described in the **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** sourcebook **Infernalism: The Path of Screams** or the **Mage 20** supplement **The Book of the Fallen**. In either case, these additional and optional benefits get balanced out with a five-point ***Derangement*** Flaw of the Storyteller's choice (see **Mage 20, pp. 648-650**).

Although the player might not know what sort of entity her character is descended from, the Storyteller ought to determine the character's heritage, and then plant clues (dreams, visions, weird greetings from characters who seem to know more about the mage than she knows about herself...) throughout the story. He ought to feed roleplaying notes to the player, too: *This Realm seems familiar even though you don't recall having been here before*, *You can almost taste the evil in that girl's soul*, *Man, you just wanna rip that dude's throat out and you're not sure why*... The player, of course, can draw her own conclusions – conclusions that might not necessarily be accurate at all.

This Merit goes well with Merits like ***Legendary Attributes***, ***Nine Lives***, and ***Too Tough to Die***, Flaws like ***Immortal Enemy***, ***Primal Marks***, or ***Cast No Shadow or Reflection***, and Backgrounds like ***Cult***, ***Demesne***, and ***Past Life***. As with the Merit: ***"Immortal,"*** (above) this Trait could be too powerful for player characters to take. Supporting characters, however, could be nephilim-descended, which would make for potent friends and memorable enemies.

True Faith (7 pt. Merit)

See **Mage 20, pp. 644-646**.

Supernatural Flaws

The strangeness of Awakened life brings perils as well as power. And while mortals occasionally suffer such bizarre fates too, the following Flaws embody the uglier side of magick's gifts.

As mentioned under the heading for ***Supernatural Merits***, several of the Flaws presented in earlier editions have not been included below. Generally, that's because they're redundant with other Traits; the old Flaw: ***Denial***, for instance, is redundant with its namesake form of Quiet, (described in **Mage 20, pp. 556-557**), while ***Touch of Frost*** is a manifestation of the Flaw: ***Echoes***. On the other hand, many of the revised Traits formerly known as *Adversarial Backgrounds* (detailed at the beginning of the ***Merits and Flaws*** section) have become Supernatural Flaws, as described below under ***Jinx***, ***Uncanny***, and other variable-point Flaws.

Anachronism (1 to 3 pt. Flaw)

Time has passed you by... or maybe it simply hasn't caught up with you yet. Your beliefs, personality, mannerisms, fashion, and expectations are radically out of step with your surroundings. This could be a deliberate affection on your part ("*The Old Days were better than today*" /"*Why wait for the future to arrive when you can* ***become*** *the future?*"), a Time Sphere-related temporal hiccup or Paradox Flaw, the result of paranormal longevity or back-tracking time travel, the manifestation of an especially assertive past (or future) life... hell, even *you* might not know quite why you're like this, but you *are*, and the rest of the world can't help but notice.

The value of this Flaw depends upon the amount of trouble you get into as a result of your anachronisms:

- (1 point) You seem a little weird, and potentially offensive ("*Why are they not sitting in the back of the bus? Aren't there laws about that sort of thing?*"), displaying quirks from a recognizably different past or future that isn't radically behind or ahead of the current age. Add +1 to the difficulty of understanding current technology and modes of behavior.
- (2 points) You're a relic of a distinctly earlier age, or the harbinger of a seriously advanced one. The things you say, wear, expect, and believe are disturbingly out of touch with your surroundings, and can present significant problems... especially if and when you hold forth on silly little things like politics, social mores, sexuality, and the law. Current technology puzzles you, either because it's inexplicably advanced or staggeringly primitive. Add +2 to the difficulty of all efforts to understand your current era, including social rolls based upon getting along with people in this age.
- (3 points) You hail from a time so distant that the current era seems as alien to you as you seem to people of this era. Hell, you might not even speak English (a common trait of folks who existed before the expansion of British and American influence in the 1800s), or speak your language with an accent and idioms that essentially turn it into another language entirely (think Shakespeare, or Anthony Burgess' novel *A Clockwork Orange*). Your expectations regarding technology and social mores are wildly divergent, and you could easily get yourself into serious trouble. Add +3 to the appropriate rolls, and you may be unable to process certain things (driving, politics, current computer tech, etc.) at all.

Assuming you have a chance to acclimate to your surroundings, this Flaw can be bought down with experience points. Until that time, your companions will have a lot of explaining to do on your behalf!

Apprentice (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

Most metaphysical societies, the Technocracy included, employ a mentor /apprentice system. During a members' early years, an elder member is assigned to, or chooses to, teach a new and inexperienced member. During the later days of membership, an elder is expected to pass on their experience to the younger generation. In addition to the usual training programs a given group may purse, a new recruit often winds up in the care of a seasoned member of that group. And in the case of this Flaw, you've got a real winner on your hands.

When you mentor an apprentice a mentor, you're responsible for someone (whatever his formal title might be) who makes your life difficult. You can't just kick this person to the curb, but must instead provide discipline, guidance, training, and quite often a support system (room, board, research space, and so forth) so that the newbie can become a successful member

of your sect. An apprentice, however, is not a houseplant; even the most cooperative apprentices demand time and attention, and their deeds – good and otherwise – reflect upon your own social status. The more troublesome ones, by extension, can drive a mentor toward curmudgeonly solitude.

As a Flaw, this Trait reflects the range of potential apprentices and the effect they have upon your life:

- (1 point) A cooperative and dedicated ideal student who takes up very little of your space and time, reflects well upon you, and seems eager to learn from you while being reluctant to argue very much.
- (2 points) A typical student who needs a fair amount of hand-holding; makes occasional mistakes of protocol and discipline; and takes up a fair amount of time, space and patience. Even so, this person remains attentive and more or less respectful, providing plenty of reasons for you to be proud of him.
- (3 points) A rather clueless student whose presence consumes a significant amount of time and attention. This apprentice can be clumsy, obnoxious, thick-witted, and occasionally problematic in social situations and training exercises. He's got promise, but it's going to take a lot of work to get him to realize his potential.
- (4 points) A seriously challenging student whose behavior and dedication leave a great deal to be desired. This apprentice may have talent, but the burdens begin to outweigh the potential benefits of his instruction.
- (5 points) An obstinate, haughty, disrespectful ass whose presence is more trouble than it's worth. Dangerous to himself and everyone around him (yourself included), he's a disgrace to the society you share. Why are you training this person, again? There might be a light at the end of the tunnel someday, but it's gonna take a lot of work and sacrifice before this apprentice amounts to anything more than a waste of your time.

Again, this is a person for whom you are responsible. Unless you dedicate lots of time, attention, and often monetary resources toward bettering his condition, your apprentice could get worse as time goes on. Conversely, you might be able to mold a troublesome apprentice into an exemplar of your society. From a game-system standpoint, you can lower the value of this Flaw through dedicated work – the obstinate five-point troublemaker could eventually become a one-point ideal student if you put in the time, work, and roleplaying to make him so. Storytellers: Allow your player to buy this Flaw down through experience if and when she makes an effort to straighten up a problematic apprentice, but also feel free to raise the Flaw's drawbacks if the player lets things slide too often and too far.

Despite the usual preconceptions of age and experience, an apprentice could be older than his mentor. He may have originally belonged to a different sect (say, a Verbena defecting to the New World Order or Bata'a), and has a head full of ideas about how things "should" be done – ideas that run counter to your own teachings. Or he might be a new mage who Awakened in middle age, and who therefore has problems taking orders from an experienced mage he considers to be a kid. Even the best students make mistakes, and so no level of this Flaw is without headaches – that, after all, is why it's considered a Flaw!

Once again, this character-based Trait represents a full-fledged Storyteller character whose personality, needs, problems, and agendas make him far more than just a list of dots on a character sheet. In an experienced roleplaying trope, you might let another player run this apprentice, as either a supporting character or as their main mage. In such cases, of course, the student will be less powerful and experienced than the teacher, unless he began his Awakened life as a mage from a different group. In any case, the apprentice ought to be a major part of the chronicle, and may eventually even become the center of the tale (as in the Harry Potter saga) if and when the apprenticeship goes well. A rotten apprenticeship, on the other hand, could still earn that character a starring role in the chronicle: as an antagonist whose close history with the mage just makes the fight nastier for everyone involved.

The Bard's Tongue (1 pt. Flaw)

A curse has rendered you unable to lie. It may even compel you to speak the truth when you struggle to remain silent. Worse still, you tend to say things that later turn out to be true even if you hadn't known anything about them at the time. ("*Don't try and score food from that guy over there – he's got a gun and is having a really bad day.*") You often get a certain "look" when the urge to speak truth comes up, and folks who know you have begun to recognize the signs of a forthcoming "honesty blast" before you even open your mouth.

Life and **Mage** chronicles are both filled with times when it's best to keep a lid on the truth. And so, in order to avoid saying speaking the proverbial inconvenient truth (or worse), you need to spend a Willpower point to keep your mouth shut about it. Repressing that truth may also cost you one health level in bashing damage if the truth you're clamping down on is one of those "things that really must be said" which isn't a smart thing to say under the circumstances. ("*Yeah, Agent Courage, everybody knows you work every angle with every group – that's not exactly a 'secret,' now is it?*")

Cast No Shadow or Reflection (1 to 2 pt. Flaw)

According to certain legends, witches cast no shadow. And while that isn't true of most mages, it's somehow true for you. Maybe you suffer from a lingering Paradox Flaw, manifest your own cultural fears, or made a bargain that cost you your shadow or reflection. In any case, your shadow and /or reflection are absent from your presence. For one point, you're missing one of those things, for two points you lack them both, and although most folks won't notice this consciously, they do tend to feel

uneasy in your presence even if they're not sure why. (Technological machines record this phenomenon, too.) Add +1 to the difficulty of all your Social-Trait rolls under most circumstances, and +2 to the difficulty if a witness makes a perception-based roll (difficulty 7) and figures out why you seem so weird.

Cursed (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20, p. 646**.

Devil's Mark (1 pt. Flaw)

A pact or some other metaphysical occurrence has left you with what old-school witch-hunters consider a "devil's mark": a minor but noticeable deformation that remains insensate to pain and yet allows a creature to draw your Quintessence out through your body in physical form. Despite preconceptions, the origins of this mark might not have come from a pact with some infernal entity. That fact doesn't keep people – Sleepers and otherwise – from looking askance at you if and when this mark can be seen, especially since there's often something disconcerting about the way it appears – a third nipple, a red or black growth, a vaguely demonic face or sigil embedded in your flesh, and so forth.

Thankfully, you don't have to worry too much about witch-hunters in the technologically industrialized world. (Other regions are a different story; even rural areas of so-called advanced nations still hold people who will harm or kill someone who's "different.") The mark's disconcerting appearance, though, may lead you to cover it up anyway. Folks who do believe old-fashioned ideas about "witches" will not take kindly to that devilish brand, so it could become a real problem under the wrong circumstances. On the plus side, however, you actually can nurture a ***Familiar*** (as in the Background Trait of that name) on the mark, and do so without physical discomfort. Of course, the idea of a talking, midnight-blue winged tarantula taking hits of Quintessence off your body may be uncomfortable in its own right.

Echoes (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

See **Mage 20, pp. 646-647**.

Paranormal Prohibition or Imperative (2 to 8 pt. Flaw)

Also known as **Geasa** and **Magical Prohibition or Imperative**, this Flaw represents a thing you either *must* do, or are *forbidden* from doing, on pain of awful consequences. Generally, this imperative comes from an oath you swore, a curse that was inflicted upon you, or a legacy that follows your family lineage. Faerie grudges, infernal pacts, godly inheritances, ancient prophecies, Fortean quirks of physics... any one of them can inflict such a burden upon you. So long as you never cross that line, you should be okay – and may, in fact, possess some blessing (a Merit or Background Trait) that's linked to this Flaw. Ah, but life has a way of pushing us to do things we don't want to do, and that's especially true in the case of people who have a curse or geas upon their heads!

The value of this Flaw is based on your chances of violating the prohibition, and the consequences that occur if / when you do:

- (1 point) You break the prohibition only with an easily avoided circumstance (never kill a cat, go to London, or have sex with a married person), or find it easy to fulfill your imperative (you must shave all your hair off, walk outside every day, or wear blue clothing).
- (2 points) Your prohibition is easy to break (never tell a lie, leave your home town, or have sex with anyone), or your imperative is challenging to fulfill (you must always cover your head, walk at least three miles every day, or go barefoot at all times).
- (3 points) It's very hard to *not* break your prohibition (never speak, have a home of your own, or fall in love or lust with anyone), or to honor your imperative (you must blindfold yourself every day even though you can see, walk everywhere you go, or remain naked at all times).
- (+1 point) Inconvenient consequences – you botch your next three rolls, suffer a migraine, develop a rash for several days, etc.
- (+2 points) Annoying consequences – you lose your voice for a day, lose a die from all your pools for a week due to constant pain, add +2 to all your social rolls with members of your faction until you can atone from breaking your oath, and so forth.
- (+3 points) Painful consequences – until you can atone, you go blind or mute, lose one dot from an Attribute, lose an ***Ally***, ***Mentor***, or ***Familiar***, take the Flaw: ***Oathbreaker*** (below), or suffer a similarly awful fate.
- (+4 points) Crippling consequences – until you atone, your Avatar abandons you, you lose a total of three dots from various Attributes, you take the Flaws: ***Oathbreaker***, ***Deranged*** or both, or else endure a related punishment.
- (+5 points) Fatal consequences – either you're gonna die soon, you'll be whisked off to an Otherworldly punishment Realm, or both. Atonement, if it's even possible, will be very harsh, so do *NOT* break this oath or forsake this imperative!

This Flaw makes an excellent companion to numerous Backgrounds (***Familiar***, ***Legend***, ***Past Life***, ***Totem***, ***Wonder***, and potentially others at the Storyteller's discretion) and Merits (pretty much anything, really, depending on how you define the source of that Merit). Although this does not reduce the cost of that Trait (despite the description of this Flaw in ***Mage Revised***, which employed a complex and potentially abusive rule system that's not found in other World of Darkness games),

a Prohibition /Imperative can represent vows, obligations, and /or legacies associated with the beneficial Trait. If, for example, Riordan Manseragh were to have sworn a mystic oath in order to win his hawk-spirit familiar, that oath would represent a Paranormal Imperative, with *painful consequences* (the loss of his ***Familiar*** Background) if he breaks his promise.

Your Prohibition /Imperative must be tied in with your character's backstory, and probably has a connection to all three elements of her magickal focus (paradigm, practice, and instruments). The conditions must be something that could conceivably present an obstacle for your character (no prohibitions, for example, against having sex with Voormas, or imperatives to get out of bed in the morning), and your Storyteller will, of course, make a point of throwing said obstacles in your path at various points during the chronicle. That said, we also urge Storytellers not to abuse this Flaw, or to apply it out of proportion with the points the Flaw is worth.

Although it's rather unusual, a technomancer could have a metaphysical pact or prohibition too. She may, for instance, need to work on a Mac, employ only steamtech, or invent all of her own technology to avoid suffering some paranormal malaise. Thus, this Flaw is not always "mystical" in nature, even if the line separating mysticism from paranormal phenomena is more a matter of semantics than of metaphysical principles.

Gremlin (1 to 3 pt. Flaw)

There's a perverse imp running around your home. Okay, maybe it's not an actual imp – it could be a malfunctioning robot companion, a vain and selfish bioconstruct, a troublesome spirit, an obnoxious beast, that talking winged tarantula we mentioned a few entries ago... the form of the creature is unimportant. Like the above Flaw: ***Apprentice***, this Trait reflects a companion character who, despite being supposedly on your side, remains a constant pain in your ass.

Originally presented as the adversarial Background for ***Familiar***, this Flaw becomes more significant as the power of the creature, and its attendant nuisance, grows:

- (1 point) A creature of unusual, but minor, ability, which busies itself with trivial annoyances.
- (2 points) An entity whose power and intellect (or at least its cunning) make your life frustrating but not actively hazardous.
- (3 points) A being of notable power whose mischief has begun to shade into actual damage to your property, health, status, and relationships.
- (4 points) A metaphysical pain in the tuchus whose powers cause lasting harm to you and to the things you consider precious.



- (5 points) A walking plague of significant power and malignancy. Said critter might not actually *mean* to be bad, but its effects on your life are inescapably destructive.

As with an ***Apprentice*** Flaw, above, you bear a certain amount of responsibility to this creature – it's not simply your enemy, or even a nemesis, but a being with whom you share a vital bond. Also as per the Apprentice Flaw, your treatment of this "gremlin" (a legendary being that sabotaged airplanes for fun) may reduce or intensify the value of this Flaw. A formerly malignant entity could be tamed and eventually become a ***Familiar*** (as in that Background), while a poorly-treated familiar might become a gremlin, and a previously annoying gremlin could be annoyed into becoming a serious threat to the mage and his surroundings. As an *optional rule*, you might even – with Storyteller approval – be able to purchase the Gremlin Flaw in addition to the Familiar Background, to reflect a helpful yet perpetually troublesome companion.

A gremlin, as with all other Trait-based characters, is an entity in its own right. Chances are good that the trouble it causes for your mage has an understandable foundation – a reason that seems inexplicable to the mage yet remains perfectly reasonable to the gremlin. A mage who explores the reasons behind this misbehavior may calm her temperamental companion; then again, an attempt to understand the gremlin's grudge might only piss it off further...

Locked Vidare (1 pt. Flaw)

Mages view the Otherworldly Penumbra through a metaphysical perspective called the *Vidare*. Most of them can alter that perspective by changing their point of view. Not you. For you, the Periphery remains "locked" into a single perspective: the glittering clarity of the Vidare Astral, the primal luminosity of the Vidare Spiritus, or the rotting deathscape of the Vidare Mortem. Essentially, your metaphysical perspective is frozen in place. This is literally the way you view the world around you, and that view never really changes. (For details about the Vidare and the impressions they present, see **Mage 20, pp. 82, 89, 94-95, 98-99**, and **474**.)

In addition to shaping the way your Storyteller describes the Vidare to you, and guiding your reaction to what you perceive, this Flaw also influences your personality, your sense of fashion, your philosophical and metaphysical paradigms, your magickal focus, and so on. When you perceive things in a certain way, after all, that perspective tends to color most aspects of your life.

Strangeness (1 pt. Flaw)

Your metaphysical prowess occasionally warps reality in your presence, even when you don't want it to do so. Weird stuff happens when you're not expecting such phenomena, and those quirks of strangeness seem to be rooted in the sort of magick you pursue. A specialist in Entropy could suffer twists of probability and decay; a Life-attuned healer discovers odd growths and mutations in the life-forms around him, while a Forces-gifted mage bends the physics in his general vicinity. These phenomena ebb and flow without your guidance or control. Perversely, the more skilled you become in magick, the stronger these tides of weirdness become.

System-wise, the Storyteller determines, once or twice per game session, to roll your Arete against difficulty 6. If the roll succeeds, the Storyteller throws in some random occurrence that's based on a Sphere you possess – most often, on your Affinity Sphere. Grass could grow suddenly, mirrors could crack, psychic impressions could inform you of the sexual habits of the person standing next to you in the elevator – that sort of thing.

If the roll fails, then nothing unusual occurs. If the roll botches, however, then a Paradox backlash expels one point of Paradox in your current pool for each dot you have in your Affinity Sphere; or all of your current Paradox, if you have fewer points than that in your Paradox pool. (If, as an example, Jinx has three dots in Entropy but only one point of Paradox, the backlash dispels that one point in a backlash.) These small backlashes won't be terribly damaging, but given the unpredictable nature of this Flaw, they could come at very inconvenient times.

Throwback (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

Haunted by a past life (often as per the Background Trait of that name, described above), you suffer from awful memories and act out in ways that are, shall we say, not productive to your current incarnation. Perhaps you still loathe the clergymen who tortured a former "you" for witchcraft 400 years ago; the smell of cooking meat still sends you into panic attacks. Or you'll get vertigo and acrophobic surges from that time a previous incarnation fell off a castle wall. You may slip into archaic accents, foreign languages, or terminology that is not exactly *au courant* (or socially acceptable) in today's world. Flashbacks, time segues, inappropriate behavior – it's all part of the package in this life you lead today.

For each point in this Flaw, up to a maximum of five points (and dice), the Storyteller will roll one die against difficulty 8 when the potential arises for a past life to affect your present life. The more successes he rolls, the more that past life affects you. The symptoms of this "throwback syndrome" generally depend upon the Storyteller's whim, but you could collaborate with him to hash out a backstory (or several backstories) for the previous incarnations your character recalls, and then roleplay symptoms that seem appropriate to those histories. For especially strong flashbacks (three successes or more), you may need to roll your Willpower (again, difficulty 8) to suppress the reaction to what your character recalls.

Described in **Guide to the Traditions** as an adversarial Background of ***Past Life***, this Flaw makes a fitting companion to that Background, the ***Dream*** Background, and to other Merits and Flaws related to reincarnation (***Twin Souls***, ***Shattered Avatar***, and similar Traits described within this section). With a few appropriate changes to the symptoms, you could also describe the Throwback Flaw as manifestations of a ***Legend*** Background, or as memories from a life that goes back

several centuries. You'd rather forget the things you did, and endured, back during the Conquest of the Americas, but you never really can.

Uncanny (1 to 5 pt. Flaw)

No matter how unobtrusive you try to be, you remain remarkably memorable to anyone who encounters you. You're the very opposite of "arcane," which is why this Flaw was originally described as an adversarial Background for the Trait of that name; rather than moving through life with near-invisibility, you stand out like a HIT Mark at a Verbena barbeque.

Why are you memorable, exactly? Is it an inhuman glow behind your eyes? An unsettling tone in your voice? A metaphysical miasma that hangs about you despite your apparently mundane appearance? Does grass grow or die in your shadow? Maybe dogs cower when they sense your approach. There could be a low buzzing in your presence, like a chorus of flies, or a disconcerting crackle of electricity that radiates from your skin, disrupting electrical systems in small but noticeable ways. Whatever it is that causes people to remember you, that facet of your presence is a constant reminder that you are not like other folk.

Once again, the point-value of this Flaw depends upon the extent to which it interferes with your life:

- (1 point) You stand out in a crowd.
- (2 points) It's pretty hard to conceal your oddities.
- (3 points) People remember you long after you're gone.
- (4 points) You creep people out simply by existing.
- (5 points) You scare people simply by existing.

By its nature, this Flaw represents an unmistakable impression. Each point in this Flaw adds one die to the dice pool of anyone who's trying to notice you, recognize you, or penetrate your attempts at stealth or concealment. (You didn't *really* think those wailing damned souls were gonna shut up just because you were trying to get past the guards, now did you?) You may, however, attempt to cover up your uncanny presence with a roll of Intelligence + Subterfuge, assuming you have a method of doing so – it's easier to conceal your glowing red eyes with sunglasses than to get those wailing damned souls to piss off for a few minutes! The difficulty of such attempts is generally 5 + the value of your Uncanny Flaw; if, for instance, the clever bioconstruct Victoria Carliotti gets two points in Uncanny for her too-perfect skin, rippling muscles, and impossibly green eyes, her concealment difficulty would be 7. That said, this Flaw does not increase the difficulty of social rolls and may, depending on what you're trying to do, decrease such difficulties instead (Storyteller's option).

Despite the potentially grotesque nature of this Flaw, your uncanniness doesn't necessarily have to mean that your physical features are fearsome in themselves. An inhumanly gorgeous or disturbingly *ordinary* person can be Uncanny in their own ways. This Flaw makes an excellent companion to a variety of Physical Merits and Flaws – ***Enchanting Feature***, ***Hyperflexible***, ***Hideous***, and so forth – and fits in with Backgrounds like ***Legend***, ***Past Life*** or ***Totem*** quite well too. (See the appropriate entries for details.)

Although the Flaw: ***Echoes*** can manifest similar odd phenomena, this Flaw reflects a constant and recognizable distinction. While it probably embodies certain elements of your metaphysical practices, it's not tied to your Resonance or activities – it's an innate part of who you are. Your uncanniness could represent physical features (hulking physique, metallic skin, eyes that reflect eternity, and so forth); metaphysical quirks (an unearthly aura, echoing disembodied voices, a chilling radius around you, etc.); weird companions (a parade of pink-winged kittens, smoldering butterflies, howling coyote spirits, or similar inexplicable critters). Essentially, any sort of localized kink in normalcy's tail could be considered a sign of your Uncanny nature. By "uncanny," incidentally, we don't necessarily mean "supernatural." The unnatural stillness of a Black Suit, the flawless skin of a Victor, the predatory charisma of a Syndicate "magic man" – they're all examples of uncannily Enlightened technology.

Vulnerability (1 to 7 pt. Flaw)

Some perilous substance may spell your doom. Thanks to a paranormal weakness – a curse, a Paradox Flaw, a quirk of belief or cultural legends – you suffer extraordinary harm from that malignant material. Perhaps you shrivel up in sunlight, flee from the scent of roses, or melt when obnoxious farm girls throw water in your face. This substance isn't generally fatal to most folks (Awakened or otherwise), but it's potential death for you.

Your vulnerability to this substance in question has two potential levels:

- *Weakening*, which inflicts one aggravated health level on your character every turn she's in contact with the substance; and...
- *Mortal peril*, which inflicts three aggravated health levels for each turn she's in contact with the substance.

The value of this Flaw is based upon two factors: How common the fatal substance is, and how badly it affects you:

- (2 points) You can be mortally wounded by contact with something that's almost impossible to acquire (the sound of Pan's pipes, a splinter from the True Cross), or weakened by a very rare substance (a chunk of moon rock, the tooth from an aged lion).
- (3 points) Mortal injury from a very rare substance, or weakness caused by something that's relatively scarce and not obviously harmful (saffron, grave dirt, a raven's feathers).

- (4 points) Mortal injury from something that's relatively scarce, or weakness from a common substance (rainwater, silver, a baby's cry).
- (5 points) A common substance inflicts mortal injury on you.
- (+1 point) You die instantly upon contact with the substance in question.
- (+1 point) The mere presence of the substance means instant death to you.
- (-1 point) The substance must first inflict damage on you through a typical injury (a stab wound, ingested poison, a silver bullet) before it can harm you.

Damage from this Flaw cannot be soaked unless you're wearing an appropriate type of armor to prevent exposure to that substance. (Being aggravated damage, it shouldn't normally be soaked anyhow, but mages have ways of getting around such trivialities.) Your backstory should feature the reason for your potentially fatal vulnerability to this substance. That vulnerability ought to be tied into your magickal focus, too – an Alpha Male tycoon isn't likely to burn upon contact with holy water, although it might be fun to fling a few dashes of the stuff around Wall Street and find out for sure! (That would certainly explain a few things.)

Bizarre Hunger (2 to 5 pt. Flaw)

You prefer – maybe even *need* – to eat weird shit... quite possibly in a literal sense of that expression. Perhaps you've sworn a vow, suffered a curse, been treated (or created) with unhallowed rituals or arcane hyperscience, or initiated into an occult fellowship with... *interesting* admission demands. In any case, you must consume substances that may be degrading, unpleasant, expensive, or downright illegal.

The more inconvenient the substance, the more this Flaw is worth:

- (2 points) Easy to procure, though not as easy to devour (paper, fresh eggs, poop, etc.).
- (3 points) Unpleasant, hazardous, and perhaps illegal to consume (rotten meat, swamp water, raw cannabis, and so forth).
- (4 points) Specialized, foul, criminal, and /or expensive chow (human blood, custom-brewed potions or meals, and the like).
- (5 points) You really shouldn't eat such things... but you must (live humans, toxic sludge, gold dust, highly specialized food-like concoctions, and other similar forms of sustenance).

For each dot in your Stamina Trait, you can go one day without satisfying your special dietary requirements. After that, you lose one health level per day until you either consume your particular substance, or else die of hunger or thirst, suffer the punishment of a vow unfulfilled, or otherwise endure whichever other consequences might result from denying your bizarre hunger.

For a related (and probably essential) companion Trait, see the physical Merit: ***Cast-Iron Stomach***, p. 36. And for a potentially related focus-instrument, see the **Chapter Three *Expanded Instruments*** entry for ***Cannibalism***, pp. 206-207.

Blood-Hungry Soul (2, 3 or 5 pt. Flaw)

In a previous incarnation, you had been a ghoul in thrall to an unholy addiction to vampiric blood. Now, you must resist the call of that ravenous past life and its fixation on intoxicating Kindred vitae.

The deeper your thirst for this damning fulfillment, the more this Flaw is worth:

- (2 points) You recall the glorious temptations of the blood, but remember it like a poor choice from long ago. If the opportunity presents itself to you, however, you'll need to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) in order to resist the urge to pursue that addiction again. If you succumb to that temptation again in this life, your difficulty to resist further temptations rises to 6 every time the chance to consume such blood arises again.
- (3 points) That temptation is stronger. Now the roll to resist that first taste is 6, and the roll to resist further crimson snacks becomes 8.
- (5 points) You've got it bad. *Really* bad! Obsessed with the memories of glorious mystic blood, you must beat difficulty 8 in order to resist your old habits, and difficulty 10 each time you try to deny that thirst after you've fallen back to that damned addiction again.

This is *so* not going to end well... See the sidebar ***Mages, the Blood Bond, and the Effects of Vitae***, p. 76, for the long-term effects of such fatal addictions.

Crucial Component (2 to 5 pt. Flaw)

Your metaphysical practice demands specialized instruments. It's not simply that you need fuel for your hypermodded Porsche 911 Turbo S – you need your own specially prepared blend of fuels, or the car won't go. A simple rowan wand will not suffice – your spells demand a hand-carved branch cut from an unscarred rowan tree at high midnight on Samhain Eve. In game terms, at least one of the instruments in your magickal focus must be specifically created, harvested or modified to work with your magicks. No lesser tool will suffice.

How hard is it to procure or employ this specialized component? That depends on the value of the Flaw:

- (2 points) Easy to procure and /or employ (sunlight, yoga postures, motor oil, strong emotions, a book

commonly found in the New Age section at your local bookstore, etc.).

- (3 points) Challenging to procure, employ, or replace (open flames, the Kurmasana posture, professional racing oil, genuine sorrow, an out-of-print occult text, and so on).

- (4 points) Pretty damned hard to obtain, employ, and replace (liquid fire, the Vrschikasana pose, alchemically formulated oil, deep-core grief, a genuine Roman text of *De Daemonum Socrates* by Apuleius, and other rare and precious instruments).

- (5 points) Unique, obscure, forbidden, cumbersome, or some combination of those four (a bottle of alchemically distilled sunfire, an impossibly complex yoga posture invented by the practitioner, personally formulated and distilled hypertech lubricating oil, the heartfelt scream of a grieving mother, a woodcut-illustrated Renaissance *Grimoire of Honorius* inscribed on flayed human skin, and similarly rarified instruments).

When used, the chosen instrument functions as a ***Personalized Instrument*** **(Mage 20, pp. 503 and 587)** – possibly a ***Unique Personalized*** one in the case of a five-point component. In your case, however, you cannot employ the magick that's connected to that instrument at all unless you're also able to employ that particular instrument. If Lee Ann Milner depends upon a unique vengeful centipede yoga posture in order to employ certain Forces Effects through her yoga practice, then Lee Ann is SOL unless she can assume that posture in time to deploy the necessary Effects.

In the original version of this Flaw, the material was bound to a specific Sphere Effect. This revised version ties the Crucial Component to a tool you employ. This change makes it easier to keep track of the component and its uses, employing the new focus rules presented in **Mage 20, Chapter Ten**, so that the Flaw becomes an integral part of the way your mage performs magickal Effects. For details about ***Assigning Practices and Instruments to Effects***, see the section of that name in **Chapter Three**, p. 169.

Faulty Enhancements (2 to 5 pt. Flaw)

Well, crap. The warranty on your cybernetic gear has expired (assuming, of course, that it ever had such assurances in the first place), and now you're stuck with malfunctioning hardware that has literally gotten under your skin. Does your BCI keep crashing? Do your legs keep seizing up? Is your bioware constantly trying to eject your iron? Whatever the problem might be, this Flaw gets rated by the amount of misery it causes you:

- (2 points) You suffer constant disorientation and pain.

- (3 points) The malfunctions keep you in such severe discomfort that you need to take specialized medication, or employ other forms of pain relief, at least once a day. Failure to do so costs you one die from all dice pools until the problem is rectified.

- (4 points) Your Enhancements fail you at critical times (generally on a botched roll), crash or freeze up, and must then be repaired by a technician who understands the gear you've got.

- (5 points) That shitty gear consistently conks out when you need it most. Roll one die against difficulty 7 whenever you employ cybertech in some important way (lifting heavy things with bionic arms, sensor-scanning for enemies, deflecting incoming enemy spells, and so forth). If you succeed, then the Enhancements function normally; if you fail, they fail and must be rebooted; if you botch, they lock up or shut down until a skilled technician manages to repair them.

Obviously, this Flaw means nothing unless you've got the Background: ***Enhancements***. Although such glitches occur with Technocratic bioware, they're far more common in cybernetics that have been installed by factions whose people *haven't* maintained a systemic and standardized approach to human upgrades for the last few centuries. Wonky Etherites and overambitious Virtual Adepts invent crappy iron all the time, and so this Flaw is especially appropriate for cyborgs from those zealously individualistic Traditions, as well as for ex-Technocrats who've managed to go rogue and survive the experience thus far.

Jinx /Infernal Contraption (2 to 10 pt. Flaw)

Stormbringer. The One Ring. The Monkey's Paw. Sure, that paranormal doohickey may possess amazing powers, but it's also a sack of miseries the likes of which few humans can imagine. And you've got one. Lucky you...

As with the Background: ***Wonder*** (a Trait for which this Flaw was once an adversarial Background), this Trait reflects an uncanny item or device. In this case, however, the "treasure" is more trouble than it's worth. Perhaps it's cursed with misfortunes, poorly made, haunted by malignant spirits, seething with Paradox emanations, or too experimental for its own good. It could be the earthly form of an unpleasant entity ("*I was a thousand times eviler than thou...*"), an alien artifact, or the remnant of a culture that passed into dust millennia ago – and good riddance to them! Or maybe it's simply a truly wondrous treasure that dislikes you personally, like the Sword of Fighting in *JourneyQuest*. For whatever the reason might be, you own this mystic /hypertech millstone, and can't easily get rid of it.

Like all variable-point Flaws, the value of this Trait depends upon its ability to screw up your life. In this case, however, the value of the Flaw is deducted from the Background cost of a Wonder. In order to avoid nightmarish catastrophes of math, every two points in the Flaw are worth one dot in the Wonder Background's cost. That cost, however, *cannot drop below one dot* (two points), and so any points that get "left over" between

the value of the Flaw and the two points in that Wonder are added to the owner's character sheet, reflecting the proverbial dead albatross around the character's neck: a mighty burden he can't just toss away.

For expanded rules regarding Wonders, see the section of that name in **Chapter Two**, **pp. 139-165**.

- (2 points) Your Jinxed item features an annoying drawback that, while not deadly, makes life difficult for the person who owns it. *Examples*: it attracts ghosts, smells bad, makes irritating sounds at inconvenient times, or radiates a pervasive aura of discomfort.
- •• (4 points) The Jinxed item has several annoying drawbacks (as above), or perhaps one or two problematic ones. *Examples*: It must shed blood each time it's employed, has a contentious and unpleasant personality, attracts malignant spirits, or tempts the owner to violate her moral code.
- ••• (6 points) Your item features a host of annoying drawbacks (at least six of them), three or four problematic ones, and/or a major flaw. *Examples*: The item belongs a powerful paranormal entity that wants it back, it inflicts constant pain on whomever uses it (three bashing health levels per turn of operation), the object radiates an aura of corruption and decay, or it steadily drives its owner toward atrocities.
- •••• (8 points) In addition to at least six annoying drawbacks and/or five problematic ones, plus two or more major flaws, the item also backfires if you fail a roll of Wits + Esoterica (or Wits + Hypertech, if the item employs advanced technology), against difficulty 7. The Storyteller is encouraged to get creative when deciding how that backfire manifests; for suggestions, see the ***Mucking About with Wonders chart***, **Chapter Two, p. 141**.
- •••••• (10 points) In addition to the previous level of difficulty, the Storyteller essentially has an open license to make your life difficult in unexpected, creative, and often mysterious ways. *Examples*: A bloodthirsty cult that's after the treasure, a demonic entity imprisoned within the item, a cross-dimensional vortex of probability fluxes and quirks of physics that manifest in the object's vicinity, and so forth.

These flaws, of course, should be based in the nature of the Jinxed item and its relationship to the owner. That said, there's no reason that a robot can't be possessed by evil spirits or a primeval artifact can't be a technological hazard using unknown technology. Stranger things, in **Mage**, happen all the time.

Permanent Paradox Flaw (2, 4 or 6 pt. Flaw)

Following a nasty brush with Paradox, you're got a Flaw that just won't go away. System-wise, select a ***trivial*** (two points), ***minor*** (four points), or ***significant*** (six points) Paradox Flaw as described on **Mage 20**, p. **551**. That Flaw is now part of your character's life until you buy off this Flaw, preferably with experience earned through some extraordinary adventure that's related to the Paradox Flaw in question and the mishap that created that Flaw in the first place.

Branded (3 to 5 pt. Flaw)

You've been found guilty by a Traditions Tribunal, who Branded your Avatar with a sigil that indicates your crime. Folks who can see that sigil recognize that you're a criminal of some sort, and the worse the Brand, the more severe your crime and the more appropriate their reaction will be. Those reactions won't always be negative; considering the sort of people who'd be favorably inclined toward a known criminal, though, do you really *want* the goodwill of such people?

- (3 points) A temporary Brand for a ***Low Crime*** (see below), which fades after one to three months. At the end of that period, this Flaw goes away. This Brand raises the difficulty of your social rolls by +1 for "average" Tradition mages and +2 for especially law-biding ones.
- (4 points) A lasting Brand for a Low Crime. This Brand lasts for a year or more, and marks you as a rather notorious offender. The difficulty of your social rolls rises by +2 among most mages who can recognize the Brand's significance, and +3 among mages who take such offenses and punishments seriously.
- (5 points) A lasting Brand for a High Crime, which will not fade for at least nine years and may be essentially permanent. The Brand raises the difficulty of your social rolls by +3 for any character who cares at all about Tradition justice and the people who incur its punishment. Certain parties will target you for additional punishment, and others will consider you to be prime meat for their recruiting efforts.

For details about Tradition crimes and punishments, see **Chapter Four**'s entries regarding ***Crimes*** and ***Punishments*** in the section ***Among the Traditions***, **pp. 213-219**.

Demented Eidolon (3 pt. Flaw)

There's someone in your head, and it's not you. Despite your commitment to logic and reason, a mad heretic rants through the inside of your skull, insisting that what you do is *magick*, not science. This rough voice drives you toward Superstitionism and Reality Deviance. Not that you would ever consider such insanity. No, really – seriously, *never*.

A Flaw for Technocratic operatives and other technomancers who refuse to view what they do as "magic," this Trait pits your conscious-self against an Avatar hell-bent on reclaiming the identity of *mage*. The *Eidolon* (Technocrat-ese for *Essence*) invested within your Genius (Avatar) whips that paragon of Enlightenment into Deviant directions. While most Technocratic Geniuses behave themselves for the most part, this one assumes a flagrantly supernatural mien and batters at the fortress of Reason (and Social Processing) that protects you from Deviant thoughts. It may even be entertaining to have a different player assume the role of your Genius, especially during a Seek... I mean, during one of those meditative interludes which allow you to process the enigmas of Enlightenment. Ideally, this Flaw compliments a Genius (Avatar) Trait rated at 3 or higher, and it goes well (from a "dramatic roleplaying" standpoint, anyway!) with Backgrounds like ***Past Lives***, ***Destiny***, and ***Legend***, Merits like ***Twin Soul*** and ***Avatar Companion***, and Flaws like ***Throwback***, and – as one may imagine – ***Dark Fate***.

Haunted (3 pt. Flaw)

An angry ghost – perhaps even more than one of them – has an entire skeleton to pick with you. Did you kill her yourself, or does she blame you for her death? Did you commit some awful crime against her during her living days, or were you foolish enough to attempt (and perhaps succeed at) a bitter act of necromancy against her after she had died? Whatever your sin might be (and whether or not you actually did anything wrong in the first place), this wraith is determined to make you suffer for whatever remains of your own life... and possibly your afterlife too, if she can manage that!

Check out **Wraith: The Oblivion** to learn more about ghosts and the various powers they can employ to harass the living. If your group doesn't include **Wraith** rules or characters in your chronicle, your Storyteller can simply unload on you with the many phantasmal abilities mentioned in haunting lore: rattling chains, chilling voices, sudden drops in temperature, and so forth.

Primal Marks (3 pt. Flaw)

You've been marked by some god, spirit, myth, or other metaphysical entity... and the mark is not a pleasant one. Maybe you share Papa Ghede's nasal voice and crude sense of humor, or Coyote's grotesquely huge cock, or Christ's bleeding stigmata. Essentially, this Flaw is the flipside of the Merit: ***Mark of Favor***; in your case, though, the mark complicates your life, twists your body, and alerts people who understand the significance of that mark. In certain circles – say, being marked by Satan while living in a deeply religious region – a Primal Mark can be a life-threatening affair. Such marks can also indicate the profound displeasure of the entity in question, like the Mark of Cain (in a non-vampiric sense, anyway) which set the First Murderer apart while sparing his life for a long-enduring punishment. But even if the entity in question likes you, this particular mark is more of a burden than a blessing. If, for instance, you stink like a goat and have the heavy, hairy features of Pan, that's not going to make you terribly popular with the ladies... especially not if you're female to begin with!

This disconcerting legacy might come through as animalistic features that reveal your connection to a totem spirit, as described in the ***Totem*** Background entry and the appropriate section of **Mage 20**'s **Appendix I**. (See **pp. 326-328 and 633-636.**) Or the "mark" might involve some physical manifestation of your inner Avatar. You could share the archetypal "look" of a notorious family, like the Borgias or Romanovs, even if you're not actually related to that bloodline; or bear an uncanny resemblance to some sinister beast even if you're not a shapechanger or totem-friend. Maybe you just look like what people think of when they say *wizard*, *shaman*, or *witch* – which, in many cultures, can be rather unhealthy for people so identified. In short, you look *weird* in the literal, uncanny meaning of that phrase, and people notice.

Obviously, you should define the appearance of this feature, and decide the sort of reaction people have when they notice it. Because this is a Flaw, of course, that reaction should be negative in some way – the "primal mark of the Jolie-Pitt Clan" is not exactly a Flaw unless you're dealing with paparazzi. The "mark" could also be a tone of voice, a distinct way of moving (birdlike, catlike, Papa Legba-like), or a certain vibe that nearly anyone can sense. Whatever their source and manifestation, these Primal Marks are obvious, and they tend to carry over even when a mage changes shape. People recognize you even when you'd rather not be recognized, and that sort of distinction can be rather unhealthy too.

This Flaw goes well with Backgrounds like ***Blessing***, ***Destiny***, ***Legend***, ***Past Lives***, and, as suggested earlier, ***Totem***. It could be taken as a genetic Flaw for ***Enhancements***, or as a reflection of an especially potent ***Avatar***. For extra fun, you might not even know why you've been so marked, who marked you, or what may come as a result of the mark. As with so many elements of a mage's life, these Primal Marks could be mysteries whose answers lay at the end of a long and winding Path... if, indeed, those answers ever reveal themselves at all.

Oathbreaker (4 pt. Flaw)

Sworn oaths are powerful things, especially when magick is involved. And yet, you have broken your vow – not a simple promise, but an oath of serious significance. "*I'm sorry*" won't cut it here; you need serious atonement in order to make things right, and until that point, anyone who can read auras or listen to gossip within the proper circles will know you for the faithless swine you are.

A story-based Flaw, Oathbreaker marks your character out as someone who is not to be trusted. People who place great value in honor will shun her, and others will exploit what they consider her generally dishonorable nature. Beyond that, other characters may be hunting her, with the intention of exacting penance or revenge... maybe both! Resonance, Paradox, Seekings, and Quiet will reflect the metaphysical dimensions of this



broken vow. Your Seekings may involve literal guilt-trips in which you're confronted with the potential (or real) consequences of your violated promise; your Resonance remains tainted by the presence of dishonor; Paradox will assume appropriately ironic forms, like visitations from the entity called ***Judgment*** in **Mage 20, Appendix I**; and should you fall into Quiet, there'll be no place to hide from the transgression you've committed. In short, then, you're screwed for reasons that are very likely your own fault.

(Tragic stories, of course, revolve around people who broke vows without meaning to do so, or who were put into no-win situations regarding promises that could not possibly have been kept. The universe, however, can be implacable and uncaring in such matters. "Fair," among Awakened folk, is not a common word!)

Some sort of penance should be available to an oath-breaking character. She might not know what that atonement *is*, though, and the quest for such rectification could be the seed for powerful stories (cf. the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*). Atonement is rarely a pleasant matter (again, see Oedipus), but the successful performance of such rituals should erase this Flaw... at least until you make and break another promise, that is.

For a related Flaw, see ***Faithless***, below. To see potential consequences of oath-breaking, check out the genre entry for ***Tragedy*** in **Chapter Five's** section ***Genre, Storytelling, and Mage***, pp. 285-286.

Prone to Quiet (4 to 5 pt. Flaw)

In an effort to avert the inevitable stresses of Awakened life, you tend to drop into metaphysical ***Quiets*** (as per **Mage 20, pp. 554-561**) more easily than most other mages do. The easier you fall into them, the more this Flaw is worth:

- (4 points) Quiet is your default Paradox backlash, and so a backlash of five points or more automatically sends you into Quiet.
- (5 points) Quiet is your default backlash, *and* you can fall into it even without a Paradox discharge. Roll your Intelligence + Enigmas dice pool when you're faced with an unusually stressful situation; if you succeed, then you're able to puzzle your way out of the fall – and if *not*, well, then, welcome back to Quietville... (The roll's difficulty ranges from 6 to 10, depending upon the severity of the stress and whether or not you've dealt with this particular kind of stress before.)

Although it's most often noticed in Virtual Adepts and other Netizens, who tend to set off into the Digital Web in order to escape physical unpleasantness, any mage can suffer from this Flaw.

Beast Within (5 pt. Flaw)

You've got a truly infernal temper: one so violent it feels like a volcano in your soul. As with a werewolf or vampire, you're subject to the dreaded *frenzy* that turns you into an engine of hot rage. Under intense stress, you risk losing every shred of enlightenment you possess. Driven to such extremity, you let loose with the most immediately destructive powers at your command, and "vulgarity" be damned! Everyone in your vicinity becomes a target, and the consequences matter to you only when this inner storm has passed.

System-wise, this Flaw sends you into deadly rages as per the ***Berserker /Stress Atavism*** Trait featured in **Mage 20**, p. **644**. Instead of rolling your Willpower to avoid the frenzy, however, you roll your Avatar rating plus one die, with your Willpower as the difficulty of that roll. If, as an example, young Vyper Trabia suffers from the Beast Within Flaw, with an Avatar of 4 and a Willpower of 5, Vyper's player rolls five dice against a difficulty of 5 when that Akashic hothead is under ferocious stress. A failure on that roll sends Vyper into a berserk rage. Yeah, this probably happens pretty often. Vyper's friends don't stick around for long when things go poorly.

(If you employ the *optional* ***Resonance*** Trait described in **Chapter Two**, you could substitute your highest Resonance, plus one die, as the dice pool for your rage. The roll's difficulty is still your Willpower Trait, and your Resonance plus that extra die should at least equal, if not exceed, your Avatar Trait. In this case, the Resonance in question must be something capriciously unstable – *Wild*, *Primal*, *Ferocious*, and so forth – instead of calm and centered energy. For details, see ***Four Flavors of Resonance***, pp. 136-138.)

Considering that the Avatar could be seen as your inner Beast, a character with the Pattern Essence cannot take this Flaw. It's best suited for Dynamic Essences, although a Questing or Primordial Avatar could attain frightening rages too. A berserk mage cannot employ rituals or employ complicated tools; only the most direct methods of attack – magickal or otherwise – will do. Although mages rarely suffer from such grotesque lapses of self-control, an Awakened ***Ghoul*** (as in that Merit), a cyborg, a Victor, a ***Shapechanger Kin*** (again, as per the Merit), or an animalistic shape-changer could possess such inhuman monstrousness.

For similarly bestial character traits, see the Mental Flaw: ***Feral Mind*** (p. 52) and the ***Expanded Practice*** of ***Animalism*** in **Chapter Three**, pp. 197-199.

Blood Magick (5 pt. Flaw)

Your Arts demand blood... specifically, *your own* blood. And while many practices employ small amounts of ritual cutting or bloodletting, this degree of sacrifice demands an injurious amount of vital fluid each time you cast a spell.

With this Flaw (mislabeled as a Merit in the sourcebook **Sorcerer, Revised Edition**), you must suffer one *unsoakable* health level in bashing damage whenever you employ an Effect. Story-wise, you cut yourself, slash designs in your skin, or otherwise hurt yourself enough to shed the required amount of blood. This sort of thing can, of course, add up quickly if you're throwing lots of magick around without giving yourself a chance to heal, as bashing damage soon leads to lethal damage (see ***Types of Injury*** in **Mage 20**, p. **406**). Meanwhile, your bloodletting looks pretty gross and obvious (often vulgarly so), and tends to make a mess as well. Your companions might appreciate the *results* of your magick, but may well object to the methods you employ... especially since blood magick has a rather unsavory rep among all but the most primal of practices.

Bound (5 pt. Flaw)

Mentor always *told* you not to make bargains with strange entities. But did you listen? *Nope*. Now you're in deep to someone whose power dwarfs your own, and your prospects for getting out of bondage are laughable at best. Haunted by thoughts of the payment to come, you live on borrowed time and realize that the worst is yet to come...

Sometimes known, with minor variations, as **Faust's Bargain**, Bound puts your character in the Faust-like position of getting something interesting in return for something significant – her life, her soul, a thousand years of servitude, or a similarly awful fate that no one in their right mind would want to risk. Still, occultists are infamous for short-term thinking, and literal devil's deals are common currency in the magickal world. The specifics of that deal are for you and your Storyteller to arrange; you might have received some Merit(s) and / or Abilities in return for the debt (purchased with the points from this Flaw), escaped an awful situation ("*You want out of this death-trap, dear wizard? Very well – what do you have to offer me?*"), saved someone who was important to you ("*Sure, I'll bring your mother back from the brink of death – let us discuss the terms of this favor...*"), or otherwise blew a standoff with an Otherworldly entity (see the ***Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding*** section of **How Do You *DO* That? pp. 91-95**).

Like the Flaw: ***Dark Fate*** (below), this debt throws a foreboding air over your character's part of the chronicle. In this case, though, your doom may be averted if you can wrangle a way out of this pact. In the meantime, your creditor will call in occasional favors – nothing large enough to pay off the debt (unless that entity needs a significant service and agrees to write off the larger obligation), but deeds that can spark new stories or complicate existing ones. Despite tradition, this debt doesn't have to be a soul-pact owed to a devil – a promise to your god(s) or their immediate emissaries can be just as terrible as one owed to Old Scratch!

Dark Fate (5 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

You're screwed. No matter what you do, regardless of your heroic deeds (possibly because of them), there's a terrible end in your not-too-distant future. Prophecies speak of it, visions remind you of it, and other folks seem to know it too. You realize this fact, and it weighs upon you. From time to time,

you must spend a Willpower point in order to shrug aside the dread of your impending damnation; otherwise, you lose one die from all rolls for the rest of that day. A common Flaw for Nephandi, Infernalists, and other folks who don't know when to stop fucking with Forces That Should Not Be Fuck'd With, this Dark Fate becomes Damocles' sword in your Storyteller's hands. Sleep well... while you can. (Once again, check out the **Chapter Five** genre entry for ***Tragedy***.)

Faithless (5 pt. Flaw)

Magick, according to your beliefs, does not come from you – it comes from your god, and you've broken faith with him. Until you can shake this crisis of faith, perhaps atoning for your perceived misdeeds, your Spheres remain stuck at Rank 1 – potent enough to perceive the presence of Divinity around you, limited enough to remind you that you have failed.

This Flaw (which is more likely to be "awarded" to you through the course of the game than it is to be something you purchased during character creation, though of course you *can* start off a new character in such a crisis) represents the power of faith in your character's life – a power so strong that it can interfere with your abilities as a mage. Ironically, the strength of that faith denies you the ability to use magick when you feel that your faith is lacking. From a game-system standpoint, you are denying yourself the ability to access your magick because you believe that your magick comes from a source you have betrayed. Your mage believes that his god is cutting him off from magick, though... and, considering that the player is pretty much the "god" of a gaming character, in a meta sort of way, that's true.

Although a character with this Flaw can pursue any sort of spiritual focus, his paradigm and practice *must* be oriented toward religious devotion. You could be a shaman or a priest, a Goddess-bound witch, a spiritual scientist, even an Infernalist whose hell-spawned powers flow from a damnation pact. Obviously, this Flaw means nothing to an atheist, or to someone with nebulously casual beliefs. Only a mage who believes deeply in some greater power can believe that she has so much to lose from a sudden lack of faith.

In order to discard this Flaw, the player must pay a five-point "fine" in order to buy off the Trait itself, and roleplay out a "dark night of the soul" sort of Seeking in which he faces his sins and rededicates himself to his divine Path. The character, meanwhile, must first undergo an atonement that suits his belief system and the "sin" that invoked this punishment. Maybe he needs to take strict vows within a religious order... or take on even stricter ones if he had already broken his previous set of vows. Did he violate a taboo? Then he must undergo ritual purification, often by way of fasting, marathons of prayer, and some traditionally torturous ordeals. A mage who has sworn never to kill, and yet who has killed someone, may be forced to make significant restitutions to the murdered person's family. Traditional atonements include pilgrimages, vision quests, oaths of poverty, appalling mortifications (self-torture, radical fasting, mutilation, and so forth), and other difficult paths back to the favor of one's god. Regardless of the creed and specific atonements, however, the mage must spend endless hours in intensive prayer. A faithless soul, after all, must find his way back to the presence of his god... typically on his knees.

Immortal Enemy (5 to 8 pt. Flaw)

Oh, dear. You've pissed off someone whose concept of "eternal grudge" could be taken literally. Essentially, you've got the ***Enemy*** Flaw with a powerful and more or less immortal entity: a vampire elder, a demon, a demigod, totem spirit, Loa, dragon, or other being who measures its existence in centuries or millennia, with resources and abilities to match. Foolish wizard, what *will* you do now?

For the relative power of this enemy (or perhaps for the *number* of your enemies), see the Merit: ***Powerful Ally***, p. 77.

Psychic Vampire (5 pt. Flaw)

Also known as the **Reaper's Touch**, this dreadful curse makes you a life-force siphon. Your presence consumes vitality from your surroundings and the living things who happen to get too close to you. Unless you do so, however, your own life-force withers. Despite your best intentions, you're essentially a walking void into which life itself pours in order to sustain your own existence.

Story-wise, you're a drain on the energy of your companions. Insects and small plants perish in your presence, while children and animals smaller than a horse feel ill when you stand near them. System-wise, any character who's in physical contact with you for an hour or more loses one health level per hour to bashing damage. If you're unable to soak up someone else's life-force, though, then your own vitality drains away. In system terms, you lose health levels in the reverse order that you would heal lethal damage, dropping to Bruised after one day, to Hurt after three days, to Injured after one week, and so on. (For details, see **Mage 20, p. 406**.)

If you employ Life Sphere magicks, your difficulties for healing or improvement-type Effects are raised by +2, while your difficulties with corrupting, damage, or illness-related Effects are lowered by -2. (In both cases, the usual maximums and minimums still apply.) Each health level you inflict on someone else with Life Sphere magick heals you of one health level if you're injured, or else forestalls the "starvation" loss of your own health levels by one day per health level inflicted.

An inversion of the Merit: ***Spark of Life*** (p. 78), this Flaw darkens your aura, makes your blood taste awful as far as vampires are concerned, and keeps your close associates constantly sick with low-level ailments. Life-affirming mages consider this to be a mark of profound misfortune or outright evil, while folks who love corruption (Nephandi and the like) see you as a ripe candidate for recruitment. Mundane science can't do a damn thing about this metaphysical malady, and dismisses such fluffy concepts as "life-force energies." The Technocratic Union, on the

other hand, takes this sort of thing seriously, and tends to view psychic vampires as Reality Deviants of the most unfortunate kind.

For a potentially related metaphysical application of this Flaw, see the **Chapter Three *Expanded Instruments*** entry ***Cannibalism***, pp. 206-207.

Bedeviled (6 pt. Flaw)

Oh, you poor bastard! A mysterious power has decided to fuck with you, and it's perfectly capable of making your life a chronicle of woe. Misery and setbacks are your bread and butter; should things start looking up for you, you begin looking up as well to spot the inevitable anvil dropping toward your head. This sort of thing goes way beyond simple misfortune or even a paltry little curse. Your enigmatic foe is a dedicated cuss, and whatever it might be (it's not necessarily an actual devil, though it certainly seems like one to you!), that force has apparently unlimited resources and a very sick sense of humor; in short, then, it's your typical Storyteller.

A story-based Flaw, this wretched Trait essentially grants the Storyteller a license to give your character the starring role in a twenty-first-century Book of Job. (And again, check out ***Tragedy***.) There ought to be a certain rhyme and reason behind this metaphysical fuckery, of course, but the source of your agonies, and the way you could potentially end them, are for your Storyteller to know and you to find out... should you be fortunate enough to live so long.

Sphere Inept (6 pt. Flaw)

A particular element of Reality eludes you. No matter how devoted you might be to mastering its complexities, this field of magick remains a challenge. Essentially, this is the reverse of the Merit: ***Sphere Natural***, described above; one Sphere costs 130% more (rounded up) to learn than the other Spheres cost.

Rank	Cost /Affinity Sphere Cost
New Sphere	13 pts
2	11 /9 pts.
3	21 /19 pts.
4	32 /28 pts.
5	42 /37 pts.

Again, this Flaw can apply to only one Sphere (fortunately!), and comes through in your practice and backstory. Someone who's inept at understanding, say, Time will have a very wonky relationship with schedules and timing.

Phylactery (7 pt. Flaw)

Your magick, perhaps your very soul, resides outside of your physical self. Maybe you've placed your soul within a ring, a jar, or a wooden doll in order to protect yourself from possession and control. Or perhaps you believe that your wand, not your Will,



is the source of your mystic powers. You could have built a robot as an extension of your Genius, or crafted a jacket into which you've instilled the very essence of who you are. The receptacle itself is not important except with regards to its portability. This Flaw reflects the fact that you must have the receptacle before you can employ your Arts. Without it, you're just another Sleeper.

Linguistically, *phylactery* comes from a Greek root meaning "to guard." In many forms of classical magick, practitioners would place their souls or life-force within amulets, either as protection for their souls or as portable vessels for spellwork. Orthodox Jews sometimes employ *tefillin* – often referred to as phylacteries – as reminders of their covenant with God. As a **Mage** Trait, your Phylactery serves as a container for the "inner god" that allows a mage to change reality: the Awakened Avatar.

How your character views this relationship between the container, his Awakened self, and the ability to perform magick depends on the character's paradigm. A Slavic witch could believe that she has taken her heart and placed it into a hardboiled egg; a mad scientist may use consciousness-transposing co-location theory in order to secure his brilliance in a vat-held brain. The shapechanging shaman invests her soul into a wolf-skin, while a Hermetic magus employs Roman rituals to lock his immortal essence into a golden staff. Your phylactery is probably an item, but it could conceivably be a location (a grove, a garden, a house, etc.) or living being (a child, a bird, a tree, a manufactured intelligence housed within a mainframe, and so forth). The key is this: *Your mage must be able to physically access the phylactery in order to employ Sphere magick*. And therein lays the Flaw.

All told, a phylactery offers a few powerful benefits in exchange for some pretty significant drawbacks. On the plus side:

- A phylactery allows you to preserve a part of your consciousness outside your mortal body. That body may be destroyed, but your soul and consciousness live on until or unless the phylactery is destroyed. With Mind 4, you can project that consciousness into another body or an astral form, while a character with Mind 5 /Spirit 5 can place your Awakened consciousness into a new body for you.

- If the phylactery is taken from you, or you're taken away from it, you can retrieve it, or return to it, with a successful application of the Correspondence Sphere. The difficulty for this return Effect is 4 if the return would seem *coincidental* to a witness, 5 if it's *vulgar without witnesses*, and 6 if it's *vulgar with witnesses*. (Yes, the usual Paradox applies.)

- A living phylactery retains a psychic bond with you, as if you're in constant empathic and telepathic contact with that character. (No roll necessary.) If the phylactery is a place, then you retain an awareness of that place, and can check in with it by using Perception + Awareness, difficulty 6. (For very large areas, the check-in difficulty may range from 7 to 10.)

- With the addition of the Merit: ***"Immortal"*** at the seven-point level, your physical body may continue to survive until the phylactery is destroyed... which, if you don't mind going without your magick for a while, could render you more or less immune to death if you then hide your phylactery away in a safe location. Traditionally speaking, that's why many mages make phylacteries in the first place: to preserve their mortal lives indefinitely.

- So long as your phylactery remains safe and undamaged, you remain immune to Gilgul and other soul-trapping attacks. Your *body* may be possessed, but your soul cannot be stolen or destroyed unless someone attacks your phylactery instead... in which case you're screwed, as described below. For details about Gilgul, see that entry in **Chapter Four**, pp. 218-220.

- And if you invest your soul into a place, you literally carry the essence of that place within yourself, while a part of you always remains there. For practitioners of certain ancestral forms of magic (or simply for hardcore romantics), that's a very powerful reason to do such a thing.

Those are the good points. The downsides are as follows:

- If the phylactery gets destroyed, your ability to use magick in this life gets destroyed along with it.

- You cannot perform magick or recharge your Avatar unless you have some form of physical connection to your phylactery. That form could involve a physical gateway to virtual contact, as with a computer that accesses a mainframe, but you still need that gateway in order to reach a distant phylactery. (Yes, you may use Correspondence Sphere magick to reach the phylactery, and you are always counted as being one success away from your phylactery when you use Correspondence to reach out to it.)

- If your phylactery is a place, you must be in that place in order to employ the Spheres. If it's a living thing, then that character has got to be within touching range before you can use the Spheres. (Explains a lot about Blofeld and his cat, doesn't it?)

- If you're using your phylactery to cast magick, you need to be rather obvious about it – shouting commands to your hypertech robot pal, holding your mystic crown aloft, hewing your demonic sword through enemies as you shout invocations to your patron god, that sort of thing.

- If your Avatar communicates to you through an embodied phylactery character, then you need to purchase the Merit: ***Manifest Avatar*** (p. 71) to represent the Avatar's physical form.

- If your phylactery is an item, then it's considered a ***unique personalized instrument***, as per the rules in **Mage 20, pp. 587-588**. It can be broken, stolen or repaired, but cannot be replaced if it's totally destroyed.

Creating a phylactery of this sort demands high-level magick – Correspondence 5 /Prime 5 /Spirit 5 /Mind 4 to be exact, plus Matter 4 to invest one's self into a material item, Life 5 to invest it into a living thing, and Life 5 /Matter 4 in order to instill it into a place with an active biosphere – a forest or lake, as opposed to a bare room or large metal box.

(A previous description of the phylactery investment ritual, given in the sourcebook **Dead Magic**, p. **112**, stated that only Spirit 3 was necessary for investment; by the rules, however, this claim is incorrect. You need Correspondence 5 to forge so powerful a connection, Prime 5 to invest that intimate a degree of vital energy, Spirit 5 to bind the Awakened Avatar spirit into a separate place or being, and Mind 4 to project an aspect of consciousness out of the body and into a separate vessel. Spirit 3 alone does none of these things.)

Unless your mage is already a Master of the appropriate Spheres, this Flaw assumes that some stronger power invested (or trapped) your Avatar and consciousness into that phylactery for you. According to some practices, a magical practitioner *must* create a phylactery in order to use their most potent Arts; although that's not true in the greater scheme of **Mage**, that doesn't mean people don't still *believe* that it is.

Taint of Corruption (7 pt. Flaw)

Evil has an intimate hold on you. Your spirit has been corrupted – possibly since birth, as with the reborn Nephandi known as *widderslainte* – and you are, as the werewolves put it, "of the Wyrm" whether you wish to be or not. This doesn't necessarily mean you *behave* in an evil manner – you *can* choose to resist the evil inside you. On a metaphysical level, however, you bear an innate corruption which tests the ideal of Enlightened self-determination. You may, perhaps, defeat it, but it'll be a hard struggle before you do.

(Need we mention the ***Tragedy*** section again? I guess we just did.)

From a story perspective, this Flaw could come from demonic possession, the aftermath of an awful Quiet or a badly botched high-level Seeking, corrupt Resonance, one too many deals with malignant Umbrood, a curse, a vile past life, wicked karma, Nephandic heritage, poor life-choices, the influence of the Wyrm, a collection of tainted texts or artifacts, time spent in a hell, or other forms of metaphysical poison. It almost certainly shapes your magickal focus, and the things you do in pursuit of your magicks (that is, your practices and instruments) may well perpetrate this corruption. (*Hey, now, hey now now...*) To entities who recognize such soul-stains, you are either a mortal enemy (as far as most werewolves are concerned), an object of pity and potential salvation (the nicer sorts of mages), or – most likely – both. ("*Hey, it's a mercy killing, right?*")

Meanwhile, inside your skin, you wrestle with the urges born from that corruption. Whether or not you give in to them (which would, of course, just deepen the decay), your dreams and impulses hold a distinctly unpleasant edge. Working malignant magick is frighteningly easy for you (-2 to your difficulties, up to the usual modifier limits), but your "good" spells are harder to cast (+2 difficulty, as above) and have a tendency to leave traces of corruption even when you succeed. Your aura crackles or swirls with leprous stains, and your Merits, Flaws, Backgrounds, and other Traits reflect the damnation you carry inside. A truly epic quest might purge this evil (and buy off this Flaw), but maybe it's just easier to go with the flow, even if that flow leads you straight into the gutter and beyond...

Merits and Flaws

**** = Can be either a Merit of a Flaw.***

Merits

Name	Cost / Value	Type
Acute Senses	1 or 3	Physical
Alcohol /Drug Tolerance	1 to 2	Physical
Ambidextrous	1	Physical
Animal Magnetism	2	Social
Artistically Gifted	1	Mental
Avatar Companion	7	Supernatural
Bardic Gift	2	Supernatural
Berserker	4	Mental
Burning Aura	1	Supernatural
Cast-Iron Stomach	1	Physical
Catlike Balance	1	Physical
Celestial Affinity	3	Supernatural
Circumspect Avatar	2	Supernatural
Clear Sighted	5	Supernatural
Cloak of the Seasons	3	Supernatural
Code of Honor	2	Mental

Name	Cost / Value	Type
Common Sense	1	Mental
Computer Aptitude	1	Mental
Concentration	1	Mental
Confidence	2	Social
Cyclic Magick *	3	Supernatural
Danger Sense	3	Supernatural
Daredevil	3	Physical
Dark Triad	3	Social
Deathwalker	4	Supernatural
Dual Affiliation	7	Supernatural
Eidetic Memory	2	Mental
Enchanting Feature	2	Physical
Expert Driver	1	Mental
Fae Blood	4	Supernatural
Faerie Affinity	2	Supernatural
Family Support	1 to 3	Social
Favor	1 to 3	Social
Ghoul	5	Supernatural
Green Thumb	1	Supernatural
Guardian Angel	6	Supernatural
Hands of Daedalus	3	Supernatural
Hideaway /Safehouse	2, 4 or 6	Social
Huge Size	4	Physical
Hyperflexible	1	Physical
Hyperfocus	3	Mental
Hypersensitivity	3	Physical
"Immortal"	5 or 7	Supernatural
Inner Knight	5	Supernatural
Inner Strength	2	Mental
Insensate to Pain	5	Physical
Iron Will	3	Mental
Jack-of-All-Trades	3	Mental
Judge's Wisdom	4	Mental
Language	1	Mental
Legendary Attributes	5	Supernatural
Light Sleeper	1	Physical
Lightning Calculator	1	Mental
Local Hero	3	Social
Loyalty	1	Social
Lucky	3	Supernatural
Manifest Avatar	3	Supernatural
Mark of Favor	3	Supernatural
Master of Red Tape	4	Social
Mechanical Aptitude	1	Mental
Medium	2	Supernatural
Natural Channel	3	Supernatural
Natural Leader	2	Social
Natural Linguist	2	Mental
Natural Shapeshifter	3	Supernatural
Nephilim /Laham	7	Supernatural
Nightsight	3	Physical
Nine Lives	6	Supernatural
Noble Blood	1	Physical
Noted Messenger	3	Social
Officially Dead	2	Social
Oracular Ability	3	Supernatural
Parlor Trick	3	Supernatural
Perfect Liar	2	Social
Physically Impressive	2	Physical
Pitiable	1	Social
Poison Resistance	2	Physical
Poker Face	2	Physical
Powerful Ally	5	Supernatural
Prestige	2	Social
Prestigious Mentor	1	Social
Property	2 to 5	Social
Regal Bearing	1	Social
Research Grant	2	Social
Rising Star	3	Social
Sanctity	2	Social
Scientific Mystic /Techgnosi	3	Mental
Secret Code Language	2	Social
Self-Confident	5	Mental
Shapechanger Kin	4	Supernatural
Shattered Avatar	5	Supernatural
Socially Networked	2	Social
Spark of Life	5	Supernatural
Sphere Natural	6	Supernatural
Spirit Magnet *	3 to 7	Supernatural
Spirit Mentor	3	Supernatural

Name	Cost / Value	Type
Sterile *	1	Physical
Stormwarden /Quantum Voyager	3 or 5	Supernatural
Subculture Insider	2	Social
Supernatural Companion	3	Supernatural
Ties	3	Social
Time Sense	1	Mental
Too Tough to Die	5	Physical

Name	Cost / Value	Type
True Faith	7	Supernatural
True Love	4	Social
Twin Souls	4	Supernatural
Umbral Affinity	4	Supernatural
Unaging	2	Supernatural
Unbondable	4	Supernatural
Unobtrusive	1	Social

Flaws

Name	Cost / Value	Type
Ability Deficit	5	Mental
Absent-Minded	3	Mental
Addiction	1 or 3	Physical
Aging	2, 4, 6, 8 or 10	Physical
Amnesia	2	Mental
Anachronism	1 to 3	Supernatural
Apprentice	1 to 5	Supernatural
Bard's Tongue	1	Supernatural
Beast Within	5	Supernatural
Bedeviled	6	Supernatural
Bigot	3	Mental
Bizarre Hunger	2 to 5	Supernatural
Blacklisted	1 to 5	Social
Blood Magick	5	Supernatural
Blood-Hungry Soul	2, 3 or 5	Supernatural
Bound	5	Supernatural
Branded	3 to 5	Supernatural
Cast No Shadow or Reflection	1 to 2	Supernatural
Catspaw	2	Social
Child	1 to 3	Physical
Chronic Depression	3	Mental
Compulsion	1	Mental
Compulsive Speech	1 to 2	Social
Conflicting Loyalties	1 to 3	Social
Conniver	1	Social
Crucial Component	2 to 5	Supernatural
Cultural Other	1 to 5	Social

Name	Cost / Value	Type
Curiosity	2	Mental
Cursed	1 to 5	Supernatural
Dark Fate	5	Supernatural
Dark Secret	1	Social
Debts	1 to 5	Social
Degeneration	3, 6 or 9	Physical
Demented Eidolon	3	Supernatural
Deranged	3 or 5	Mental
Devil's Mark	1	Supernatural
Diabolical Mentor	2	Social
Discredited	1	Social
Dogmatic	2	Social
Double Agent	2	Social
Driving Goal	3	Mental
Easily Intoxicated	2	Physical
Echo Chamber	4	Social
Echoes	1 to 5	Supernatural
Enemy	1 to 5	Social
Esoteric Discourse / Technobabbler	1	Social
Expendable	3	Social
Extreme Kink	3 to 5	Mental
Failure	2	Social
Faithless	5	Supernatural
Family Issues	1 to 3	Social
Faulty Enhancements	2 to 5	Supernatural
Feral Mind	3	Mental
Fifth Degree	5	Social
Flashbacks	3	Mental

Name	Cost / Value	Type
Gremlin	1 to 5	Supernatural
Gullible	2	Social
Hatred	3	Mental
Haunted	3	Supernatural
Hero Worship	1	Mental
Hit List	4	Social
Horrific	5	Physical
Icy	2	Mental
Immortal Enemy	5 to 8	Supernatural
Impatient	1	Mental
Impediment	1 to 6	Physical
Inappropriate	1 to 4	Mental
Infamy	1 to 5	Social
Insane /Infamous Mentor	1	Social
Intemperate	2	Mental
Jinx /Infernal Contraption	2 to 10	Supernatural
Lifesaver	3	Mental
Locked Vidare	1	Supernatural
Mayfly Curse	5 or 10	Physical
Mental Lock	1	Mental
Mistaken Identity	1	Social
Monstrous	3	Physical
Mr. Red Tape	4	Social
Naïve	1	Social
Narc	3	Social
New Kid	1	Social
Nightmares	1 or 3	Mental
Notoriety	3	Social
Oathbreaker	4	Supernatural
Obsession	2	Mental
OCPD	3	Mental
Offline	1 or 3	Social
Old Flame	2	Social
Overconfident	1	Mental
Overextended	4	Social
Paranormal Prohibition or Imperative	2 to 8	Supernatural
Permanent Paradox Flaw	2, 4 or 6	Supernatural
Permanent Wound	3	Physical
Phobia	2 or 3	Mental
Phylactery	7	Supernatural
Primal Marks	3	Supernatural
Probationary Member	4	Social
Profiled Appearance	2	Physical
Prone to Quiet	4	Supernatural
Psychic Vampire	5	Supernatural
PTSD	2 to 5	Mental
Repulsive Feature	2	Physical
Rival House	1 to 5	Social
Rivalry	3 to 5	Social
Rogue	4	Social
Rose-Colored Glasses	2	Mental
Rotten Liar	3	Social
Sect Enmity	1	Social
Short Fuse	2	Mental
Short	3	Physical
Shy	1	Mental
Shy	1	Social
Sleeping with the Enemy	3	Social
Soft-Hearted	1	Mental
Special Responsibility	1	Social
Speech Impediment	1	Mental
Sphere Inept	6	Supernatural
Strangeness	1	Supernatural
Stress Atavism	4	Mental
Sympathizer	1	Social
Taint of Corruption	7	Supernatural
Throwback	1 to 5	Supernatural
Troublemaker	2	Social
Twisted Apprenticeship	1	Social
Uncanny	1 to 5	Supernatural
Vanilla	1	Mental
Vengeful	2	Mental
Vulnerability	1 to 7	Supernatural
Ward	3	Social
Whimsy	1	Mental
Witch-Hunted	4	Social



Chapter Two: Expanded Rules and Options

Magic was not what it once had been. It was spread thinner these days;
one had to use it as it came, and never quite trust all one's weight to it. Nor lose faith in it.
– Megan Lindholm, *Wizard of the Pigeons*

*It's 2017, and we **do** have our flying cars. They're just not cleared for general use. I mean, could you just imagine what it'd be like it they **were**? The average American can't even manage to drive a relatively primitive piece of land-bound technology without running over some kid because the driver's texting instead of driving. People pig out on bad food while watching millionaires pretend to be inbred hicks on TV, and you want to give them **flying cars**? Good luck with that. Me, I'm sticking with that whole "need to know" philosophy attitude toward technology. The average person doesn't need to know what we can **really** do. He can't even handle what he already **has**.*

*Our O-so-righteous friends over in Deviant City already realize this. They know damned well that you can't hand over the Keys to Creation to the average citizen. Those Hermetic-wizard dicks have the right idea: With them, you have to **work hard** and prove your right to play with matches before they'll hand over the secrets of the universe. So when our people start going on about "the elevation of the common man" and that sort of thing, I ask them: Have you ever looked at "the common man"? He's an idiot ape with a lousy haircut. Give that guy a magic flaming sword and he'll cut his own head off with it before setting fire to the neighborhood. Yes, I agree that it's our job to advance the cause of humanity and all that happy horseshit, but Joe Average has to hit the brain-gym and get his ass in shape before I'll feel comfortable giving him anything better than an HD TV and some fast food to munch on while the rest of us do the real work around here. And honestly? I don't see that happening anytime in the near ever.*

So I'll take the flying cars and the other goodies, thankyouverymuch. Joe Average can watch his "learning channel" while the rest of us handle the heavy lifting. That's why we keep putting goodies out there – to see what people do with them, to note whether or not folks can handle them yet. And while I've seen some good stuff happen with computers and advanced medical treatments, it'll be a cold day in hell before Joe Average is ready for the Real Deal. Yeah, it's kind of a shame, but what can you do, right? You can lead an ape to wisdom, but you can't make him think.

A Wealth of Options

If magick was simple, everyone would do it. And if **Mage** was simple, maybe everyone would play it. It is what it is. There are, however, *degrees* of complexity, and – with magick and gaming both – a wealth of options tends to increase that complexity by several degrees. Some folks, though, don't care. That wealth of options is worth the potential complications.

The following chapter is composed of *optional rules* that may be added to your **Mage 20** chronicle. They are not required to play the game, and might seem too complex for a given troupe. Folks who enjoy a broader range of options, however, are invited to add these rules to those systems given in **Mage 20, Chapters Six, Nine, and Ten**. Hopefully, they'll add an extra element of magick to the tales you share.

Expanded Combat Systems



Considering how comparatively fragile they are in comparison to their paranormal peers, mages have a potentially extensive arsenal of ass-kicking techniques. Of course, as **Mage 20** points out, it's wise to have options when a well-placed punch might kill you. But while that book *does* contain a wealth of fighting rules, the following expanded combat systems can add a dash of extra spice (or is that blood?) to those moments when wisdom dies and rage takes over.

Knocking People Unconscious

Murder charges suck. In order to avoid them, you might prefer to render an opponent *unconscious* as opposed to *dead*. While that's not nearly as easy (or as possible) in real life, movies and books constantly feature characters who deck folks in one shot, or who get knocked out with a single blow and then wake up sometime later to find themselves in precarious situations.

Rules-wise, a character can be dropped into Sleepytime Central with the following *optional rules*:

- Bashing damage attacks that drive the target to the ***Incapacitated*** level can render that character unconscious if the attacker would prefer to knock her target out rather than bust him into bloody pieces. This unconsciousness lasts until the victim recovers to at least the ***Crippled*** level of damage, although he'll be ***Stunned*** (as detailed in **Mage 20, p. 417**) until he can reach the ***Wounded*** level of recovery. (Anyone who's actually been unconscious knows why.)

- A successful ***Knockout Blow*** – detailed below, under ***Stunts*** – can deck an opponent for one turn per success. Even when he wakes up, he'll remain stunned as described above for one additional turn per success unless he's somehow able to heal more quickly than usual, by way of magick or some other restorative treatment.

- Various sleep spells, detailed in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 128-129**, may employ either Mind 2 or 3 to urge the target to sleep (though they won't immediately knock a character unconscious); use Life 3 to knock the target out without inflicting brain damage (but the target can make a Willpower roll, difficulty 6, in order to resist unconsciousness if he rolls more successes than the attacker rolls); or use Life 4 to "transform" a conscious character into an unconscious one. (There's a Mind 4 variant too, but you can check **HDYDT?** for the specifics.) In all of these situations, the slumber lasts for the Effect's Duration unless someone manages to rouse the target before that time elapses.

In real life, a person can suffer brain damage from head injuries or prolonged unconsciousness. Hollywood-style pistol-whippings and blunt clubbing are more likely to fracture a skull and batter a brain while leaving the victim conscious than they are to knock a person out – see the ***Pistol Whip*** maneuver in **Mage 20, p. 423**, for a more realistic approach to that sort of attack. Mages, of course, can employ ***Hollywood Reality*** (as per that sidebar) as an excuse to render otherwise vulgar Effects coincidental, and so the proverbial "knockout blow" can involve a Life or Mind Effect tacked onto an impressive punch which inflicts a little bit of bashing damage while delivering the recipient into the arms of Mister Sandman for a significant period of time.

Stunts

While a punch in the gut is often effective, it lacks panache. Mages and their ilk are supposed to be above that sort of thing. And so, when trouble beckons, a flashy stunt often separates the mages from the murder-hobos. Such deeds display a skillful flair that moves mere violence into the realm of entertainment.

Our entertainment, of course, has inspired such theatricality. In real-life fights, these sorts of feats rarely come off well, and could easily get you arrested or killed. "Real life," of course, is relative in **Mage**, and so the following stunts – especially when finessed with magick – make excellent additions to an action scene.

A mage with an appropriate focus, the right Spheres, and convenient instruments can also add a little push to the following stunts. The details can be found in the entries below, under the heading ***Magick***, with the enhancement assuming a successful Arete roll before the stunt is performed. Yes, you have to roll the Arete for that Effect in the turn *before* the stunt occurs; you can't perform a stunt *and* perform magick within the same turn unless either A) you're using Time 3 to get additional actions within that turn, or B) the instrument is an intrinsic part of the stunt (a gun, a kick, etc.).

(Those focus instruments, meanwhile, need to be things you could conceivably employ while performing the stunt; a martial artist using the instrument ***Dances and Movement*** could easily stick the ***Hero Landing*** described below, but a wizard who needs to call the corners on the way down is more likely to become street pizza instead.)

Assuming that the characters in question have the ability to do such things, any sort of character can use the following stunts. Awakened characters may enhance a feat with a bit of subtle Sphere-craft, but the stunts themselves depend on physical capability, not Enlightened powers. Each entry below features a basic description of the feat, the Traits and rolls involved, and the potential enhancement a bit of magick can provide. Antagonists, of course, can use these stunts as well, turning the tables on a so-called protagonist who's under the delusion that he's the hero of this show.

As noted earlier, such feats tend to be improbable, if not impossible, in terms of real-world physics. Some of them might be a bit too goofy for your chronicle, too, at least for certain moments of it; a slapstick pantsing of the Arch-Nephandus might be amusing, sure, but totally wrong for the tone of your tale. Ultimately, the Storyteller decides whether or not a given stunt is possible or desirable for the chronicle in question... and if a given stunt *isn't* possible in your world, your heroes might learn their limitations the hard way. And on that note, blowing the rolls for the following stunts is a really bad idea – and botching them is even worse. The cost of failed theatricality tends to be spectacularly high.

Stunt Maneuvers

• **All for One and One for All!:** On cue, you and your boon companions converge into a bristling formation of concentrated badass. So closely attuned are you to your companions that you battle as a single unit, scattering enemies with elegant precision.

System: Assuming that you've all fought together as a unit before (this stunt won't work for strangers or new allies), a single member gets chosen to be the spokesperson for your group. That person makes a Dexterity + Alertness roll and, for one turn per success, the characters within your group all employ the same initiative roll – a new one, based upon the highest initiative rating in that group (as per **Mage 20, p. 399**), and then act, one after another, until everyone within that group has taken their actions. Only after the entire group has acted can your remaining enemies (if there *are* any enemies remaining!) get to respond with anything other than a block, dodge or parry.

From a story perspective, the group moves like a well-oiled machine, each member intuitively synchronizing their attacks and defenses with dramatic efficiency. Once your foes lie scattered before you, be sure to toast your fellowship with a loud cheer and festive mayhem!

Roll: Dexterity + Awareness **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: as normal **Actions:** 1

Magick: A successful Entropy 1 or Mind 2 Effect on the spokesperson's part reduces the difficulty of that coordination roll by -1 per success, to the usual limit of -3.

Hollywood Reality

Word has it that the technological paradigm rules the twenty-first-century industrialized world. And that's sort of true. Sort of. But y'know who really determines what the average person in today's world thinks of as "reality"? Hollywood and its associates in the mass-media industry.

Intellectually, we all know (well, maybe not all of us – lots of people clearly *don't* know this) that Hollywood is in the business of selling illusions. Cars don't really explode every time someone bumps into them; neighbors don't really walk into one another's homes without knocking, just in time to provide a zinger to their conversations; you can't really hip-fire a chain-gun for five minutes without reloading, outrun explosions, or walk away from a 15-car pileup with a few streaks of dirt on your face and maybe a trickle of blood that you manfully wipe off as you swagger back into action. And yet, we *do* kinda expect real life to act like the movies and shows we see, even when we know they're fake. The mere fact that a "reality TV" star can become president of the United States reveals just how ingrained the media version of reality has become.

Clever mages can exploit this illusory vision of reality. Especially in combat or other dramatic situations, the *Hollywood reality factor* blurs the boundaries of coincidence and vulgarity. Essentially, this is a variation on the ***Mythic Threads*** concept (see **Mage 20, pp. 61** and **530**), although in this case the Storyteller can rule that certain normally vulgar Effects are instead coincidental because they follow Hollywood reality. Obviously magickal feats remain vulgar (Harry Potter movies have not yet rendered flying broomsticks into the Consensus!), but many non-magickal feats that would be unlikely or impossible under strictly scientific principles **might** be considered coincidences if they fit into Hollywood reality tropes – wild car-chases, instant knockout blows, leaps from high places onto surfaces that would break every bone in your body, and so forth.

As always, your Storyteller has the final say regarding Hollywood reality feats. Also, Hollywood reality holds no sway in places where mass media hasn't indoctrinated the populace into what is and is not "possible." Technocrats consider Hollywood reality tactics to be fair game too, and such operatives are *very* good at using such tactics to their advantage – so good, in fact, that it often seems as though such absurd tropes are planted into films intentionally...

• **Alone in a Crowd:** The battle rages. Suddenly, the crowd parts as two significant characters work out their frustrations on one another. Maybe the action stops; perhaps the fight continues. Either way, the major combatants have enough space to stage a dramatic showdown without interference from anybody else.

System: One success gets a few people to pull back and give the hero some space. Three successes clear a path for the showdown. Five successes reflect a showdown of such ferocity that everyone nearby stops to watch until the last blow lands.

Roll: Manipulation + Intimidation **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

Magick: A successful Mind 2 empathy burst reduces the roll's difficulty by -1 per success. For this Effect, consider the difficulty to be 5, as opposed to the usual Willpower-based difficulty for Mind-based attacks.

• **The Hero Landing:** leaping from an impressive height, the character plummets through empty space, lands on one knee and a fist, and rises a moment later to kick ass – no broken bones involved!

System: In real life, this sort of stunt will maim your ass. So long as the character has at least three dots in Athletics or Acrobatics, however, and looks badass enough to survive such a stunt, that character can land gracefully and without injury from heights of roughly 30' (8 meters) or less. Cyborgs, beast-folks or brawny powerhouses may be able to leap down 50' or more, although that sort of distance is pushing the limits of even Hollywood reality.

If you roll five successes or more, the leaping character automatically has initiative on the next turn because everyone is *just that impressed* with him. A failed or botched roll, though, is just plain messy – see ***Falls and Impact*** in **Mage 20, p. 439**.

Roll: Charisma + Athletics /or Acrobatics **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

Magick: A Forces 2 Effect bends physics enough to keep you from getting yourself killed. Even if you don't stick the landing, you won't take damage when you hit.

• **The Jackie Chan:** Uh-oh... raging cyborg coming in from the left, martial-artist psychopath converging from the right, bunch of mooks charging at you head-on – time to grab the nearest object or surface and use physics to clean everybody's clocks! Bonus points if you can do this perfectly with a panicked look on your face.

System: You need suitable surroundings (a construction site, kitchen, office, etc.) and at least three dots in Acrobatics, Athletics, Brawling, Do, and/or Martial Arts in order to pull off this stunt. A successful execution inflicts one level (*not a die – a level*) of bashing damage per success upon each character



within a 10' (3 meter) circle, keeps them all from hitting you this turn, and stuns all of them until the beginning of the next turn. Your opponents can try to soak the damage, but your agile charisma still stuns them with surprise.

Obviously, this stunt works only in hand-to-hand combat. A hero can perform this stunt once per fight for every dot she has in Charisma; after that, the trick gets old.

Roll: Dexterity + Expression **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: as above **Actions:** 1

Magick: A successful Entropy 3, Forces 2, or Life 3 Effect adds one level of bashing damage per success to the damage inflicted by this attack. (Two successes add two more levels, three successes inflict three more levels, and so forth.)

• **The Knockout Blow:** When you wanna drop the henchman without making a sound, just pop him good and proper right in the jaw or upside his head, and he'll be down for the count until you're clear. Warning: This trick can be used on you as well!

As noted earlier, real-life "knockout blows" cause concussions and often inflict lasting brain damage; also, they don't tend to work nearly as quickly or as easily – you're more likely to give a pissed-up enemy a headache than to render him quietly unconscious.

System: A successful roll of Dexterity + Brawl, Do or Martial Arts inflicts normal bashing damage. Five successes or more, however, also drops the target into unconsciousness for one turn per success. This stunt doesn't usually work on badass Night-Folk, although your Storyteller might let you punch out the werewolf for comedy's sake. Just don't be around when he finally wakes up...

Roll: as above **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: as above **Actions:** 1

Magick: A Forces 2 Effect reduces the blow's difficulty by -1 for each success rolled, thus making it easier to knock your foe unconscious. A successful Life 3 Effect can put your target to sleep as described above, and a Life 4 Effect can "transform" the conscious enemy into an unconscious one. Other potential Effects can be found in the ***Martial Arts*** section of **How Do You *DO* That?**, especially on **pp. 63-64**.

• **Parkour Master:** Bouncing off of walls, vaulting over obstacles, flinging yourself across suicidal distances to roll gracefully to your feet on the other side... hey, that's just what parkour masters *do*, right...?

System: Assuming that your character has at least three dots of Athletics and /or Acrobatics, with a *Parkour* specialty, a successful roll (or a series of extended rolls, for multi-turn travel) allows your character to navigate apparently impossible multilevel terrain at their usual running speed, thanks to the miracle of freerunning discipline and impressive theatrical prowess. For movement speeds, see **Mage 20, p. 401**.

Roll: Dexterity + Athletics or Acrobatics **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1 or more

Magick: Each success rolled for a Forces 2 Effect reduces the difficulty for your parkour rolls by -1 per success, down to the maximum -3 modifier.

• **Pulling the Wool:** Grabbing hold of the target's clothing, you try to pull it up, down or off. Depending on what you're trying to do, this could unbalance your opponent, blind him for a turn, or embarrass the living shit out of him while you get a shot in... or run for your life.

System: This stunt demands two actions: the first to grab the clothing, and the second to yank it hard enough to have the desired effect. That grab roll involves Dexterity + Subterfuge, and the second roll involves Strength + Alertness. (And how often do *those* combinations come up, right?) The difficulty for both rolls is 7 if the target can see you coming, 5 if you're catching him unawares. Three successes or more will dislodge the average item of clothing in the desired way – flipping the cap down, ripping the shirt off, pulling the pants down around your target's ankles, and so forth. Special clothing (armor, unitards, reinforced garments, etc.) remains more or less immune to this trick, though you might flip a helmet off-kilter or perform some other suitable wardrobe malfunction.

If successful, you startle your opponent for one turn, and render him unable to act that turn. His next action will depend on what you did, though he might need to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to avoid a reflexive cover-up, a Dexterity roll to avoid tripping, or some other suitable roll that helps him extract himself from this unexpected predicament.

By the way, do *not* try this stunt on werewolves or vampires, unless you wish to become the target of an immediate frenzy check.

Roll: as above **Difficulty:** 7/5
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 2

Magick: A successful Entropy 3 or Matter 2 Effect lets you disrupt the garment with only one success on the Dexterity + Subterfuge roll – no strength required! If you use the Matter Sphere and roll two or more successes with your Arete roll, this stunt will essentially destroy a typical cloth garment. Matter 4 will have the same effect on garments made from materials that were crafted by, or reinforced with, magick.

• **Surfing the Wave:** As the explosion goes off, you hurl yourself into the air and surf the concussion wave to safety. Cue the *Mission Impossible* soundtrack again!

Realistically, this stunt demands magick. Human bodies get pulped by concussion blasts in close proximity, and torn to shreds by flying debris. A cinematic high-adventure chronicle, though, might allow skilled Sleepers to pull off this sort of nonsense if the Storyteller agrees, and it certainly fits the definition of Hollywood reality even though it *is*... um, impossible.

System: A successful roll lets the character "ride the wave" for 20' (6 meters) per success. Each success also inflicts one automatic level of bashing damage from the impact, though the

character can try to soak those injuries. A successful character takes no damage from the explosion itself; an unsuccessful one takes it all.

Roll: Stamina + Athletics **Difficulty:** 9

Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

Magick: A Forces 2 and /or Entropy 3 Effect lowers the difficulty by -1 per success, to the usual -3 modifier limit.

Advanced Weapon Techniques

As extensions of fists and feet, weapons hold a long pedigree in the field of martial arts. A skillful combatant doesn't simply hack away at enemies with her sword – she slashes, feints, disarms, subdues, and otherwise employs her weapon like the extension of her body that it truly is.

The following maneuvers listed in the ***Combat*** section of **Mage 20** can also be used with weapons: ***Disarm***, ***Grapple*** (only with chain- or rope-based weapons), ***Sweep***, ***Pistol Whip*** (obviously), ***Death Strike***, ***Deflecting Block***, ***Joint Lock*** (again, only with flexible weapons), ***Nerve/Pressure Point Strike***, and ***Withering Grasp*** (again, likewise). The defensive techniques of ***Blocking*** and ***Parrying and Rebound Attacks*** **(Mage 20, p. 411)** can, of course, be performed with weapons too... and often should be!

Certain techniques, though, work only with the weapons for which they've been designed. A character can employ the following maneuvers, then, if she's got one or more of the following Abilities:

- ***Melee*** at three dots or higher.
- ***Martial Arts*** with an appropriate weapon specialty (chains, blades, staves, etc.).
- ***Fencing/Kenjutsu*** at the appropriate level, as detailed below. This pertains only to the bladed weapons involved – you can't use Kenjutsu techniques with a chainsaw unless your Storyteller has a really cinematic sense of style (*Translation*: This is a Storyteller-judgment-call thing).

The following maneuvers can be considered optional. A few of them are fairly cinematic, and so Storytellers may allow all, some, or none of them, as desired. The roll-designation (Ability) means that the attacker can use Melee, Martial Arts, or Fencing /Kenjutsu – whichever is appropriate.

Weapon Maneuvers

• **Bash:** Striking with a non-edged portion of the weapon, the attacker tries to injure, not kill or maim, her opponent. A successful attack inflicts one die less than that weapon's normal damage in bashing, not lethal or aggravated, damage. A failed blow misses the target, and a botched one might snap the weapon if it's thin enough to be broken – a blade, for instance, as opposed to a sturdy club. Obviously, this attack works only with hand-to-hand weapons that inflict lethal or aggravated damage; in certain cases, like chainsaws, it may be impossible even then.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** Weapon +1

Damage: Weapon -1/B **Actions:** 1

• **Bind:** Sweeping her antagonist's weapon up with her own, a defending fighter uses gravity and leverage to prevent her enemy from using his weapon this turn. Essentially, this technique involves a block that denies the opponent the use of his weapon until he can break the bind. Unlike a typical block or parry, however, this maneuver succeeds automatically if the defender makes her roll.

As the opponent attacks, the defender captures his weapon with her own. A successful roll represents a successful capture attempt, which deflects that attack and immobilizes both weapons (meaning that neither party can use them) until either the defender ends the bind or the opponent successfully breaks free as described under the ***Grapple*** maneuver **(Mage 20, p. 421)**.

Both parties can use other attacks – kicks, head-butts, punches, etc. – during a successful bind. Due to the close range, occupied attention, and lack of leverage and space, however, attacks other than head-butts add +2 to their usual difficulty. Other opponents, however, subtract -2 from the difficulty of trying to hit either fighter while their weapons are bound.

Bind attempts typically begin with the defender maneuvering her opponent into position – often with a held action, a ***Feint*** (see below), a taunting remark, or some similar enticement to strike. That enticement isn't necessary, but it's a common tactic that – if successful – reduces the difficulty of the Bind maneuver itself to difficulty 6, not 8. This enticement requires an additional action before the Bind attempt itself. As with other two-action moves, this enticement could be performed within the same turn if the player chooses to employ a *multiple action* (detailed in **Mage 20, pp. 388-389**).

Obviously, this is a hand-to-hand fighting technique that typically demands weapons that are strong and rigid enough to bind and be bound (blades, staves, clubs, etc.). That said, an especially flexible weapon (like a chain, whip, or rope) could be used to capture an opponent's weapon too... and with such weapons, this is a popular technique.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 6/8

Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1+

• **Curtain of Blood:** With a superficial slash above his opponent's eyes, the attack spills a bit of the red stuff into her vision. The resulting distraction sets him up for a better shot... or possibly for a quick retreat.

It takes at least two successes on the attack roll in order to cause that blood to flow. The "curtain" effect kicks in one turn after the slice is made. The cut itself is too shallow to cause damage; until the target can clear her eyes and staunch

The Mexican Standoff

Guns! Guns! Guns! Everybody's got at least one, and mutually assured destruction appears imminent. More of a trope than a stunt or maneuver, this action-movie staple puts every character involved in the standoff into an *extended and resisted* Willpower-roll challenge. (See **Mage 20**, **p. 390**.) The first one to break does something stupid, and everyone might wind up dead.

In the grand tradition, these face-offs take place at point-blank range. Long-range standoffs use the normal rules for such combat. Once the guns are out (other weapons can serve as well, so long as every antagonist can hit their target with a single move), all players involved roll their Willpower. On the first turn, the difficulty is 5; each subsequent turn, however, the difficulty rises by +1 until somebody either backs down or blows a roll.

During the standoff, until the situation changes, all characters involved get one automatic attack on a single target. For that attack, the players simply roll for damage, not to hit. Each turn after the first one, that attack adds one automatic level to the damage inflicted; thus, the longer it goes on, the deadlier this standoff becomes.

Each turn, a player who succeeds at their Willpower roll can choose to take an action, to talk, or to hold their action until someone else moves. A winning character can try to talk their way out of the standoff (using roleplaying and /or a Social Traits roll), distract an opponent (again, usually a Social roll, although certain physical actions are possible), hold their action, dodge /block the intended assault, or attack. Each turn the standoff continues, all rolls *other than* Social-Trait rolls add +1 to the difficulty. Social rolls start off at difficulty 9, but a successful player can lower that difficulty by -1 per turn each time that individual succeeds at the roll.

A player who blows a roll can spend a point of Willpower in order to succeed.

Anyone who fails a Willpower roll and hasn't spent a point of Willpower in order to keep things together, or who botches any sort of roll involved, immediately does something really stupid. At that point, the standoff ends and everyone attacks.

Anyone who makes a sudden move (dodge, block, run, etc.) immediately kicks off the carnage.

Character can choose to lower their weapons at any time. The other characters can choose to respond however they want. Once the shooting starts, though, it won't end until only one side in the dispute still stands.

that flow of blood, however, she's using half of her usual dice pools. (Stopping the flow requires one full action unless the opponent can close up wounds through force of will or innate healing abilities.) Naturally, this attack means nothing against opponents who do not bleed, or whose faces are protected from cuts and incidental blindness.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

• **Feint:** Faking a strike at a different location, the attacker sets her opponent up, redirects her weapon to hit a different place instead, and delivers a nasty surprise. Employed as both a test of the opponent's defenses and a sincere attempt to harm the opponent, this technique draws the opponent's attention away from the true target for that attack. Performing it involves two actions: the fake-out, and the strike.

For the fake-out, the attacker adds her Manipulation to the appropriate weapon Ability, and rolls against difficulty 6. The target gets a chance to notice the feint (Perception + whichever Trait is highest from among the target's Melee, Martial Arts or Do Traits, difficulty 8); if he blows that chance, the attacker sets him up and – with her next action – strikes. If successful, this attack inflicts extra damage because it hits the opponent in an unexpected, vulnerable spot.

As is possible with other multiple-action maneuvers, an attacker who can use two or more actions within the same turn can deploy the fake-and-strike in that same turn. This is a hand-to-hand combat technique that does not work at range.

Roll: Manipulation + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Weapon +2 **Actions:** 2

• **Fleche /Charge:** Darting in to close the distance, the attacker throws speed and momentum behind her assault.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: Weapon +1 **Actions:** 1

• **Great Blow:** Exposing himself to attack, the assailant throws everything he has behind a massive blow that will hopefully put a permanent end to the fight. This blow demands two actions – one to draw back, the other to strike – although it can, as usual, be performed within the same turn as a multiple action.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** Weapon +2
Damage: Weapon +3 **Actions:** 2

• **Jab:** A short, quick stab at the opponent tests his defenses and skill. The attacker also adds +1 to the difficulty of her opponent's next attack against her, due to the fast, defensive nature of this move.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** Weapon +1
Damage: Weapon -2 **Actions:** 1

• **Lash:** A fast flick of the weapon – typically a thin and flexible blade, a whip, or some similar implement – strikes out at a small targeted object. Success knocks that object down

(a lamp, cup, book, etc.), puts it out (a candle, light bulb, spotlight, etc.), cracks it out of someone's hands (if the attacker rolls more successes with the attack than the holder has dots in his Strength Trait), or shatters it (if the weapon could normally break that object – a glass, a house plant, and so forth). This technique might flip levers, click buttons on machines, and otherwise manipulate items that are small and fragile enough to be affected by a quick strike from the weapon involved.

Although this maneuver represents hand-to-hand attacks, a skilled marksman could use the same technique to hit objects at a distance – blasting out lights, knocking over lanterns, shooting objects out of people's hands, and so forth. In this case, the usual modifiers for distance and cover apply to the usual specifics for this maneuver.

For details about the breakability of material objects, see ***Bustin' Stuff*** **(Mage 20, pp. 439-440)** and ***Sample Objects and Surfaces*** **(p. 457)**.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: Weapon **Actions:** 1

• **Lightning Parry:** With a massive blow or a flurry of blazing-fast strikes, the character deflects incoming shots from a host of attackers. Despite implacable odds, she remains – for the moment – untouched. *En garde*, gentlemen!

The difficulty for this maneuver is 6 + 1 for every attacker beyond the first (+2 for three attackers, +3 for four attackers, and so on). With five successes or more, she breaks the opponents' weapons, too, forcing them to roll their Willpower (difficulty 7) or back away in fear.

Unless she has extra actions within a single turn, the defender cannot do anything this turn except deflect the incoming assaults. As a rule, this trick should work only against blade-fodder mooks, not against serious antagonists; for details, see ***Mook-a-Palooza***, **Mage 20, p. 414**.

Realistically, this maneuver should apply only to hand-to-hand attacks; martial arts movies, though, use this technique against missile weapons all the time.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 6+
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

• **Riposte:** Following through on a previous parry, the attacker takes advantage of his surprised opponent and delivers a rapid counterstrike. This maneuver *must* follow a successful block or parry, and can be performed only with hand-to-hand weaponry. A fighter with multiple actions in a single turn (thanks to Time 3, a multiple-actions dice pool, or some other advantage that allows her to act more than once within that turn) can perform this maneuver in the same turn as the parry itself.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** Weapon -2
Damage: Weapon **Actions:** 1

• **Shiv:** Wrapping herself around her opponent, the attacker shoves a short stabbing weapon into a sensitive location – an armpit, the belly, a helmet's eye-slit, and so forth. As an extra benefit, the attacker restricts her opponent's ability to move, making him vulnerable to other attacks from interested parties. The attacker herself becomes more vulnerable too, but desperate circumstances demand desperate measures.

A two-action maneuver, the shiv "technique" requires a successful ***Grapple*** maneuver first. (Again, see **Mage 20, p. 421**.) Assuming she's successful, the attacker uses her next action to shove a short stabbing weapon (dagger, stiletto, hatpin, spike, etc.) into the vulnerable spot. This demands a second roll (Dexterity + Melee) but lets her ignore all protections from armor while inflicting a bit of extra damage too.

This attack's base difficulty is 7; however, a target with very few vulnerable spots (that is, covered except for eyes and /or with only small chinks in their armor) raises that difficulty to 9.

So long as the attacker keeps her weapon in the target, she can twist it around and inflict an extra level of aggravated damage per turn. This damage cannot be soaked unless the target is essentially immune to harm caused by weapons digging around in his innards. Werewolves, vampires, dragons, and similar critters can attempt to soak such damage because they're *just that tough to kill*; cyborgs and so forth, though, can have their workings seriously messed up by this sort of thing. (Spirits and ghosts, lacking physical substance, can't be harmed by a shiv attack unless the fighter employs a weapon that can hurt them, they've already materialized, or both. Zombies, skeletons, and other critters that lack functioning organs are unfazed by such mayhem.)

As with the ***Bind***, ***Grapple***, and ***Stabbing Frenzy*** maneuvers, the attacker remains vulnerable to other assailants. Characters who take shots at her subtract -2 from their usual difficulties; if they miss, however, they hit her target instead.

Roll: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** 7/9
Damage: Weapon +1 + Special **Actions:** 2

• **Slash:** Going for the kill, the attacker brings his weapon around for a slicing blow. This attack applies only to hand-to-hand combatants.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** Weapon +1
Damage: Weapon +2 **Actions:** 1

• **Spinning Bloodbath:** In a whirl of unmatchable speed, the attacker turns a crowd of incoming enemies into geysers of explosive carnage. Limbs fly. Gore erupts. Hip-hop soundtrack or ironic 1970s pop song not included.

The feat demands at least three dots in both Dexterity and the appropriate weapon Ability on the part of the attacker. For each success, that attacker renders one mook-level assailant either dead or dying of grotesque mortal wounds. This maneuver works *only* against faceless agents of antagonism – serious foes must be fought with the usual combat methods. Although it's usually associated with martial-arts films, this maneuver can be used with bows and firearms as well, to reflect Legolas- or Rambo-style prowess.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Special **Actions:** 1

• **Stabbing Frenzy:** Armed with a short-bladed knife, the attacker ducks inside the opponent's reach and unleashes a storm of rapid jabs and stabs. It's a risky attack, because the attacker cannot dodge or counter any assaults at such close range; the sudden massive trauma involved, however, usually occupies the opponent's attention that turn. That said, the attacker is vulnerable to other opponents, who subtract -2 from their difficulty when trying to hit him. Thus, this is a sort of sacrifice technique, best used in a one-on-one fight.

On a similar note, this attack is useless against armor that's thicker than 2 points of protection. These zero-range stabs have no momentum behind them, and so cannot penetrate thicker types of armor.

Because it depends upon using a short, fast weapon to stab the target at exceedingly close range, this maneuver can be performed only with short knives (switchblades, pocket knives, stilettos, etc.), razor blades, needles, broken bottles, small hand axes, or spiked fist-load weapons. There's no room in this frenzy for slashing or elaborate technique – it's just a brutal, desperate barrage. Hence, this maneuver employs either Brawl or Melee, not any form of refined martial art.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl or Melee **Difficulty:** 4
Damage: Weapon +3 **Actions:** 1

• **Stillness Strike:** A staple of samurai showdowns, this technique demands utter dedication to the moment and withdrawal from all other concerns. Entering a Zen trance, the warrior stands near-motionless until her opponent moves; at the instant of contact, she dodges his weapon and strikes with her own. If she's successfully judged that moment, her attack is devastating; if not, her life may be the price for inattention.

Unlike most combat maneuvers, this technique depends upon awareness, not agility. And so, the roll is Wits + Awareness. Each success rolled adds one automatic success to the damage that weapon would normally inflict, plus one automatic success for each dot of Willpower the opponent has that is less than 5. (She would, then, receive an extra two successes when striking a Willpower 3 opponent.) This maneuver *does not* receive the usual success-based bonus damage that hand-to-hand weapons normally receive, but the attack is devastating enough without them.

If the warrior blows her roll, her attack misses completely. If she botches it, the bonus damage she would have inflicted on her opponent gets inflicted upon her instead. That opponent also subtracts -2 from his next attack against her if the warrior fails or botches her roll; if he still misses her, though, then the warrior remains unharmed that turn.



This technique demands concentration, and so the warrior must take one action to enter the Zen trance. After that, she may remain essentially motionless for one hour per point of Willpower, and yet respond instantly to any form of attack.

Because of her stillness, the attacker seems like easy prey; a character who attacks her at close range, however, winds up on the receiving end of the strike. The first long-range attack is automatically deflected by the character's weapon. From that point onward, the trance is broken and the fighter acts as usual.

If two warriors face off and employ this technique, both players must make an ***extended and resisted*** roll (**Mage** 20, **p. 390**). The difficulty of that roll is the *lowest* Willpower Trait between those two warriors; if a warrior with Willpower 7 faces off against one with Willpower 5, then the difficulty is 5. Each roll reflects one hour of stillness. The first warrior to roll 10 successes wins, and the *losing* warrior automatically attacks her. A warrior who runs out of Willpower before 10 successes have been rolled automatically attacks; because he's lost his cool, he attacks using a normal attack maneuver, not the Stillness Strike. Otherwise, he can still use the normal damage bonus from this maneuver. Yes, this means that both warriors can kill each other in a single blow. That sort of thing happens during these showdowns!

If the warrior has more dots in the ***Meditation*** Ability than she has in Awareness, then she may use Meditation instead of Awareness when making this roll. She must, in any case, have no less than three dots in Martial Arts, Fencing / Kenjutsu or Do, and at least five dots in Willpower. This is not a technique for amateurs!

The Stillness Strike is a hand-to-hand fighting technique. For similar situations with guns at very close range, see the ***Mexican Standoff*** sidebar, above.

Roll: as above **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Special **Actions:** 2+

• **Thrust:** Spotting an opening, the attacker lunges in and spears her enemy through a significantly vital spot.

If she scores three successes or more, that enemy will continue bleeding out, suffer from perforated organs, or otherwise take an additional level of lethal damage per turn until someone with medical expertise treats his wound. Armor, obviously, will not help him soak that internal damage.

Roll: Dexterity + (Ability) **Difficulty:** Weapon +1
Damage: Weapon +2 **Actions:** 1

Additional stunts and flashy maneuvers can be found in the **Mage** sourcebook **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventure (pp. 72-76)**, and the **Sorcerers Crusade** supplement **The Swashbuckler's Handbook (pp. 121-128)**. Specific systems might require a bit of tweaking in order to reflect the **20th Anniversary Edition** rules; even so, for the warrior-mage with a touch of style, you can never have too many options when it's time to bust somebody's head.

Bloody Good Reading

For details about the immediate and long-term elements of violence, we highly recommend the books *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman; and *Facing Violence: Preparing for the Unexpected, Meditations on Violence: A Comparison of Martial Arts Training & Real World Violence*, and *Violence: A Writer's Guide*, all by Sgt. Rory Miller.

"What Have I Done?"

Violence only *looks* easy. In real life, it's scary, unpredictable, and traumatic in ways that game systems can't accurately reflect. Although certain mages may be hardened to carnage by their training and experiences, the average person can be unnerved by "simple" violence and emotionally scarred by deadly force. The hardened folks get traumatized by violence too, either retreating into callous emotional cocoons or growing jumpy even when no threat is obvious... and quite often both. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a real thing, and mages who spend lots of time facing violence will almost certainly acquire some.

Now, **Mage** is a roleplaying game, and RPGs are infamously violent. But mages, unlike werewolves and vampires, aren't supernatural murder machines. Ascension War or not, the Awakened are supposed to be more enlightened than blood-drinking corpses or Mama Nature's meat grinders. Part of that enlightenment includes a deeper appreciation for the Big Picture. And so, it makes sense that a typical mage – that is, one who's not an ice-cold cyborg or Man in Black – will feel the effects of deadly violence long after a fight is done... and yeah, even the ice-cold folks feel it as well, although they rarely admit as much.

Players and Storytellers might want to reveal the deeper effects of violence through roleplaying; Resonance; Willpower rolls; Flaws like ***Icy***, ***Berserker,*** or ***PTSD*** (see **Chapter One**); and other story-based consequences. Violence may come with the territory when you're a mage, but in **Mage**, as in real life, it's hard to walk away from it without scars.

Stunt Maneuvers

Maneuver	Traits	Difficulty	Effect
All for One...	Dexterity + Alertness	8	Shared initiative (one turn /success)
Alone in Crowd	Manipulation + Intimidation	8	Cleared showdown space
Hero Landing	Charisma + Athletics /Acrobatics	8	Safe, impressive descent
Jackie Chan	Dexterity + Expression	8	1 level B damage per success + stun + attack denial vs. all characters within 10' #1
Knockout Blow	Dexterity + Brawl /Do /Martial Arts	8	5+ Successes knocks out target (one turn / success)
Parkour Master	Dexterity + Athletics /Acrobatics	7	Travel across difficult terrain
Pulling the Wool	Dexterity + Subterfuge /Strength + Alertness	7/5	Wardrobe malfunction
Surfing Wave	Stamina + Athletics	9	Travel 20' /success away from explosion #2

Notes

#1 = Requires at least three dots in Acrobatics, Athletics, Brawling, Do, and/or Martial Arts. Hero can perform stunt once per fight for each dot in Charisma.

#2 = Negates explosion damage, but inflicts one level bashing damage /success on character.

Weapon Maneuvers

Maneuver	Roll #1	Difficulty	Damage
Bash	Dexterity + Brawl	Weapon +1	Weapon -1/B
Bind	Dexterity + (Ability)	6/8	Immobilizes weapon
Curtain Blood	Dexterity + (Ability)	8	Target ½ dice pool until vision cleared (min. 2 successes)
Feint	#2	6	Weapon +2
Fleche / Charge	Dexterity + (Ability)	7	Weapon +1
Great Blow	Dexterity + (Ability)	Weapon +2	Weapon +3 #3
Jab	Dexterity + (Ability)	Weapon +1	Weapon -2 #4
Lash	Dexterity + (Ability)	8	Weapon /damages targeted object
Lightning Parry	Dexterity + (Ability)	6+	Deflects 1 incoming attack / success #5
Riposte	Dexterity + (Ability)	Weapon -2	Weapon #6
Shiv #7	Dexterity + Melee	7/9	Bypasses Armor + additional damage per turn
Slash	Dexterity + (Ability)	Weapon +1	Weapon +2
Spinning Bloodbath	Dexterity + (Ability)	6	Eliminates 1 mook /success #5
Stab Frenzy	Dexterity + Brawl/Melee	4	Weapon +3 #8
Stillness Strike	Wits + Awareness	6	#9
Thrust	Dexterity + (Ability)	Weapon +1	Weapon +2 #10

Notes

#1 = Ability refers to the Ability used by the attacker to employ weapon.

#2 = Two rolls, two actions. First roll is Manipulation + (Ability), difficulty 6. Opponent can counter with Perception + (Ability), difficulty 8; if attacker succeeds, next action is a strike at Dexterity + (Ability), difficulty 6.

#3 = Requires two actions; subtracts -1 from the difficulty of attacks against the character that turn.

#4 = Adds +1 to the difficulty of the target's attacks against that character this turn.

#5 = Maneuver applies only to mooks, not to major antagonists.

#6 = Follows successful block or parry.

#7 = Requires successful Grapple attack first.

#8 = Only with short blades; attacker is easier to hit; useless against Armor 3 or better.

#9 = Adds +1 success to damage, per success; see entry for details.

#10 = Three successes or more inflicts bleeding internal wound.

Certámen: Optional Tactics for Classic Wizard Duels

In the early days of the Hermetic Order, cranky wizards needed a way of blowing off steam and sorting out disputes, preferably without killing each other and laying the countryside to waste. Centuries later, the Council of Nine adopted their solution: *certámen*, a "gentlemen's duel" in which magick, cleverness, and theatricality would matter more than sheer might and the resulting carnage thereof.

The basic rules for such contests can be found under ***Old Form Certámen***, in the ***Magickal Duels*** section of **Mage 20, pp. 432-434**. If you'd like a wider range of options, however, the following *expanded rules* may add spice to a certámen duel. Use or ignore them as you see fit. Oh, and for clarity's sake, remember that a lower-case *sphere* refers to the floating weapons, shield, and reserves of a dueling mage, while a capitalized *Sphere* refers to the nine Spheres used to perform magick.

Intimidation

Facing a clearly superior wizard in certámen can be extremely daunting. Mages can't "see each other's character sheets," as it were, so the characters don't usually know what their opponents can do. When the glowing spheres manifest, however, a duelist may realize that he's seriously outclassed.

At the beginning of a duel, a combatant whose opponent has at least three glowing spheres more than he does may have to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 4 + 1 per additional sphere), or else automatically lose initiative that first turn. If he botches that Willpower roll, don't bother rolling initiative at all – he's always attacking second.

Blocking

The defending player can try to use her Aegis to entirely block an incoming attack. In this case, roll Wits + Aegis Sphere against the difficulty of the attacker's Gladius Sphere + 3. A successful roll means that the Gladius gets completely deflected that turn. The defender can either perform ***Multiple Actions*** **(Mage 20, p. 388-389)** in order to block an attack this way, use her entire turn as a blocking attempt, or employ Time 3 to give herself an extra action so that she can block the attack with her full dice pool.

Botching

A botched certámen roll reflects a loss of concentration. Essentially, the duelist fumbles his Gladius or Aegis, and both disappear. To use them again, he needs to rearm himself, as described in the ***Rearming*** entry below.

Disarming Your Opponent

Striking at the opponent's weapon or shield, the duelist tries to disrupt her rival's dueling spheres with her own. This maneuver demands the usual attack roll, this time at difficulty 9. Each success disrupts the target Gladius or Aegis for one turn; four successes or more destroys the target completely, leaving the rival duelist either unarmed or unprotected.

Rearming

A duelist who loses his Gladius, Aegis, or both must either form a new one from one of his reserve spheres, or else – if he has no reserve spheres left – conjure a new sphere to use. Forming a new Gladius or Aegis from a reserve sphere takes only one turn, but conjuring a new sphere and then transforming it into the proper shape requires two turns. In the meantime, the duelist is either unarmed, unprotected, or both.

Locus Dodge

Here, the defender tries to move the Locus itself. He rolls Wits + Arete (difficulty 6), and each success removes one success from the attacker's total. A Locus dodge requires a full action; you cannot perform multiple actions in order to attack within the same turn, though a Time 3 hastened mage could use one action to attack and another as a Locus dodge.

Switching Spheres

Typically, the attacker and defender keep a single Sphere as the Gladius and another as the Aegis. A tricky mage, however, might shift between them in mid-duel, replacing one for the other. She could even pull one of her reserve spheres into play, changing tactics by switching spheres.

In game terms, it takes one turn to transform the Gladius into the Aegis, the Aegis into the Gladius, or a reserve sphere into either the weapon or the shield. Under most circumstances, there's no roll required – the ability to switch between spheres easily is built into the circle. Under extreme circumstances (injury, fury, fear, etc.), the duelist might have to roll her Willpower against difficulty 7 in order to change them in the middle of a match. A successful roll allows her to do so easily, and a failed roll reflects scrambled concentration. That failed roll allows the opponent to get one free attack while the duelist regains her composure. After that, she can try to switch the spheres again, though at the usual penalty for a new attempt at a failed roll. (See ***Trying it Again*** in **Mage 20, pps. 392-393**.)

Surprise Intimidation

A cunning mage can decide not to reveal her true power until the duel has begun. Then, at a strategic point, she conjures her remaining glowing spheres in an attempt to intimidate her opponent. In game terms, the player simply says something like, "*I'm going to conjure only three spheres, rather than the six I could conjure because I have Arete 6.*" In the middle of the duel, she lets those other spheres manifest, forcing her opponent to make the Willpower roll above. This sort of thing is considered sneaky, and the Certámen Marshall might stop the duel. Still, he might *not* stop it, and the psychological edge may be worth the risk.

Refueling

A duelist might be able to carry Tass into a certámen match in order to refuel the Locus during the duel. If the terms of the match forbid refueling, however, that extra Tass would be considered cheating. In many matches, though, that little extra edge is quite traditional – Hermetic wizards used to do it all the time back in the old days.

Refueling takes one turn, and requires Prime 2 or better. A normal Prime 2 Effect must be cast in order to draw the Quintessence from that Tass. (For details, see the ***Prime Sphere entry*** in **Mage 20, pp. 520-521**) The roll involved is difficulty 6, and each success moves one point of Quintessence into the Locus. Technically, you could refuel from the Chantry's Node during a duel; this, however, is *extremely* bad form and usually leads the Marshalls to cancel the duel and chastise the offender.

Psychological Warfare

As with any other sort of contest, you can psyche out your opponent in a certámen duel. This could involve anything from taunts or aggressive body language to a terrifying manifestation of the Gladius and Aegis – say for instance,

Optional Rule: Special Sphere Effects

As a seasoned certámen veteran knows, different Spheres can offer special benefits to a duelist who knows how to employ them properly. The following *optional rule* can spice up a certámen match. A combat Sphere grants advantages in attack or defense, whereas a reserve Sphere supplies an edge in other ways.

- **Correspondence (Reserve):** Thanks to its disorienting effects, Correspondence can add extra dice to the duelist's attack or defense rolls. When employed this way, Correspondence supplies one extra die for every dot the duelist has in that Sphere. (A mage with Correspondence 3, for example, would get three extra dice for either attack or defense.) In any given turn, these bonus dice must be used for either attack or defense, not both.
- **Entropy (Combat):** When used as a Gladius, Entropy adds one automatic success to the attacker's roll; however, it also consumes one point of Quintessence every time it drains Quintessence from the defender's Locus. That Quintessence goes to feed the Void and does *not* transfer Quintessence into the attacker's Locus.
- **Forces (Combat):** If the attacking duelist rolls at least one 10, a Forces Gladius grants the attacker one extra attack die for every 10 that he has rolled with that attempt. (Three 10s, for example, would give three more dice.) Each 10 rolled on those bonus dice gives the attacker yet *another* bonus die.
- **Life (Combat):** Used as the Aegis, the Life Sphere gives the defender one extra soak die for every Rank in that Sphere. (Life 3, for instance, would give three more soak dice.)
- **Matter (Combat):** For every dot the duelist has in the Matter Sphere, he can add one extra die to attack (when Matter is used as the Gladius) or defense (when it's used as the Aegis).
- **Mind (Combat):** Due to the almost-invisible forms of Mind-based weapons and shields, all attack or block rolls against a Mind-based Gladius or Aegis add +1 to the difficulty for each dot in the duelist's Mind Sphere. (Mind 3, obviously, adds +3 to the difficulty. And yes, this bonus can exceed the usual +/-3 modifier maximums.)
- **Prime (Reserve):** When tapped for reserve, the brightly shining Prime Sphere allows the duelist to lower her difficulties for both attack and defense by a total of -1 for every rank in the Sphere. (Prime 3, as above, grants a -3 difficulty reduction, which can be applied to attack, to defense, or split between them, each turn.)
- **Spirit (Combat):** When used as a Gladius, the Spirit Sphere adds one automatic drain success for every 10 rolled during an attack. (Two 10s, for instance, would drain two additional Quintessence points.)
- **Time (Reserve):** For every dot in Time over the first one, a duelist who taps Time as a reserve Sphere can spend a point of Quintessence from his own Locus to perform one additional action. (Time 3, for example, would give that duelist the ability to spend up to two points of Quintessence and perform up to two additional actions, per turn.)

When formed into glowing spheres, Correspondence, Prime, and Time are extremely hard to look at directly. Correspondence seems to warp space around the sphere, Prime blazes in a ball of incandescent white, and Time ripples perceptions in several feet around the glowing sphere itself. A mage trying to attack one of those reserve spheres must add +1 to his attack difficulty for every dot the defending mage has in the Sphere Trait. (Someone attacking the Time reserve sphere of a mage with Time 3, for example, would add +3 to her difficulty to hit that rippling sphere.) Such Spheres, for obvious reasons, have dazzling strategic and visual appeal when used during a certámen match.

a Gladius that looks like a roaring hell-beast and an Aegis that resembles a shrieking face.

In game terms, the intimidating player rolls an appropriate Social Trait (usually Manipulation or Charisma) + an appropriate Ability (probably Intimidation, although Art, Empathy, Expression, or even Seduction could work as well). Each success inflicts a -1 penalty on the defender's next roll; five successes or more might cause her either to concede the match immediately or lose initiative for the rest of the duel and remain on the defensive throughout the certámen match.

Reshaping the Spheres

As explained under the heading ***Shaping the Spheres*** **(Mage 20, p. 434)**, certámen duelists can shape their Gladius, Aegis, Locus, and glowing spheres into whatever forms they like. At the beginning of the match, this shape choice is essentially part of the ritual and isn't counted as part of combat. Once the duel begins, however, it takes an extra effort of will in order to reshape the spheres into new configurations.

If a duelist wants to change sphere shapes in the middle of a match, that combatant should roll his Wits + Arete. The difficulty depends on whether he's winning (difficulty 5) or losing (difficulty 7). A successful roll transforms the spheres as desired; a failed one keeps them in their current forms; and a botched roll flusters the mage's concentration, giving his opponent one free attack.

Tapping a Reserve

If a duelist has the correct magickal Spheres, and she conjures them as glowing spheres with her Arete, she may be able to tap one of those spheres as a reserve. In this case, the duelist employs multiple actions in order to draw upon the power of that sphere during combat. For the effects of different reserve spheres, see the sidebar, under ***Special Sphere Effects***.

To the Pain

In a serious grudge match, certámen opponents may battle "to the pain." In this case, the duelists employ Quintessence from their own life-force, and the fight lasts until one of them passes out from the strain. Story-wise, the two combatants sling power in one another's directions in the usual way, but with serious focus and deep emotional investment.

System-wise, give each duelist an extra three Quintessence points for each dot of permanent Willpower they possess. This is *not* actual Quintessence, only a reflection of the contestants' strength of will. Those "will points" go into the Locus, giving the duelists a deeper reserve of power. After the initial Quintessence points in the Locus (that is, the ones that aren't drawn from Willpower) are depleted, the duelist needs to make a Stamina



roll each time his Locus gets hit. That roll's difficulty starts at 6, and then goes up +1 for each subsequent Willpower roll. If he succeeds, he keeps fighting; if he fails, the attacker drains a will point, and the defender loses one temporary Willpower point for every three will points that get drained. Once a combatant loses all of his will points, he drops unconscious and the certámen match ends. The losing mage wakes up with a ferocious headache and a temporary Willpower rating of 1 until he manages to restore his self-respect.

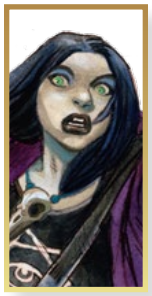
Attacking Your Opponent

Certámen was designed to pit power against power without causing physical harm to the combatants. Therefore, the duelists attack one another's Quintessence Loci, not each other's bodies. Even so, certain certámen duelists throw feints at their opponents, trying to unnerve the rival mage with an apparent attack upon his person.

In this case, count the attack as a ***Psychological Warfare*** maneuver (above), using the Social Trait + Gladius Sphere. In story terms, it looks as though the Gladius flares up and goes straight for the rival duelist. A successful roll puts that duelist on the defensive, forcing him to roll his Willpower or else lose his next attack. (If the roll succeeds by three successes or more, the Storyteller might subtract a -1 penalty from the defender's Willpower roll for every success rolled by the attacker.)

Unless the duel has already been established as an all-out grudge match, *actually* attacking a rival mage in the certámen circle, with intent to injure him, is extremely poor form. The Marshall will probably stop the match right there, award victory to the defender, and charge the attacker with either a low crime (if the opponent isn't harmed) or a high crime (if he's badly harmed). In either case, the attacker will be banned from certámen matches for the foreseeable future, as she clearly cannot be trusted in them.

Child-Mages: Creation Rules for Awakened Youngsters



Infants have the most powerful human voices. But as we learn to speak, and to "quiet down now," we forget how to use those vocal powers. The same might be said about Awakening. According to certain philosophers, all infants are born Awakened and then get lulled to Sleep by the demands and structures of the human world. Some mystic practices, in fact, emphasize the importance of "getting in touch with your inner child." Certain children, though, never go to Sleep at all... or, if they *do*, they re-Awaken again before they hit puberty. Those young mages, rare as they might be, can hold amazing – even terrifying – power.

Child-mages tend to fall into one of three categories:

- Those who never go to Sleep, and are thus magickally gifted from birth. Parenting such children can be... challenging. Parents who don't believe in magick wonder why so many strange things happen around their kids, while those who *do* can go overboard when indulging their "little miracle," and then wind up raising a mystic brat.

- Those with a powerful past-life reincarnation. Such children embody mages who have died and been reborn with memories and understanding of who they were and what they could do. Reincarnated magelings might become "golden children," filled with wisdom and experience; or else reveal themselves to be "demon seeds," carrying their malignant past-lives into a new and awful form.

- The "innocents" who embody pure new Avatars rather than past lives. Such kids are *extremely* rare, although wishful parents like to *think* that their kids have this kind of innate gift. True innocents have a powerful faith that often protects them in times of need, and tend to attract both protectors and enemies who wish to guide or destroy that innate innocence.

In ever rarer circumstances, the spirit of a dead mage might possess the body of a child. In that case, the poor kid winds up with a sudden flood of powers and memories, plus the consciousness of a wizard who's trying to run the show. Depending on the bond worked out between these two minds, the resulting child-mage could be gracious and wise, or else hell on two legs. (Marauders and Nephandi tend to do this sort of thing on purpose, which has become one of their most terrifying tactics; see the ***Puppetry and Possession*** entry of **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 122-125.**)

Whatever the origins and nature of their mystic powers, Awakened children can inspire wonderful adventures. The roleplaying games *Grimm* and *Little Fears*, plus the sourcebook **World of Darkness: Innocents**, contain plenty of ideas about such characters, their world, and the sorts of stories they endure. The Harry Potter series presents an obvious inspiration for such chronicles, as do other books and films along those lines.

An Awakened child among a group of adults has a far more difficult time of things, partly because it's so hard being taken seriously as a kid, and partly because those adults are legally responsible for the things a child does (or is exposed to) in their presence. Minors have few independent legal

rights beyond the right to be taken care of decently... and even *that* right is violated far more often than it should be. If you choose to play a child-mage, everyone in your group will have a lot of unexpected challenges to face – from the obvious ones like "*Where's your parents, kid?*" to the thornier issues of childlike temperament, reckless endangerment, and potentially inappropriate bonds and emotions.

Parents of Awakened children often get overwhelmed by the balance of power involved when a kid can summon lightning or bring dead pets back to life. Temper tantrums from such kids can have devastating results, and enforcing consequences can be difficult unless the parents are mages themselves. A Hogwarts-style "school for mage-kids" – possibly run by Hermetic, Verbena, Dreamspeaker, or (*brrrr...*) Technocratic elders – offers a potential solution to the problems inherent when Little Jimmy can turn a neighbor inside-out; both the Traditions and the Technocracy have places where they keep and train children who Awaken before maturity, and your character might grow up in such a place.

As for Awakened teenagers, there's a whole subgenre of teen-lit dedicated to the subject of adolescents gifted and cursed by magickal powers – young people with a bit more autonomy, experience and physical prowess than little children, but also subject to raging hormones and social upheavals that young kids rarely have to face. For inspiration, check out the *Magic or Madness* trilogy by Justine Larbalestier, the *Black Blade* series by Jennifer Estep, Chuck Wendig's Miriam Black series, Holly Black's Curse Worker series, Lili St. Crow's *Strange Angel* series, and many other books, besides.

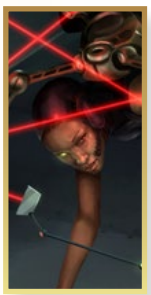
(It's also worth mentioning that Awakened kids can be technomancers or even budding Technocrats. After all, a kid who spends a lot of time online, working in a lab or tinkering with cars is far more likely to gravitate toward the Virtual Adepts, Society of Ether, or Iteration X than to the Celestial Chorus or Verbena. For examples, look at the character Chopper in the **Mage 20 Quickstart** book, and the story "A Firm Place to Stand" in the **Mage 20** collection **Truth Beyond Paradox**.)

Culture is everything, especially to a child. A kid who Awakens in a monastery, rural village or Native reservation might find a mystic elder who can train her properly... although she could also, like the heroine of Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Who Fears Death*, become a hated outcast instead. "Native cultures" do not automatically accept magick in their midst – or welcome it either. An Awakened child faces a hard road... but also, like most mages, a potentially rewarding one as well.

Game Traits for Child-Mages

- Pre-adolescent characters begin with 10 freebie points, not 15, due to lack of life-experience.
- Pre-teen kids get no more than six dots in Physical Attributes, with no more than two of them in Strength.
- Pre-teen mages start with a base Arete of 2, not 1. (Maximum of 3 still applies.)
- Child-mages may begin with any Affinity Sphere, but get the usual six Sphere dots.
- Pre-teens must take the Flaws: ***Short*** and ***Child***. (See ***Chapter One*** for details.)
- Young mages will probably have the Backgrounds: ***Allies***, ***Destiny***, and ***Mentor***, plus an ***Avatar*** Background no lower than 3. These Traits are not "free," but must be paid for normally.
- New-Avatar innocents also begin play with between one and three points in the Merit: ***True Faith***. Again, this Trait must be purchased (it's not free), and may be worn away by the challenges of growing up in the World of Darkness.

Computer Systems: Game Rules for InfoTech



Depending on which mage you ask, a computer could be anything from a sentient entity bound into a material container, to a Technocratic shackle upon the imaginations of humanity, to the last great hope of human transcendence. None of that stuff has any bearing on the following rule-systems, and technological specifics really aren't important in game terms anyhow. Computer technology and its applications have changed radically within the last 25 years, and any specifics we note here right now would be essentially obsolete by the time this book winds up in your hands. Practically speaking, however, computers are hypercompetent information storage, management, and assimilation systems. That part of the deal hasn't changed much since the abacus – merely the systems' methods, forms, and capacities have changed.

From a practical perspective, a character who's working with computers is organizing and manipulating information. And because reality *is*, in a sense, information, that computer user invokes a tiny bit of magick every time he taps the interface. That happens whether the Spheres and Arete are involved or not. You can change the reality of your day, perhaps your life, perhaps the lives of people across the world, all with a simple email. That's the power of the Information Age.

Computer System Types

palmtop /smart phone /tablet: Smallest computers known to the Consensus. Technomancers operate smaller computers than this, although access to the truly miniscule models can be problematic.

laptop: Former status symbol, now a common tool and toy.

PC: Personal Computer; a home- or office-based private unit.

elite PC: Personal computer designed and maintained by a computer expert.

supercomputer: Large, incredibly powerful computers and networks, typically employed by governments, major corporations, wealthy mages, and the Technocracy. Inevitably protected by the best security measures possible... which does not make them impregnable, merely challenging.

quantum computer: Massive, immobile units that maintain qubits in an uncertain state. This state theoretically allows the computer to work far faster, and employ more sophisticated applications, than conventional bit-based digital technology.

Trinary computer: Enlightened hypertech; where Consensus computers operate on "*yes /no*" principles, a Trinary computer also understands "*maybe*" and "*either /and/or.*" This capacity allows them a flexibility and power that normal computers have yet to match – a flexibility essential to many technomagickal applications.

firewall: Baseline security program and protocols. Any protected computer or system has a firewall to block intrusions – and often to monitor and control outgoing computer transmissions too.

mini /small network: Multiuser system, typically interconnected in a home or office setting.

mainframe /large network: Extensive networks of affiliated computers, data storage, and security systems. Typically used by corporations, governments, universities, labs, hospitals, and other high-end facilities, and often shielded from casual contact and intrusion by thick firewalls and tough security protocols.

server /server farm: A computer system, or network of computer systems, dedicated to data storage and management for a particular set of clients and services.

cloud: Virtual server network dedicated to Internet-based data storage. A typical cloud server doesn't exist in physical space, it and may be moved around and adjusted in virtual space.

To access that power, a character needs to know how to work the system. Twenty years ago, that skill belonged to a handful of people worldwide. Today, it's an essential part of daily life for at least a quarter of that same world's population, and it indirectly influences almost everybody else. The hardware and software change, as do the skills involved, but the in-game Traits remain the same: a Mental Trait (Perception, Wits, or most commonly Intelligence) + Computer (or, in certain cases, Technology). Any character with that combination of Traits can use information technologies to some degree. What she can *do* with those Traits depends upon her skills, the system, and the task at hand.

Back in the 1990s, all a would-be hacker or cracker needed was a little computer savvy, the proper hard- and software, and a lot of time on his hands. Times change, though, and today's computer specialists have batteries of skills that help them do their jobs. And so, in game terms, your character should possess appropriate Traits before he goes mucking about in IT systems. Although most folks know how to use basic computer skills these days, the true elite master a wide range of helpful abilities. For the various rolls and modifiers involved in those computerized tasks, see the ***Computer System Types*** sidebar and the ***Computer Systems*** and ***Hacking Difficulties charts***.

Simple Use

If you're reading this book, then you already know how to use employ a computer's basic functions: writing, web surfing, cut-and-paste, basic data storage, and other standard IT tasks. In the twenty-first century, a character with at least one dot in ***Technology*** can do the same, although a character from an earlier era could not have done so. These days, computers are a standard part of the industrialized world, and it doesn't take special skills to employ their simplest applications.

Employing more advanced tasks – coding, data sifting, Computer Generated Image projects, and so forth – requires at least one dot in ***Computer***; for really skillful use of those applications, a specialization is usually a good idea. Under normal circumstances, a character won't need to roll Intelligence + Computer to handle daily tasks. In high-tension situations, though – swiping data from the boss's computer, chasing bugs, loading new programs that could crash your system – the Storyteller might require a roll just to make sure you don't screw things up.

Basic installation for a home-based system generally involves at least one dot in both Technology and Computer; that way, you're not trying to plug the speakers into a USB

Computer Systems

Tasks	Traits
Programming	Intelligence + Computer
Hacking & Cracking	Intelligence + Computer
Working Fast	Wits + Computer
Analyzing System	Perception + Computer
Finding Data or Traps	Perception + Computer
Social Engineering	Social Trait + Computer
Encrypting/ Deciphering	Intelligence + Cryptography
Hardware Work	Dexterity or Intelligence + Technology (Computer Hardware)

Activity / Circumstances	Difficulty	Hours
Writing Cracking Software	8/6	#1
Writing Security Software	7	#1
Using Cracking Software	-1/-3	-1/-3
Planting Backdoor	#2	+1
Using Backdoor	-2	-4
Accessing /Altering Obvious Data	6	1
Accessing /Altering Hidden Data	7	2
Accessing /Altering Classified Data	8	3+
Obvious System Crack	7	1+
Hidden System Crack	8	2+
Scanning Van Eck	#2	1+
Sloppy Filing	+1 /+3	Double usual time
Social Engineering	-1 /-3	-1/-3
Trinary Computer	+/-2	+/-2

Notes

#1 = One roll reflects a week or more of work in downtime; each success when writing software reduces later hacking and cracking rolls by -1 per success.

#2 = Difficulty based on the system being hacked, as per ***Computer System Types***.

port, or wondering why a blank disc won't install the newest version of Word. Again, you don't usually need to roll for such tasks unless your character's trying to do them in a hurry or under duress. ("*Yes, Mom... I* ***do*** *know what I'm doing, really...*")

Programming, Repair, and System Architecture

A character who's trying to use the more sophisticated applications of information technologies – advanced programming, program writing, system architecture, elaborate programs, technical maintenance, upgrade design and installation, software repair, etc. – should have at least three dots in Computer, plus at least one dot (probably more) in Technology. Hardware repair involves at least one dot in Technology with a specialty in Computer Hardware.

Outside the movies, such tasks tend to take time... minutes at least, hours more often, sometimes even days or weeks, depending on the scope and complexity of the task. Beyond daily tasks (say, basic repair if you're a member of the Geek Squad), this sort of thing could require a roll: usually Intelligence + Computer for software application, Perception + Computer for troubleshooting, and perhaps Dexterity + Technology (Computer Hardware) for fiddly physical tasks. Brainstorming and system design (hardware or software) usually require Intelligence + the appropriate Ability, although Wits or Perception might come into play as well, depending on the task. In most cases, these tasks would involve standard rolls for simple feats and extended rolls for complex or time-consuming ones. (See the ***Dramatic Feats*** entries ***Computer*** and ***Design***, **Mage 20, p. 403**.)

System Bypass and Subversion

Computerized intruder or burglar alarm systems protect most of the industrial world's technology these days. From a purely physical standpoint, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) networks monitor many places of interest in the twenty-first century: businesses, intersections, elevators, alleys, traffic intersections, and even – in places like London – large portions of the city. All of this information is stored somewhere, usually in digital format... a format which a character with enough dots in Computer and Security can manipulate.

The modern burglar must understand at least the basic workings of computer-run security systems, and industrial-espionage types should be significantly better than that. Folks who wish to remain unseen (as many mages do) need to know their way around system bypass and subversion tactics. After all, when cameras, heat sensors, pressure sensors, laser arrays, and other such technologies are keeping Big Brother's eyes on you, mere stealth is not enough.

A character who wants to bypass or corrupt computer-managed security systems needs at least one dot in both Computer and the secondary Skill: ***Security***. (See that entry in **Chapter One** for details.) In most cases, those systems are

managed from inside a secured area, so the would-be intruder needs to figure out a way to access that system without setting the security off. Thankfully, the wonders of computer magicks and Correspondence Arts allow a savvy mage to reach control centers that no unAwakened person could access. (See the ***Black Card /Little Black Box*** Adjustment, **Mage 20, p. 601**.) Even so, that trespasser needs to know what he's looking for in order to bypass or sabotage the system. Merely being there isn't enough; you've also gotta *understand* the system before you can modify it.

Defeating a computerized security system doesn't always require hacking into it; a smart intruder knows how to bypass a system without messing with it. That said, many computerized security systems have triggers that set off alerts when suspicious events (power surges, sudden cutoffs, unauthorized users, etc.) hit the system. In real life, most of the tricks employed by Hollywood don't actually work, and though a mage might employ ***Hollywood Reality*** to wrangle a computer, there's no guarantee that such tactics will pay off. (See the sidebar of that name earlier in this chapter.)

Serious details about security bypass procedures can get too complicated for normal game use. For simplicity's sake, assume that you'll use an Intelligence + Security roll, probably extended, to establish a computerized security system. Maintaining or adjusting that system would involve Intelligence + Computer rolls if such tasks have to be rolled for at all.

Bypassing that sort of a system, though, is a bit more complex. In such situations, the Storyteller asks the player what she's doing to get around the system, then has her make a Perception + Security roll to scope out the system, followed by an Intelligence (or perhaps Dexterity) + Computer roll to access or bypass it. For automated systems, this requires either a standard roll (for simple systems) or an extended one (for sophisticated networks). Success grants access, failure does not, and a botch triggers the alarm. For especially sensitive systems, even a failed roll will set the alarms off... in which case the mage should have a good escape plan handy.

Hacking, Reversing, and Cracking

One of the oldest games in computer culture involves breaking into a system, usually to change data and systems to your satisfaction, design new systems and upgrade old ones, create workarounds for annoying obstacles, and generally subvert the existing paradigm. This bag of programming tricks, whether used for good or ill, falls under the umbrella called *hacking*. Despite its bad name, hacking provides a major component of the IT revolution. If everyone had been content with the systems we had back in the 1960s or '70s, after all, we wouldn't have the computerized world we enjoy today.

On the other hand, the term *cracking* refers to deliberately breaking a protection code or encryption built into an application or program. Breaking a code or encryption in a video game in order to copy a high-value item and then sell that (perfectly legit, as far as the cracked system is concerned) copy on the gray market is cracking, as is breaking digital-rights protection software on commercial DVDs. In plain English, then, cracking is the process of breaking things.

Hacking Difficulties

System Being Hacked	Difficulty	Successes	Hours
Commercial Software	5-7	1-3	½ hour – 2 hours
Unique Software	8	5	2+
Palmtop /Tablet	5	3	1
Laptop /PC	6	3-5	1-3
Elite PC	8	5-8	1-6
Mini /Small Network	7	3-5	
Mainframe / Large Network	8	5-10	3-5
Commercial Cloud	6	3-5	½ hour – 2 hours
Secure Cloud	7	3-6	1-3
Elite Cloud	8	10	3-5
Commercial Server	7	5	1-3
Secure Server	8	10	5+
Elite Server	9	15	5+
Supercomputer	9	20	5+

Cracking isn't done in a vacuum, though. The character first needs to reverse engineer, or just *reverse*, the system she's trying to crack. She needs to know what she's looking for in order to crack encryption – she can't just jailbreak that fancy smart phone without having done some research and reconnaissance first. It's easy to... *obtain*... something like the smart phone she's trying to crack in order to take it apart and figure out how it ticks, but some hackers go so far as to buy the same model of ATM or point-of-sale system they're trying to hack in order to reverse it. Reversing can also apply to programs or applications like firewalls: once the hacker has reversed the program, she can use the knowledge she gained to bypass the system's security measures.

Many hackers draw sharp distinctions between people who pursue excellence through better solutions to the problem (white hats), and those who strive to break what other people



have created (black hats). In the eyes of many non-technical folks, hacking *is* cracking and vice versa. That's not the case, though, as far as many hackers are concerned. For the sake of clarity and of game simplicity, then, assume that *hacking* refers to access, innovation, and reinvention (possibly against the original designer's intentions...), whereas *cracking* refers to breaking into an established system with destructive purposes in mind.

In practice, hacking is just programming, making changes to digital things.

Philosophically, hacking is *magick*; computer hackers remake the reality they've been given in order to make the reality they want. Ideally, hackers also prize excellence and seek better ways to do almost anything imaginable. In that sense, then, *all* mages are reality hackers. Some are just more attuned to the computer side of that game than others are. (For more details, see the ***Everything is Data*** paradigm and the ***Reality Hacking*** practice under ***Focus and the Arts*** in **Mage 20, pp. 570** and **581-582.**)

For the game-systems involved in the various sorts of hacking, see ***Hacking Rules***, pp. 123-127.

Cryptanalysis and Codes

No sane person wants strangers rummaging through his stuff. The field of *cryptanalysis* specializes in studying the hidden aspects of computer systems, crafting security measures to protect information, and then working around those measures so you can safeguard yourself while undercutting rival operators. In game terms, the Computer specialty ***Cryptanalysis*** helps your character size up potential threats and plans of attack, and the secondary Knowledge ***Cryptography*** helps her make and break codes for computerized systems.

Twenty-first century computing employs codes of inhuman complexity. Writing and deciphering those codes, even with a computer and badass cryptography programs, can take days, weeks, months, or more. Therefore, a character who's trying to make a new code or break a complicated one could be at that task for quite a while. Cryptography almost always requires extended rolls – typically with 20 or 30 successes involved, and perhaps even more than that.

The problem is, security codes often require specific sorts of information... usually rather *obscure* information. Therefore, a skilled cryptographer needs access to research – systemwise, the ***Research*** Skill and ***Library*** Background, as well as research-based rolls as per the ***Dramatic Feats chart***. The ***Esoterica*** Knowledge and its many specialties can be a huge help in that regard, especially when you're dealing with mage-crafted codes. The Storyteller may allow, or require, ***complementary rolls*** with related skills (see **Mage 20, p. 389**) before a code may be written or broken to begin with. And if

the character doesn't have access to the proper information, that code may prove unbreakable.

Social Engineering

A sardonic term for alternative solutions, *social engineering* refers to hacking a system through the *people*, not the *technology*. Bribes, seductions, blackmail, payoffs, dumpster diving, threats, and even physical violence (sometimes called *rubber hose cryptanalysis*) can secure passwords, reveal backdoors, uncover data, and otherwise compromise a system by going after the people who work with that system.

Social engineering attacks can be risky, as they expose the hacker to personal contact even when conducted through third-party channels. At times, though, they can be quite effective, especially when dealing with heavily secured systems. Mages keep various tricks up their sleeves for such situations, of course, but for hackers with good looks, personal charisma, lots of money or trade goods, or simply an intimidating presence and sociopathic tendencies, the social engineering approach contains useful tools for all-purpose subversion.

Van Eck Reading

Another "side-channel attack" technique involves reading the electronic emanations from IT technology. Although sensitive systems feature TEMPEST-hardening (a security array that protects computer systems from being "read" by outside parties), a non-TEMPEST system can still be deciphered by a hacker with the right gear and the proper knowledge.

As Wim van Eck revealed in 1985, unprotected computers release electromagnetic pulses based on the work being done on the computer in question. Reading and interpreting these "compromised emanations" through what's called *van Eck monitoring* requires specific gear and expertise; that said, it's supposedly easy if you know how.

A mage who understands this phenomenon and knows how to "read" its effects can employ Correspondence 2 /Mind 2 / Forces 1 to scan and interpret a computer's van Eck signatures. The ***Hacking Difficulties*** sidebar gives the difficulties and time involved. A properly skilled mage can read a system's van Eck emanations even if the system has been TEMPEST-hardened, although that's a pretty difficult stunt for even the most experienced technomancers. Since no one else can see what the mage is doing inside her head, van Eck reading remains coincidental unless the scanner starts saying stupid things like, "*Well, according to the van Eck readings I'm picking up without any gear...*"

Even with technomagick, however, it's still currently impossible to *transmit* a hacking program via van Eck emanations, though many Virtual Adepts have tried. At the moment, it's a read-only technique... though it might not stay that way forever...

Metaphysical Applications

Anyone with the proper knowledge can make a regular computer system do tricks. Certain tricks, though, demand certain specialized systems. And so, the more accomplished computer-mages employ sophisticated machines that accomplish feats no ordinary computer could perform.

Computers as Instruments of Focus

In the twenty-first century, mages across the spectrum use computers as instruments of technological focus. By 2017, IT systems have been a part of mainstream industrial culture for a generation... for many people, a computer provides a more natural focus than, say, dancing naked in the woods. Even the more naturalistic groups – Verbena, Ecstatics, Bata'a, and so forth – have members who employ computer magick. These folks might not be as devoted to transhumanist ideals or hypertech innovation as Virtual Adepts or Technocrats are, but they have no aversion to computer technology. For them, computers – like brooms, swords, and so on – are simply tools, as magickal as anything else in their world.

Even so, computer technology has upper limits. High-end magick overloads a typical computer system and can – in the case of Sphere Ranks 4 and 5 – crash or burn a normal computer. To perform powerful technomagick, you still need a ***Trinary computer***: a system specifically designed to handle hypertech operations, operations (as defined earlier in this chapter, and in more detail below.

A savvy computer mage will upgrade his gear to sustain the tremendous stress involved with technomagickal computer processes. For more data regarding computers as technomagickal tools, see ***Computer Gear***, ***Devices and Machines***, ***Gadgets and Inventions***, ***Mass Media***, ***Money and Wealth***, and other entries under ***Common Instruments*** in **Mage 20, pp. 588-600.**

Enlightened Upgrades

Y'know how complex programs slow your computer down? Technomagick does the same thing to computer systems that haven't been upgraded to handle the stress of bending reality. A typical off-the-shelf computer system can facilitate Sphere Ranks 1 and 2. After that, however, it's time for an upgrade.

System-wise, a technomagickal upgrade requires a combination of mundane tech and Enlightened knowhow. The tech part is simple enough; if you want to reflect it in rolls, assume an Intelligence + Technology (Computer Hardware) roll, difficulty 7, followed by an Intelligence + Computer roll, also difficulty 7. These rolls reflect the essential hardware and software alterations.

After that, a combination of Prime 2 and either Matter 2 (to reinforce the molecular structure of the gear), Spirit 3 (to awaken the spirit of the machine), or both will upgrade the system on a magickal level. Roll Arete /Enlightenment + Computer, difficulty 5. Assume that three successes or more upgrade the machine to handle technological workings (rotes, energies, Digital Web access, etc.) up to Sphere Rank 3. For Ranks 4 or 5, you still need a Trinary computer. Sleepertech has yet to reach that level of power.

Mage Trick: Flash Time /Lag Time

When you're working on a computer, time seems to slow down for you and fly by for everyone else. Building on that chrono-warp perception, a computer-using mage with advanced Time-Sphere Arts can either work at inhuman speeds (*flash time*), or slow down time while he writes programs, hacks systems, performs repairs, and so on (*lag time*). These sorts of trick are extremely vulgar, though, so folks tend to use those stunts in their own private sanctums, far away from Sleeper witnesses.

System-wise, Time 3 allows a mage to work faster than usual by employing the **Accelerate Time** Effect. Time 4 lets the technomancer slow time in his immediate vicinity so he can program for hours without blowing the rest of his afternoon. In both cases, every two successes either...

- grants the character one additional action (Time 3 flash time) or...
- slows the passage of time within a small localized bubble for two hours (Time 4 lag time).

Two successes, for example, would give the mage one additional action or two additional hours of work-time; four successes would give him two additional actions, or four additional hours of "lag time," and so forth.

To outside witnesses, the technomancer appears to blur while the "lag time" trick's in effect. The mage's actions flash by at inhuman speed. It's worth noting that a normal computer keyboard will fly to pieces after a minute or two of "hyperspeed typing" due to extra actions, and the computer's memory will soon lock up unless the gear has been treated with the "Enlightened upgrades" described above. With a properly upgraded system, however, a Time-savvy hacker can craft, in apparent seconds or minutes, programs that should take hours or days to create.

Upgrades allow computer gear to access and focus the reality-bending powers of Sphere magick. They do not, however, allow computers to access their own magical powers. Machines with that sort of innate power are Devices and Fetishes; for details, see ***Wonders: Objects of Enchantment***, pp. 139-165.

Trinary Computers

As mentioned elsewhere, Trinary computers have been specially designed, built, and programmed through Enlightened hypertech. Processing a broader band of information and working with "*yes /no /maybe /and /or*" protocols, such machines have far greater capacities than normal, real world computer systems. Technically, the current state-of-the-art Trinary computers are actually *Quinary* computers, but that name has not yet caught on among the elite. Even futurists have a soft spot for certain traditions.

In story terms, such systems have been around for several decades, and they've become the default computer gear for Awakened technomancers from many different groups. That said, Trinary systems are still rare, expensive, precious, more challenging to use than normal systems, and exceedingly effective at mundane tasks as well as magickal ones. Imagine them as the IT equivalent of a high-end sports car: available if you've got the right money and connections, but not easy to use unless you know what you're doing with one.

Trinary gear used to be the sole province of Virtual Adepts, who treated such machines as marks of elite status within their Tradition. That technology, however, eventually slid out into the technomancer mainstream... partly through trade and sharing, partly through theft and gear acquired from dead or converted Adepts, and partly through innovations by Iteration X and other computer-using mages among various groups.

In game terms, a Trinary computer gives bonuses to its user, inflicts penalties upon anyone unfortunate enough to go up against someone using one (unless he's got his own Trinary system), and makes certain things possible that a normal computer just can't do. As the ***Computer Systems*** sidebar shows, a character using a Trinary computer system reduces her difficulties by -2 when she's going up against mundane computer systems. The Trinary system also reduces the time it takes to hack such mundane systems by roughly two hours. On the flipside, a hacker who's trying to access and alter a system that has one or more Trinary computers involved adds +2 to her difficulties and adds at least two hours to the work time if she's using non-Trinary gear. (Two Trinary systems cancel out those benefits and penalties if they go up against one another.)

When focusing magickal Effects, too, a Trinary computer makes certain feats possible. As mentioned above, high-level computer magick is still impossible on a typical computer system; such machines, even now, can't handle the raw amounts of power and bandwidth required for sophisticated technomagick. Assume, then, that a magickal Effect that involves Spheres 4 or 5 can be performed only with a Trinary computer system.

Quantum Computers

An intermediary form of technology between mundane digital computers and hypertech Trinary computers, the quantum computer employs quantum-mechanical phenomena in order to perform the usual computing tasks. Where current digital technology uses binary *bits* (0 or 1) that exist in one of two definite states, quantum computers employ *qubits* (quantum bits) that exist in a superposition of states that allows them to remain *in*definite. Essentially, the typical computer says "*yes*

/*no*," the Trinary computer says "*yes /no /maybe*" (and these days, more), and the quantum computer theoretically says "*all of the above*."

As of this writing, quantum computing still *is* largely theoretical. Working models have been built and employed in the real world, but they suffer from a number of physical and theoretical limitations. Physically, they're huge, bulky, immobile things that require delicate conditions and enormous amounts of space and energy. On the theoretical side, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle limits the quantum application potential of such machines; after all, if someone needs to view the results of a quantum computer's functions, then that observer probably defines those results and takes them out of a superpositioned state! Tests with quantum computers have shown them to be marginally faster and more accurate than digital machines... but whether that speed and accuracy is the result of quantum-state phenomena or simply better components and conditions remains a source of debate.

In **Mage**, certain large, high-tech facilities probably employ quantum computers, if only to explore their possibilities and work those possibilities into the Consensus. Complex applications of Correspondence, Forces, Matter, and Prime could compress the titanic devices of mundane technology into smaller, portable machines. Even so, they remain delicate energy hogs with uncertain practical applications. From a rules standpoint, the Storyteller could declare that quantum computers allow a mage to use Sphere Ranks 4 and 5 without employing a Trinary device. Because the Trinary machines are smaller, more portable, and more reliable, however, they currently provide a superior technology to quantum computers.

Given the rapid pace of both mundane and Awakened technology, however, that edge might not last much longer.

Hacking Rules

The basic theory and practice of hacking has been covered above. In game terms, a character hacks a computer system using either Intelligence + Computer (for slow, methodical work), or Wits + Computer (when time is of the essence).

Perception + Computer can help reverse a system or obstacle, and Manipulation or some other Social Attribute + Computer can help a hacker socially engineer a solution... that is, find a workaround by influencing other people to help him do it.

In most situations, though, Intelligence + Computer does the job. See the ***Computer Systems chart*** (p. 118) for specific rolls, circumstances, and difficulties.

Static and Active Systems

Hackers face two different sorts of systems: *static systems*, in which a self-contained software, computer, or system has its own protections but no further maintenance, and *active systems*, in which the normal protections (firewall, security programs, and so forth) are backed up by a system administrator and trace programs. A stand-alone home computer, game, music file, or software program is a static system; in this case, the hacker just needs time and patience – no one's working against her or coming after her if she fails. Corporate computers, financial data banks, government agency systems, and so on are active systems; in such cases, the hacker's not just working against the firewall but also against active agents who'll block, stop, and trace intruder access.

Appropriate rolls and difficulties can be found on the ***Computer System*** sidebars.

Cracking /Reversing

Before a hacker can access any system, she has to first reverse it to find its vulnerabilities, or cracks. Once she finds a crack – say, in an application that a particular network uses – the hacker can then write a clever piece of code that uses the crack to break into the system so she can play with its contents. Reversing a system to spot weaknesses is really an exercise in digital lock-picking. In game terms, finding and exploiting these cracks makes hacking more effective, and doing so lowers the difficulty of rolls within the system.

Reversing a system or an application takes weeks of work downtime – often with additional materials like passwords gained from the ***Social Engineering*** described above. To create effective crack-exploitation code, the player makes a single Intelligence + Computer roll, difficulty 8. If that code has been created to access a specific system and do specific things, the difficulty is only 6, but the code will work only within the system for which it was designed. Each success on the roll lowers the hacker's difficulty by -1.

The character can also write security software to protect her own system. In this case, the rules are the same, the roll is the same, the difficulty is 7, and each success rolled by the software designer raises the difficulty of other hackers by +1 difficulty (again, per success) when they try to access her system.

Static System Access

Hacking static home software or breaking into such computers is comparatively easy: the player makes Intelligence + Computer rolls until she gathers enough successes to do what she wants. Although she may be working against the clock to hack that computer before someone comes home, there's no active agent working against her while she does so. A botch rolled while hacking a static system, however, locks that system down. From that point on, the hacker has been shut out indefinitely.

Active System Access

Many commercial active systems are absurdly easy to hack if you know how – reverse one and you might as well have reversed most of the rest of them too. The ubiquity of computer technology these days makes it impossible to guard all systems as well as they were protected a decade or two ago.

Although the commercially available casual protections are far stronger than they used to be, a skilled hacker can still break into email servers or company data with little trouble.

Accessing a *secure* active system – like the ones in governments, corporations, Technocracy Constructs, and so on – is far more difficult. There, folks are *expecting* trespassers, and they're ready for you. Developing or exploiting a crack for a Technocracy Construct is nowhere near as simple as hacking Facebook, but because almost every piece of important information is online these days, few secrets are truly safe from a dedicated hacker mage.

To access a secure system, the intruding player makes an initial Intelligence or Wits + Computer roll to get past the firewall. Failure at that point blocks the attempt, and a botch indicates that the intruder has been discovered. The Storyteller might choose to adjust the difficulty of that roll based on the character's preparation, reconnaissance, and reversing.

Opening the Window: The Hacker's Dice Pool

The number of successes you score with that initial roll becomes your dice pool for future rolls in this system. If you get three successes, for example, then you have three dice to roll once you're engaged beyond the firewall. This reflects the window you've got to work with. The more you open the window, the more freedom you have inside.

A player could decide to spend more time hacking her way in. System-wise, she makes an extended roll, rather than a standard roll, to open the window further. Each roll reflects one additional hour spent finessing the system. This way, the hacker can attain more successes, and thus get a bigger dice pool to work with.

Taking time is risky, though. A failed roll during that attempt crashes into the firewall, and a botch alerts the *sysadmin*, as detailed see below. For each hour the hacker spends working at the firewall, the player must make another Intelligence + Computer roll. The more time you spend working within an active system, the greater your chances of getting caught.

Backdoors

Once inside a system, you can create *backdoors*: bits of code that provide shortcuts past the firewall for later access. Using a backdoor cuts way down on the time and risk involved in getting into a system again. In game terms, a backdoor requires an Intelligence + Computer roll based on the difficulty of the system you're working against. Once installed, a backdoor lowers the time and difficulties of future access attempts.

With or without a backdoor, a hacker has limited time to find what she wants to find, do what she wants to do, and get out before someone spots her. Scanning programs and sysadmins perform regular searches for intrusion attempts; the more secure the system and the more sensitive its data, the more frequent those searches will be.

Security Software and Sysadmins

Almost every computer system these days has *security software* to deflect and detect intrusions. In game terms, this software adds to the difficulty of hacking rolls inside the system, and raises the amount of time you need to work inside that system (see the sidebar chart).

Depending on the system, its owners, and its contents, this software can range from the virtual equivalent of a cheap car lock to the elite protection of a watchdog pack. As far as a serious hacker's concerned, all forms of security programs are essentially speed bumps, meant more to slow and discourage violations than stop them cold.

The cold stops come in from sysadmins and trace-and-countermeasures programs. If the software is the speed bump, then these parties are the cops. Once every one to 12 hours, live sysadmins and security administrators perform walkthroughs for backdoors and trespassers. (The more secure the system, the more frequent those walkthroughs become.) If a hacker trips an alarm – that is, botches a roll once inside the system – then the admins and trace programs will come gunning for that trespasser immediately... at which point, the chase is on.

The Chase, Pit Bulls, Tagging, and the Visit

Should a player botch – or even, in certain systems, just fail – a roll inside an active system, that player and the Storyteller play out *the chase*. Both parties roll their characters' Intelligence + Computer in a resisted roll.

- If the sysadmin gets more successes, then he catches the hacker – usually ejecting her with an identification tag on her computer. With five successes or more over the number needed to beat the hacker, he can send a nasty virus or trace program back into the hacker's computer, or else detain her in a virtual lockup. This sort of thing is more cinematic than realistic, but it's a good way to make a player sweat... especially if she's been trying to hack the Technocracy.

- A successful sysadmin can also hack the hacker. With five successes or more, that sysadmin has gotten access to the intruder's own system; at that point, the Storyteller becomes the hacker, and the player becomes the sysadmin, defending her system against the party she had originally tried to hack.

- Technocrats or other high-tech mages and Night-Folk might also have *pit bull countermeasures*: smart programs that act to trip and catch trespassers. If the system has such programs, then the hacker's difficulty rises by +2 during a chase. In story terms, the pit bulls slow her system down and give the sysadmin an edge. (For potential pit bulls, see ***Memophores*** in **Mage 20, p. 638**.)

- If the sysadmin wins the chase, then the Storyteller also makes a secret roll to find and purge the backdoors the hacker had implanted in the system. *The player should not be told whether or not those backdoors have been found* – that information is for the Storyteller to know and the player to find out. And if the sysadmin *does* tag the trespasser's computer, then it's probably just a matter of time before boys in blue or Men in Black show up to pay her a visit...

- Should the hacker roll more successes than the sysadmin, then she remains free and untagged inside the system. If she scores five successes or more above the number she needed to beat the Storyteller, then she's got free access within the system for one hour per success. If she wins by only one or two successes, though, the chase might resume at any time. If she wants to keep working within the system, then she'll have to work fast.

Access and Alteration

As mentioned earlier, computers store, manage, and compile information. Hacking, then, involves doing stuff with that information. Whether the hacker wants to add data, grab data, lock it down, corrupt it, or whatever else, the roll is the same. For each half hour or so spent inside the system, the player rolls Intelligence + Computer to perform the desired tasks. Again, time equals risk, and botched rolls (sometimes even failed rolls) alert the sysadmin.

A variety of tasks have been listed on the ***Computer Systems chart***. The more extensive and complicated the task, the longer it'll take and the higher the difficulty will be.

Sloppy Filing

No two users employ a computer the same way. People tend to label and store data files in methods that make sense only to them. Many systems have specific formats and protocols for labeling and storing data files; some people use them, other people don't. A person who's trying to access those files often winds up digging through folders, trying to find what he's looking for. That sort of digging takes time – often *lots* of time.

The ***Sloppy Filing*** modifier reflects data that's been stored in unusual, haphazard, or nonsensical ways. A hacker who wants to access that information needs to spend more time finding it and has a more difficult time finding it at all.

Hacking in the Web

Life imitates reality, especially when mages are involved. The process, then, of hacking an active computer system from inside the Digital Web often looks like a cyber-noir thriller filled with twisting corridors, thick fog, and black-leather-clad figures moving through heavy shadows in a desaturated, blue-lit landscape. Then again, depending on the folks who configured the system and its protections, that task might play out like a



trip to Jurassic Park; a Wild West ghost town; a labyrinthine pagoda packed with samurai and ninjas; or a chase through an Arabian Nights-style bazaar, pursued by sword-swinging vizier's guards.

System-wise, an inside job plays out like a rollicking adventure movie. The setting for that adventure is a C-Sector tailored to reflect the system designer's tastes. As the adventurer moves through a landscape that reflects the system she's hacking, she finds herself eluding guards (security programs), escaping traps (security protocols), deciphering puzzles (encryption codes), battling monsters and bosses (attack programs and sysadmins), grabbing treasures (the data), and generally living out a video game movie that might kill her and her friends... probably just online, but possibly for real.

In the case of holistically-immersed hackers, the game could *definitely* kill them. As with other forms of combat and injury, everything virtual is *real* when you're in the Web. A holistically-immersed trespasser uses his normal physical Attributes, Abilities, and whatever gear he happens to be carrying at the time. Considering what he's about to face, that may or may not be a good thing...

Look, Feel, and Constraints

A system's look and feel depends upon the Constraints placed upon that sector by the people who designed it. Thus, the intruding character tends to find herself, as the saying goes, trapped in a world she never made. Logging into the system, our hacker gets cast as a hero in some outrageous action scenario of the Storyteller's choice.

For obvious reasons, she starts off at a disadvantage – no weapons, no armor, perhaps one or two useful tools, probably dressed in the clothes on her back, and perhaps (in a really vicious system) not even that much. The hacker's limited dice pool (see ***Opening the Window*** in the ***Hacking Rules*** section above) reflects the innate disadvantage of an intruding visitor in a hostile system.

Useful Goodies

A skillful hacker, however, can turn those odds around. Once the hacker opens the window and gets inside the system, her player may roll Wits + Computer against the difficulty of the system she's hacking. For each success, the hacker can equip herself with one additional useful item: a gun, a rope, a suit of armor, etc. Each useful item adds one die to the hacker's dice rolls while inside that system, assuming that the item fits that sector's Constraints. Let's say, for instance, that Eboz the Virtual Adept hacks his way into a system configured to look like a steampunk maze. In such a setting, a key would be useful, a wrench would be useful, and a pair of goggles would be useful. A Kevlar jacket, on the other hand, would not fit the system's Constraints, so it would not count as a useful item.

In practical terms, the useful items merely add to the hacker's dice pool. The associated bullets, armor, lock-opening capacity, and so forth simply reflect the hacker's improved ability. Inside the Digital Web, however, they look and feel like props for the adventure in question. And considering that the hacker comes through the widow with a reduced dice pool (again, see ***Opening the Window***), she can use every edge she can get!

Game Systems

In terms of rules, the Storyteller and player can either run through the hacking process using the normal hacking rules presented above, or else play it out as a normal adventure, using the appropriate Traits for the type of access she's employed to enter the Web. (For details, see ***Digital Web Systems*, Mage 20, pp. 466-473**.) In the first situation, narrate out the hacking job as if it's an adventure; in the second case, just run through it normally, considering the adventure to be an elaborate computer simulation.

Instead of Dexterity and Brawl rolls, an astrally immersed hacker employs Wits, Perception, or Intelligence + Computer in order to get things done. Other Abilities might come in handy, too – say, Enigmas in place of Intimidation or Cryptography for Streetwise. Under either rules option, however, failed or botched rolls lead to icon death; the trap snaps shut, the guards shoot you, you mis-time your leap, and so forth. For obvious reasons, then, hackers hesitate before trying to bust a system from the inside out.

Example in Play: Computer Hacking

Kyle, an experienced Virtual Adept, plans to expose some nasty goings-on at Hammer Security Response. Going off a tip from a friend, he employs a bit of social engineering to score a password, works up some cracking software, and prepares to dig for dirt...

In game terms, Kyle's player Jesse has Kyle work an angle over at Hammer to get the information he needs. After a bit of roleplaying, Jesse's Storyteller tells him to make a resisted Manipulation + Computer roll to get the information out of the Hammer tech Kyle has pumped for info. Three successes later, Kyle has the information he'd gone after: a password worth -2 to his difficulty and two fewer hours of work on the system.

Having scored the password, Kyle goes home to write some crack-exploitation code. Jesse makes an Intelligence + Computer roll to reflect the quality of that code. Since he's specifically targeting the Hammer Response system, the difficulty is 6. Jesse scores two successes. Between the crack and the password, the difficulty of Kyle's hacking attempt is reduced by -4, and he saves himself several hours of work. Like any good Virtual Adept, Kyle's got a Trinary computer. That's another -2 reduction, for a total difficulty reduction of -6.

Now comes the hard part. Hammer's computer system is a military-grade mainframe with serious protection. Under normal circumstances, a hacker would need 10 successes at

difficulty 8 just to get inside, with five hours' worth of work to bypass the firewall. Thanks to Kyle's prep work, though, the difficulty is 2, with only an hour or so necessary for the initial attack. He still needs 10 successes, but that's easy enough to get with an extended roll. Jesse has Kyle spend two more hours on the attack (three hours total), giving Jesse three rolls to accumulate those successes.

Oh, crap! Hammer's got Trinary computers in their system, too. There goes that bonus Kyle had expected. What *should* be a difficulty 2 attack is going to be difficulty 4 instead. That's a clue that Hammer is more than they appear to be.

Jesse rolls Kyle's Intelligence 4 + his Computer 4 (a total pool of eight dice) against difficulty 4. The first hour's roll scores four successes; the second hour nets three; the third hour gets four more successes, getting Kyle inside and giving Jesse his full pool of eight dice to work with.

It's an active system, but Kyle expected that. He's trawling for dirt, so he figures it will be hidden (difficulty 7), maybe even classified (difficulty 8). Dodging all that security is going to take time too. "*Clock's ticking, Kyle*," says the Storyteller. "*Better get cracking... so to speak.*"

Jesse makes another Intelligence + Computer roll – eight dice, difficulty 7, two hours or so to scan what he finds. The software reduces his difficulty by -2, but still... One hour, one roll, eight dice, difficulty 5... Jesse takes the dice in hand and rolls...

Mage Tricks: The Sorcerer's Mechanic

This particular trick has nothing to do with computers, but everything to do with the sorts of technological tinkering described in **Mage 20**, **pp. 463-464**, under the section about ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology:***

Summoning the wizardly Arts, a mechanically inclined magus waves her hands a few times, bringing a collection of pieces and parts together into a working machine. In a far less ostentatious display, a desperate mage conjures a working gun in the pocket of a jacket that had been open a moment earlier. Great, right?

Possible, yes... but tricky. Very, very tricky...

If you're got a mage who wants to conjure a working machine from nothing, or to build a working machine from a bunch of separate parts, the Storyteller can demand an absurd number of successes, rolled against a difficulty or threshold that makes such feats daunting even to a skillful Master. The "build a car" trick would be vulgar, of course, while the hidden nature of the gun-in-pocket trick might make it appear coincidental even though it's really not. (Vulgar actions that take place out of sight constitute a gray area; for details, see ***Axis of Coincidence*** in **Mage 20**, **pp. 533-534**.) Both tricks, however, encounter the same obstacle: *Building a complex working machine is really bloody* hard.

In Sphere terms, a Matter 3 /Prime 3 Effect can conjure an object from random molecules; Correspondence 3 /Forces 3 /Matter 2 could pick up pieces and bring them together in more or less the right locations. But as any household tinkerer or repair technician can attest, machines are complicated. One wire in the wrong place, two pieces not fitting together quite right, and you've got a piece of junk, not a working machine. And so, a player who's trying to manufacture or build machines through magick should have no fewer than three dots in the appropriate Crafts specialties, possibly with other Abilities added. If you don't understand computers well, for example, how could you possibly conjure a working one from thin air? (See the sidebar ***Dude, Do You EVEN Know What You're DOING?*** In **How Do You *DO* That?**, **p. 28**.)

A player who wants to use magickal construction or repair on a machine should also have to make extended Intelligence or Perception + Technology rolls in order to fit the pieces together properly; the more complex the machine, the higher the difficulty and the number of successes required should be.

Even if the player manages to make the appropriate rolls, her Storyteller may make a secret roll and keep the results hidden. Those results show just how well and how long the machine will function. Those results should apply only to complex and /or precision machines – cars, guitars, computers, that sort of thing. Simple machines – like bows or wheelbarrows – or basic precision machines assembled from prepared parts (guns, toasters, etc.) – may add +1 to that secret roll, or perhaps not have a roll at all.

Result	Machine's Function
10	Marvel: machine works perfectly in all ways.
9-8	Fine: machine works well, but with a minor quirk or two.
7-6	Functional: machine works, but has a problem that will soon manifest.
5-4	Crappy: machine works sporadically, with unreliable results.
3-2	Junk: machine barely functions, and clearly has severe issues.
1	*"Piece of shit! Why doesn't the damn thing* work...?!?"

Resonance: Physics of Consequence



As ye sow, so too shall ye reap. That Nazarene principle, found in most mystic practices, is considered a metaphysical law. Karma – often translated as "deed" or "action" – can use that law to span lifetimes. Even material physics has its own version of that principle in Newton's Third Law of Motion: *Every action has an equal and opposite reaction*. And so, just as no mage exists in total isolation, so no mage conducts his or her Arts in a vacuum. The things you do influence the world through which you move... and that world, in turn, influences you as well.

In **Mage**, we call that effect *Resonance*.

Beneath all the following descriptions, terms and rules, the key to Resonance is simple: *You get back what you put in*. If your character walks through life with a chip on her shoulder, the world responds with an attitude of its own. If she moves through it with love and joy, then loving, joyful Resonance follows her. "*Punch a wall*," one saying goes, "*and the wall punches you back*." Resonance manifests your state of mind and action... most especially when you're a mage.

As explained throughout **Mage 20** (especially **Chapters Two**, **Three, Six**, and **Seven**), Resonance echoes a mage's actions and intentions, sending them out into the world at large. That "echo," in turn, bounces back to the mage, setting up a field of metaphysical energy vibrations that often intensify the original effect. Strong actions trigger strong *re*actions. Eventually, the mage acquires notable characteristics of his attitude: the callous mystic gets a stony voice and a "chilly" presence; the animal shapeshifter grows more feral; the crazy inventor has frizzy hair and always seems to have a thunderstorm going in the background when he works. At the lowest levels of Resonance, these characteristics remain subtle. Folks who court potent Resonance, however, embody the consequences of their actions to an uncanny degree.

And yet, as the Christ suggests, Resonance is universal. It's not limited to mages, but echoes the actions of every living entity. Those echoes, in turn, alter the "feel" of places and things. A battlefield has Resonance; so does a church. Areas and objects that have provided a focus or setting for huge expenditures of life-force and emotional energies hold that Resonance long after the deeds themselves have ended. When folks speak of "good vibes" or "bad feelings," they're commenting upon Resonance. Although magick certainly intensifies its effect, Resonance's principles are bigger than magick.

Rules of Resonance

As discussed in **Mage 20** (see **pp. 333**, **560-561**, and **646-647**), Resonance can affect your character's overall appearance or impression. Because it "echoes" around a mage's proximity, it can influence Backgrounds like ***Blessing***, ***Demesne***, ***Destiny***, ***Legend***, ***Sanctum***, and ***Totem***, and will certainly "flavor" her magick, Quintessence, and Paradox. In many regards, Resonance *is* a symptom of Paradox – a "vibe" of personal energy that gets intensified by the reality-changing powers of a mage. The more your mage affects her world, the stronger her Resonance – for good and ill – becomes.

Originally, the **Mage** rules handled Resonance as a "special effect" that came through in roleplaying, Storytelling, and sometimes the Flaw: ***Echoes***. **Sorcerers Crusade** ties it to Virtues and Vices, but that moralistic system seems more appropriate to the late-medieval setting of **Sorcerers Crusade** than to the existential mythos of **Ascension**. As of **Mage Revised**, Resonance becomes a Trait... but the expressions of, and rules for, that Trait changed constantly, contradicted themselves, and added new levels of complexity to an already complicated game.

Despite these inconsistencies, the existence of Resonance – and a rule-system for it – provides some excellent opportunities for roleplaying and story elements. And so, this section features potential *optional rules* and guidelines for using Resonance within your **Mage** chronicle. If these rules complicate things too much for your tastes, however, then please feel free to ignore them.

Signature: The Expressions of Resonance

If you've ever felt like something was "right" or "wrong" about a place, if you've noticed how your skin crawls or your pulse beats faster in the presence of certain people, then you've experienced the effects of Resonance. Some folks call it *chemistry* or *vibes* or *energy*, and all those definitions are true. For now, just think of such impressions as *signatures* – that is, as expressions of Resonance.

Low-level energies have vague, easily missed signatures. Stronger ones have more obvious signatures, and powerful energies have signatures that almost anyone can spot. In game terms, a successful Perception-based roll with the ***Awareness*** Talent (see **Mage 20**, **pg 276**) lets your character notice signatures, and to possibly identify them also, if the energies are strong enough.

Resonance – and its optional affiliated essence, ***Synergy*** (described in the sidebar) – cast signatures that suit the energy in question. Those signatures echo the cause of the Resonance; tragic events or depressed people cast *Sorrowful* signatures, cheerful parties cast *Joyous* signatures, battles and fighters carry *Warlike* signatures, and so it goes.

Those signatures, in turn, bring their energies to the environment around them. *Depressing* Resonance carries the emotional weight of sorrow, perhaps manifesting in drooping

posture, constant rain, or the sound of sobbing that apparently comes from nowhere. *Nurturing* Resonance makes everything feel comfortable and safe. In game terms, a signature grows stronger at higher levels of that energy. And although it tends to manifest as narrative descriptions and roleplaying choices, it can also provide small modifiers – as shown on the **M20 *Magickal Difficulties Modifiers chart*** – if the signature compliments or contradicts a mage's spells (as per the entry ***Appropriate Resonance*, Mage 20, p. 503**).

When choosing a signature, pick an expressive one-word description (preferably a verb) that shows how the energy *acts* in that character's life. Good descriptions include words like *Stabilizing*, *Sorrowful*, *Furious*, *Cheerful*, *Tempestuous*, *Reliable*, *Warlike*, and so forth. Capture the essence of the energy in that word, and think of how that word manifests the energy in your character's life and story. For examples, see ***Four Flavors of Resonance***, below.

Degrees of Resonance

Essentially, Resonance follows powerful deeds or personalities. Metaphysically speaking, it echoes people and events that "make a large impression" on the world around them. On the same principle, Synergy reflects an intense tie to metaphysical energies – a bond that goes far beyond the usual essence of living things.

For the purposes of game-rules, Resonance and Synergy have five levels of effect upon the world around them, plus the "zero-level" **Indistinct**, which reflects a generalized life-force too impersonal to be truly considered Resonance.

• **Faint (One Dot):** *Faint energies* are hard to spot unless you know what you're looking for. Extremely perceptive people might catch a slight cue about the energy in question, but most folks remain oblivious to its presence. In game terms, a character needs the ***Awareness*** Talent to notice such metaphysical traces.

• • **Subtle (Two Dots):** *Subtle energies* begin to manifest in small yet noticeable ways. A book might have a sinister vibe to it; a person might "smell wrong" even though he just bathed; a grove of trees could throw longer, colder shadows than what feels "natural" in such a place. That subtle Resonance or Synergy ripples the reality in its vicinity. Sensitive folks can usually feel it, although they might not realize quite *what* it is they perceive.

• • • **Noticeable (Three Dots):** *Noticeable energies* become clear even to people who don't possess Awareness. The Resonance or Synergy warps the reality around the person, place or thing that exudes that energy. Breezes blow colder than usual; images provoke nausea; people radiate an air of strength or comfort. A sensitive person can begin to identify the "signature" of certain energies, recognizing their source and possibly their origin with a successful Perception + Awareness roll, (difficulty 7).

• • • • **Strong (Four Dots):** *Strong energies* are hard to miss. Sensitive people have an immediate reaction, and even the dullest mortals start to sense the quality of that force. Physical changes might appear as the result of that energy's influence: a man with *Rigid* Resonance or Synergy might get literally "stiff-necked"; a *Wild* kid gets a bestial shine behind her eyes when the light catches them just right; a *Chaotic* place disorients anyone who steps into it. At this point, the energy-signature becomes easily recognizable: "*This crime-scene has Detective Barnes' scent all over it*"; "*I can still feel the rush I got from that Killing Joke concert*"; "*Jodi Blake was here – I'd know that sticky cobwebs-over-glass sensation anywhere.*"

• • • • • **Overwhelming (Five Dots):** *Overwhelming energies* color the person, object or location with an unmistakable signature. Those energies affect physical appearance and structure, and cast an energetic "feel" around the area. A *Malignant* room has lopsided angles and sharp surfaces that cut people who enter it; a *Lusty* person radiates erotic vibes even when he's fully dressed; a *Fast* car revs louder, tends to slip toward higher speeds, and arouses the ardor of its passengers and the anger of the cops who see it fly on past. A person, group or entity with Overwhelming Resonance "paints" their home space with that energy... and so, a Chantry or Realm carries a strong "flavor" of the beings who reside within.

Even in the Awakened world, very few things or people have Strong or Vivid Resonance. Most items or entities have little discernable Resonance – in game terms, ***Indistinct*** to ***Subtle*** energies. Powerful mages or other Night-Folk, Demesne Dream-Realms, Chantries and Horizon Realms, sites of great carnage or comfort, and other wells and vectors of life-energy usually range from ***Subtle*** to ***Noticeable*** levels of Resonance. To reach the reality-warping intensity of ***Strong*** Resonance or more, a vector needs to have experienced epic acts of metaphysical force.

Manifestations of Resonance

That metaphysical force has various ways of making itself known, from minor clues in a person's posture to Fortean phenomena of uncanny acuity. Several of the most common and traditional manifestations of Resonance and Synergistic energies include the following:

Impression and Personality

When folks say that a person has catlike grace or a foxy smile, they might not be speaking metaphorically. Resonance tends to shape a person's attitude, body language, emotions, and physicality. A wizard of *Calm* Temperament speaks softly, radiates serenity, and moves with harmonious purpose; a banker with *Devotional* commitment to the bottom line moves and speaks with the straight precision of mathematical equations. These manifestations appear as part of the description for a character, place or item, and may be as subtle or blatant as the Resonance itself.



Influence on Others

Resonance is not a self-contained phenomenon. In many cases, its effects and sensations spill over onto other people, animals, and other beings. Ever notice how some people's pets resemble them... and often act like them as well? Or hear that phrase "*the Devil knows his own*"? Or notice how certain folks seem to either fit together or repulse one another? In some cases, that's Resonance manifesting itself within a person's inner circle.

That influence can make some people extremely attractive, especially for people who think they have something to gain from the "resonant" party. Mentors influence their students; lovers influence their intimates; parents influence their kids, and creators influence their creations. Totems influence their mortal allies, and gods manifest their qualities among their strongest devotees. An Infernalist may radiate the presence of a demon she has dealt with, while an apprentice shares the energy of the person who trained him... sometimes even when he wishes he did not!

Metaphysical Practices

For obvious reasons, a mage's mystic or technological practices often reflect and project that mage's Resonance. After all, such practices reflect and focus that person's Enlightened Will, and so that Will manifests the Resonance while that Resonance manifests the Will.

When you think about that, it becomes clear why shamans have an earthy presence, witches prefer rough natural settings and symbols, mechanistic technicians favor shiny labs or humming workshops, and Black Suits cast their imperious glare from behind dark glasses that hide their eyes while reflecting a victim's own face back at him. All of those characters embody their practice, and their practices come from within the deepest parts of their identities. In a very real sense, a mage's practice focuses her innermost self; its trappings become her symbols, and her identity settles into those trappings. When a mage speaks of "attuning herself" to a deck of Tarot cards, a wand, or a new car, she's consciously or subconsciously linking herself to that focus through Resonance... and, for that reason those things soon start to "feel like her."

For examples of this sort of thing, see the descriptions of mages and their focuses which are provided in this book's **Chapter Three**, **pp. 176-187**.

Background Traits

On a related, note, the places and entities that a mage deals with often reflect that mage's Resonance. There are reasons, after all, that a *Devotional* Crusader meets angels

Optional Rule: Synergy

It has been said that certain people, locations, and objects hold an affinity for cosmic forces. When those certain parties connect with those cosmic forces, they create a *Synergy* between the cosmic principles and their Earthly vectors. Related to Resonance, this Synergy (from Greek *sunergia* – "cooperation") radiates metaphysical energies through physical vessels. But while Resonance reflects the actions of *people*, Synergy reflects the properties of a *force*.

Embodying aspects of the Metaphysic Trinity, a mage who channels Synergy taps into the following forces and allows – or *endures!* – their influence in his life:

- *Dynamism*, the force of change, creation, and instability;
- *Entropy*, the force of dis-integration, renewal, and unpredictability; and...
- *Stasis*, the force of stability, solidity, endurance, and control.

Story-wise, these forces manifest in the character's life, environment and magick in much the way that Resonance does. Synergy can, in fact, interact with Resonance – either by reinforcing it (in the case of complimentary forces) or canceling it out (in the case of contradicting ones).

In game terms, Synergy gives a new name to the Trait called "Resonance" in **Mage**'s **Revised**-era books. Because that Trait essentially reversed the previous definition of Resonance (and even the definition presented on **pps. 197-198** of **Mage Revised**), Synergy presents an ***optional rule*** that lets you integrate both Traits into the same chronicle.

Why Separate Synergy from Resonance?

What's the difference between these energies? Resonance comes from *inside*, echoing the mage's actions, choices, and behavior; while Synergy comes from her connection to *external* forces, and guides her actions, choices, and behavior. Both forces interact with one another. You could even say that both forces, in combination, come together to form a sort of "Greater Resonance." Thematically, however, the distinction between internal and external origins is important. *Mage* is about self-willed individuals making powerful choices and changing the world, and so the notion of "power-puppets" on cosmic strings contradicts a vital theme of **Mage**.

Synergy Characteristics

Everything in the cosmos has faint traces of Synergy; very few things, however, focus it to a notable degree. Every so often, however, a person, place, thing or event demonstrates a clear connection to Dynamism, Stasis, or Entropy as a vital force. And since mages channel cosmic forces simply by being who and what they *are*, the Awakened tend to embody Synergistic energies far more than most other things do.

If and when you choose to add the Synergy option, pick one-word descriptions (preferably verbs) to suit those forces and the ways in which they manifest. For example:

- *Dynamic Synergy* uses active, vibrant words: *Wild, Fast, Unpredictable, Chaotic, Fierce, Wrathful, Uncontrollable,* and so forth.
- *Entropic Synergy* uses words that describe breaking things down: *Corrupting, Corrosive, Poisonous, Leprous, Distracting, Subversive,* etc.
- *Stasis Synergy* uses constructive, stabilizing words: *Protective, Nurturing, Architectural, Fortifying, Restorative,* and the like.

From there, use the selected description as a guide to suggest what that energy does and how it manifests in your character or environment:

My Chaotic energy creates a vortex of wind.

There's a seething, Venomous feeling about that guy.

These woods have a Nurturing presence; in them, you feel safe.

If you choose to use the optional Synergy Trait (see ***Resonance Traits***, in the main text), then have each player select one dot in a Synergy that guides their character. Use the rules as presented in the main text. As the chronicle progresses, events within that saga can add more dots to the original Trait. In such cases, give that character more dots in either the same Synergy or in a different one, and possibly change or resolve the original dot into a dot in some other form of Synergy.

Similar or Opposed Energies

Complimenting and Contradicting Resonance

If your group chooses to use Synergy, then that energy may compliment or contradict certain kinds of Resonance, either leading to a bigger effect (complimenting) or else diminishing or dispelling the effects of one or the other.

- **Complementary:** If the signatures of the Resonance and Synergy complement one another, then the two Traits get added together when determining an appropriate dice pool. One dot of *Wild* Synergy, for example, combined with two dots of *Furious*, would combine to create three dots.
- **Contradictory:** If the signatures contradict one another, then the smaller Trait gets deducted from the larger one. That *Wild* Synergy, when combined with two dots in *Calm*, would reduce the *Calm* to one dot.
- **Unrelated:** If the two signatures aren't especially related to one another, then the most appropriate one for the situation at hand provides the dice pool. That one dot in *Wild* would provide the dice pool for a dynamic task, while two dots in *Wooded* would provide the dice pool for a feat based in a forest or wilderness.
- **Similar Energies:** If you've got two Resonances, or two Synergies, that compliment or contradict one another, then combine or subtract their dots as shown above. A dot in *Wild* and a dot in *Fierce* would combine into two dots.

As always, the Storyteller makes the final decision regarding the connections and applications of Synergy and Resonance.

and demons, resides in a Spartan atmosphere of dedication, ventures to heavens and hells, and views almost everything through a lens of godly or satanic agendas.

Story-wise, Resonance can suggest the sorts of characters a mage might encounter or befriend, the sort of places she frequents, the appearance and perhaps the set of reality in places she calls home. In game terms, a character's Resonance will probably influence the appearance, nature, identity, and atmosphere of her various Background Traits... most especially ***Allies***, ***Blessing***, ***Chantry***, ***Demesne***, ***Destiny***, ***Legend***, ***Sanctum***, ***Totem***, and – as shown below – her ***Avatar***. A *Virginal* mystic may attract forest creatures or unicorns; a *Lusty* one could reside in a richly appointed fetish dungeon or a sybaritical penthouse. Resonance may determine whose magicks are coincidental within a Sanctum, Chantry or Realm... and whose effects are vulgar in those same places. That principle is especially true in Otherworldly locations like a Demesne or Horizon Realm, where the Resonance of its "masters" shapes the fabric of local reality.

The Avatar

Perhaps the clearest reflection of a mage's Resonance appears in his Avatar or Genius – the manifestation of his "inner self." Story-wise, one could even argue that the mage's human personality is the manifestation of an immortal Avatar, and so the Avatar expresses the truest essence of that Resonance and /or Synergy.

In game terms, meanwhile, a player and Storyteller can use the Avatar's description to inspire the Resonance, or the Resonance to inspire the Avatar's image and personality. That Avatar may change as the Resonance changes, too; a *Saintly* Avatar, for example, could show blood on his hands as the mage embraces violent tendencies, or weep as the mage attains a *Tragic*, *Malicious*, *Savage* or *Treacherous* Resonance. You can have a lot of fun with this sort of thing, mirroring Resonance and Avatar in dramatically imaginative ways that reveal a lot about both aspects of your mage.

Metaphysical Echoes

Quintessence, Tass, magickal spells, and other extra-physical elements of a mage's life can become revealing vectors for a mage's Resonance. The ice-cold killer may cast ice-cold enchantments; a shape-shifting wildman could find streams of Quintessence-water running through his territory; a friendly healer can dispense candy-sweet medicines, and have soothing hands whose mere touch makes everything feel better. As mentioned in the entry about Prime-Sphere magick (pp. 135-136), Resonance and Synergy manifest most clearly in the metaphysical aspects of a mage's life... and so, when you choose your Resonance or cast your enchantments, do so with an eye to the ways in which one might express the other.

Witch-Walks

Colorfully known as *witch-walks* (named because they're "*things that happen when a witch walks by*"), these environmental quirks inspire a lot of the folklore attributed to the presence of magick: smoking footprints, curdled milk, poisoned water, dying grass, candles that gutter or flare when "the evil one" passes them, and so forth. Naturally, witch-walks can also have the positive effects attributed to holy folk: growing grass, purified water, blooming flowers, birds that sing or children who laugh, or waves of happiness that slide across a crowd. Witch-walks typically occur around people or places with Strong

or Overwhelming Resonance, and – as always – mirror the nature of that energy in appropriately strange ways.

Paradox and Quiet

As the sections above suggest, a mage's Paradox backlashes and onsets of Quiet may be deeply influenced by her Resonance. The poetic qualities of Paradox and Quiet might either mirror your character's Quiet – dropping the aforementioned *Feral* witch into a wilderness mindscape or afflicting her with animalistic Paradox Flaws – or else reversing it with painful ironies, like a city-based mindscape or a sudden allergy or aversion to animals. In either case, the downsides of magick should take many cues from Resonance or Synergy, reflecting it back upon the mage with fitting exquisite cruelty.

The Resonance Trait

If your group chooses to incorporate the optional Resonance and /or Synergy Trait(s) into your chronicle, as mentioned in **Mage 20 (pp. 333, 560-561)**, then apply the following rules to your game:

Dots

Resonance acts like any other Trait. Each dot represents a growing degree of the Trait's influence in your character's life. In certain cases (see below), the Trait rating may add to your dice pool, or modify your difficulty as shown on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart***. (See **Mage 20, p. 503**). Otherwise, it reflects the level of energy your character displays, as shown on the ***Resonance and Synergy Traits chart***, p. 134.

Starting Dots

A starting character begins with one dot in a Resonance that fits her personality and background. Additional dots may be purchased with freebie points for the new rating x 3 points: six points for two dots, nine points for three dots, and so on. The player picks a signature (see above) and describes how that energy manifests in her character's life, magick, and possibly description. For suggestions, see ***Four Flavors of Resonance***, below.

Experience

Resonance *cannot* be purchased with experience points. All additional points of Resonance beyond the ones taken during character creation must be given by the Storyteller, as described below.

Flavors

A character can have several different "flavors" of Resonance, so long as the player incorporates each one of them into the character's behavior, as described below.

Roleplaying and Description

The dots and signatures provide roleplaying notes for the mage and her magickal Effects. For example, Ashpaw, an Ecstatic shaman with three dots in *Feral*, runs around barefoot in loose ragged clothes, "speaking" more in body language than in words, avoiding "civilized" crowds, and manifesting spells that reflect the primal side of capital-N Nature. (For more about Ashpaw, see **Chapter Three, pp. 178-179.**)

If the player does *not* play out the Resonance on a regular basis, then the Storyteller may remove dots, as described below.

Effects of Resonance

On a related note, the signature "flavors" that mage's Effects and Quintessence; possibly "colors" or "shapes" her aura; definitely influences the sorts of Backgrounds she has; and certainly inspires the types of Seekings, Quiets, and Paradox backlashes she endures. Returning to that that *Feral* shaman, her three dots of Resonance give Ashpaw's spells and Quintessence a distinctly wild and animalistic tone; flavor her aura with a bestial presence; attract the attention of "primitivist" people, actual beasts, and an animal totem-spirit; and also put her through Seekings and Quiets that reflect and challenge her wild soul.

Bonus Dice

Once per story (not per game session), the player could harness that force and then use her highest Resonance Trait to provide one of the following bonuses (*only one bonus per story*):

- A bonus to her Arete dice pool, as per the ***Resonance and Synergy Traits chart***; or...
- A bonus, of one die per dot in Resonance, to an appropriate Background Trait. If *Feral* Ashpaw has Coyote as a Totem Background, she can add three dice to a Totem roll for one use of that Background Trait.
- A bonus, of one die per dot, to a related non-magickal dice pool *for a task that is clearly and imaginatively linked to her Resonance Trait*. Ashpaw might use that bonus to add to Stealth, Animal Kinship, Hunting, Intimidation, or Survival rolls, assuming the player gives a cool description of the task at hand and the ways in which the *Feral* Resonance aids her efforts.

If the character has two Resonance Traits at the same level, then the player (or the Storyteller) can choose the bonus, based upon the circumstances. However, only one flavor of Resonance – the dominant one – can provide that bonus within a single story. The player *cannot* employ several types of Resonance to gain multiple bonuses in various tasks within the same story, and may shift between them only after a new story begins.

Similar or Opposed Energies

A character can have several different flavors of Resonance, which may interact with one another at the Storyteller's discretion. For rules, see the ***Complimenting and Contradicting Resonance*** entry in the nearby ***Synergy*** sidebar.

Resonance /Synergy Systems

If your group chooses to employ that Synergy option, then all of the rules above – including the free dot and freebie-point cost – apply to that Trait as well. Under that option, each character begins with one free dot each in Resonance and Synergy.

Degrees of Resonance and Synergy

Level	Degree	Expressions
0	Indistinct	None
1	Faint	Vague signature.
2	Subtle	Discernable flavor.
3	Noticeable	Odd manifestations.
4	Strong	Obvious echoes.
5	Overwhelming	Unmistakable energies.

Flavors of Resonance

Devotional	Reflections of dedication to a cause, belief, society, or ethic.
Elemental	Reflections of affinity for creatures, spirits, or forces of nature.
Stabilizing	Reflections of calmness, structure, control, and self-integrity.
Temperamental	Reflections of dominant emotional state.

Flavors of Synergy

Dynamic	Affinity for active, vibrant, chaotic energies.
Entropic	Affinity for destructive, random, disintegrative energies.
Static	Affinity for stable, controlling, preserving energies.

Resonance and Synergy Traits

X	Indistinct: No discernable signature. No bonuses.
•	Faint: Slight traces (minor ripples, vague "feelings"). May add one die to the Arete dice pool, or to appropriate Background or Ability dice pools, once per story.
••	Subtle: Minor but telling characteristics (environmental quirks, energetic "taste"). May add either one die to the Arete dice pool, or two dice to an appropriate Background or Ability dice pool, once per story.
•••	Noticeable: Recognizable signs (environmental oddities, distinct "flavor"). May add one die to the Arete dice pool, or three dice to appropriate Background or Ability dice pools, once per story.
••••	Strong: Obvious energies (weird phenomena, potent energies). May add two dice to the Arete dice pool, or four dice to appropriate Background or Ability dice pools, once per story.
•••••	Overwhelming: Recognizable signature ("personalized" and identifiable phenomena affecting environment, actions, person, and location). May add two dice to the Arete dice pool, or five dice to appropriate Background or Ability dice pools, once per story.

Acquiring, Changing, and Losing Resonance

For the most part, Resonance and Synergy remain narrative and roleplaying effects. If a room "feels weird," you don't need to puzzle out the number of dots it has in a given Resonance – just say something like, "*The skin tightens at the back of your neck. Hairs rise along your arms, and an itch sinks in under your fingernails…*" Leave the labels and systems for times when they become absolutely critical, if and when you choose to employ them at all.

At moments, however, when potent forces come into play – a life-changing crisis, a shattering discovery, a titanic act of magick far beyond the things your characters are used to experiencing – the Storyteller *might* give a dot in the appropriate sort of Resonance (or Synergy) to the characters involved. Lost a child? Found True Love? Activated the machine you've been working on for months or years? Such occasions may provide opportunities for one new dot of an appropriate flavor of Resonance. That said, Storytellers, be careful with your generosity. Resonance and Synergy reflect vital forces in a character's life, and should be not too easily given... or too easily *taken*, either.

Because Resonance echoes behavior, certain patterns of activity can also add or subtract dots in Resonance. A person who uses lots of fire-spells will eventually acquire dots in *Fiery* Resonance. One who uses his Arts to acquire lots of money may also acquire a *Prosperous* Resonance... and possibly a *Greedy* Resonance too. In this case, the Storyteller decides to award Resonance in accordance with the mage's activities... or, if the player is not acting in accordance with his Resonance, to subtract them.

It *is* possible to lose Resonance, of course. If Ashpaw starts dressing up, adopting sophisticated manners, and hanging out downtown, then that character begins losing dots in *Feral*, possibly replacing them with dots in *Acculturated* instead.

By that same token, Resonance may change in accordance with the character's actions. An *Honorable* character who starts being sneaky and treacherous will have those dots in *Honorable* converted to dots in *Sneaky* or *Treacherous*. Generally, this happens in a one-for-one manner, trading one dot out for the other in a gradual transformation. Certain events, however, could cause a radical shift. Acquiring an obsession with a *Sinister* tome or *Corrupting* practice could change Resonance more or less instantly. (Consider, as an example, the sudden transformation of Willow Rosenberg into Dark Willow during Season 6 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*... a transformation that had been hovering in the background for a while, but which burst through in a big way when Tara was killed.) Again, the Storyteller subtracts or alters Resonance based upon the actions of the character and her player.

Identifying Signatures

Energetic signatures help characters recognize a certain type of Resonance, and may allow them to identify the parties responsible for it. Let's say that Jinx has a bit of *Wild* and *Careless* Resonance; when she uses her magick, it's almost as though she's spray-painting *Jinx was here* on whatever happens to be nearby. People who know Jinx will be able to recognize that signature, and strangers might catch a hint of wild carelessness in the air long after she's gone. Although she can "cloak" her Resonance with a bit of effort (see below), Jinx literally leaves traces of her energy behind, thanks to Resonance. And as we said above, the stronger your Resonance, the stronger its signature.

As a rule, assume that a character can discern the identity behind a particular Resonance signature by taking a turn or two and using a successful Intelligence + Awareness roll. The difficulty of that roll is 10, -1 for each dot in the Resonance Trait; identifying the person behind a Resonance of 1, for instance, would be difficulty 9, while identifying the mage with Resonance 5 would be difficulty 5. If the identifying character is intimately familiar with that Resonance signature – it's from a lover, say, or a close friend, mentor, or child – then the difficulty is -2 for each dot in Resonance; that Resonance 1 character would be difficulty 8 to spot, while the person with Resonance 5 is immediately obvious to someone who knows him well.

Cloaking Resonance

Obviously, a mage can "cloak" her Resonance, especially for short periods of time. If that wasn't the case, then no Nephandus could get away with the things they do. Such concealment, however, is easier at low levels than it is at higher ones... which suggests one reason why so many powerful mages eventually leave the material world behind.

Story-wise, a mage can cloak her Resonance simply by asserting a degree of control over the manifestations. In game terms, a Willpower roll, combined with a turn or more spent "willing away the echoes," can cloak one dot in Resonance for each success on the roll. That roll's difficulty is the dots of the Resonance in question + 3; to conceal three dots in Resonance, for example, would take at least three successes at difficulty 6. That concealment lasts roughly one hour per success.

Prime Magick and Resonance

Prime Sphere magick carries an especially powerful and "pure" sense of Resonance. A character who uses Prime-intensive magick almost always leaves traces of his signature behind. And so, if a character employs a powerful application (Prime 3 or higher) of the Prime Sphere, or who weaves points of their personal Quintessence into an object or Effect, then the difficulty of identifying or cloaking that character's Resonance is based upon either the Prime Sphere Rank of the character who left the Resonance, or else the Resonance itself – whichever is higher.

If and when Prime magick and Resonance come into play together, use the following rules:

Identity

If someone's trying to identify the signature of a mage who has been using Prime 3 or higher magick within the last hour or so, then the difficulty is 10, -1 for every dot in that mage's Prime Sphere rating. If Kyle, for example, has Prime 4, then the difficulty for identifying his Resonance signature would be 6 (10 - 4).



Concealment

If that character's trying to cloak his own Resonance signature, then his difficulty is the Prime Sphere Rank +5. Kyle's difficulty to cloak his own signature would be 9 (5 +4).

Familiarity

If the person identifying that signature is intimately familiar with the signature, then her difficulty is 10, - 2 for each dot in Prime. Because they've been lovers, Lee Ann Milner's difficulty would be 2 if she was trying to spot Kyle's Resonance signature.

Potent Resonance

If the Resonance Trait is higher than the character's Prime Sphere Rank, then use the Resonance rating instead. This reflects the intensity of that mage's energetic signature. Let's say that Kyle has Prime 3 and five dots in a given Resonance; the difficulty, then, would be based on 5, not based on 3.

Cleansing the Signature

Prime 4 can "cleanse" a Resonance signature, "wiping it clean" by one dot for every success rolled with the caster's Arete. Should Kyle decide to use Prime 4 to clean out his signature, he'll need to roll at least four successes. Cleansing Resonance is a coincidental Effect for ***Faint*** to ***Noticeable*** Resonance, and vulgar for ***Strong*** or ***Overwhelming*** Resonance. A successful roll wipes out all traces of that signature, regardless of the caster's Prime Sphere Rank.

For obvious reasons, spies and Nephandi avoid using Prime magick, especially in places where people who know them might notice it, unless they have the power to clean up their mess afterwards.

For more information about Prime-intensive magicks, see the ***Energy-Work*** section in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 42-51**.

Four Flavors of Resonance

In previous editions, the effects of Resonance were left rather vague. For the most part, this has been intentional – the more you define a thing, after all, the more you limit its potential and yet complicate its applications. Even so, a certain amount of definition is helpful, if only because it provides guidelines for what you *do* with the thing in question.

And so, to reflect the deeds and tendencies of **Mage**'s world, you could employ the following four "flavors" of Resonance. All four of them echo a mage's deeds, most especially the way in which she employs her magick in those deeds, although they often reflect her overall personality as well. All four capture the

theme of Resonance and at least attempt to put that quality into something practical. Like everything else in this section, however, these ***Four Flavors of Resonance*** are *optional rules*. If they overcomplicate your game, or go against the themes of your chronicle, then discard them and /or replace them with your own preferences. If these flavors do suit your needs, however, then enjoy the effects they bring to your characters and their adventures.

Flavors, Descriptions, and Signatures

Resonance is active; it begins with activity, radiates outward through activity, and comes back to its source through activity as well. Even *Stabilizing* Resonance, after all, begins with an activity (making something stable) and manifests in an activity (calming, nurturing, sustaining, protecting, etc.). *Resonate* means "to sound, to send back, to amplify"... and so, all forms of Resonance *do something* when they manifest. Therefore, each of the following types of Resonance – and each of the many variations within each type – gets defined by *how it starts* and *what it does*.

When deciding upon a type of Resonance, a player or Storyteller ought to consider how that energy starts and then what that energy does. From there, pick an evocative word – a **description** – that describes its effects. You want an energy that originates in a sense of centered calm and then, in turn, settles people down? Then choose a description that evokes that effect: *Calming*, *Soothing*, *Reflective*, *Meditative*, *Grounding*, and so forth. Does your character behave greedily? Then have that Resonance come across in words that reflect and reinforce greed: *Grasping*, *Avaricious*, *Miserly*, *Money-Grubbing* and, of course, *Greedy*.

From there, decide on the **signature** effects that your Resonance has within the story. Maybe that *Calming* Resonance manifests as waves of peaceful silence, a gentle voice, and a soft touch that promises control, not weakness. The stronger the Resonance Trait is, the more obvious its signatures will be. One Faint dot in *Calming* would probably just come through in that quiet voice, while five Overwhelming dots would radiate a sense of peace and centeredness even in the most stressful situations. Ideally, both the player and the Storyteller will collaborate on these signatures – the player acting out appropriate phenomena, and the Storyteller narrating the occasional surprise.

Those effects will also help you decide where and how your Resonance will benefit and hinder you. A *Calming* presence will certainly help in certain social situations, and may boost spells that soothe or comfort people; on the flipside, that same Resonance would diffuse an effort to intimidate someone, and may manifest itself in Paradox backlashes that rob the mage of his strength when he needs it, or else strand him in a realm full of featureless sand and no apparent way out.

It's worth noting that these four categories aren't mutually exclusive; you can be *Impulsive* (Temperamental Resonance) and yet still *Calming* (Stabilizing Resonance). You could have several variations within the same Resonance type as well: a *Depressing* person can also be *Joyous* or *Furious* at different times. People are complicated, and mages even more so. At times when the different aspects of Resonance come into play, use the rules presented in the ***Similar or Opposed Energies*** entry presented on (p. 132).

The following categories reflect both the source of the Resonance within the mage's behavior, and also the effects that it has upon the mage.

Devotional

Devotional Resonance originates in your dedication to a cause, belief, god, ethic, or society... and, in turn, reflects and reinforces that dedication. Faith, honor and integrity fuel this sort of energy... but so do fanaticism, intolerance and obsession.

As with all forms of Resonance, Devotional energies reflect activity – spells, behavior, attitude, and so on. A person can believe in something and yet not act upon those beliefs. Devotional Resonance, however, echoes the ways in which a character pursues those beliefs: The kind man whose faith inspires acts of charity and good will; the honorable woman whose ethics inform courage in the face of adversity; the patriot whose love of country makes him a veritable Captain America... or a Nuke. For devotion, of course, can become a terrible thing – the fuel of crusades, terrorism, bigotry, and hate – when a person invests energy in a potentially dangerous belief.

For obvious reasons, Devotional Resonance needs an obvious foundation. If you choose this flavor of Resonance, make sure that you define and play out your character's convictions.

- **Descriptions:** *Patriotic*, *Faithful*, *Charitable*, *Fanatical*, *Intolerant*, *Honorable*, *Virtuous*, *Humble*, *Revolutionary*, *Steadfast*, *Loyal*, *Martyring*

- **Signatures:** Air of faith, symbols and /or symbolic manifestations of your faith, fellow devotees, enhanced eloquence when discussing your cause, Willpower bonuses when defending faith, spirit-entities aligned with your devotion, etc.

Elemental

Elemental Resonance starts with your affinity for a certain force or aspect of Nature – storms, animals, death, and so forth – and the ways in which you turn that affinity into action. In return, that force or aspect manifests itself in you... perhaps as elemental quirks, animal allies, or "primal" appearance and behavior which can be extremely *helpful* at certain times and extremely *hazardous* at others.

Despite the feel-good preconceptions about "being natural," Nature can be a nasty bitch. As Coyote Ward says, typhus and hummingbirds both come from the same god. The dreaded death-Resonance Jhor is an aspect of Elemental Resonance; mortality, too, is Nature's way. Elemental descriptions and manifestations favor certain types of animal or element. Fire-witches, storm-lords, earth-mothers, necromancers, beast-kin, wind-riders, air-heads, lightning-weaving electrodynes and

body-grafting biotechs... they all work with, and manifest, their associated Elemental energies.

• **Descriptions:** *Fiery*, *Feral*, *Windy*, *Animalistic* (*Hawklike*, *Bearish*, *Foxy*, etc.), *Earthy*, *Fluid*, *Erotic*, *Stony*, *Stormy*, *Misty*, *Ashen*, *Wooden*, *Florid*, and so forth.

• **Signatures:** Strange weather (breezes, winds, fog, rain, etc.), wild allies, blooming or withering plants, uncanny elemental displays (flaring candles, ashy fingerprints, smoldering clothes, and the like), animalistic features, smells and behavior, and similar manifestations.

Stabilizing

Stabilizing Resonance comes from centered, grounded, and constructive behavior, and so it manifests in turn as centered, grounded, and constructive energies. In its best aspects, Stabilizing energy helps you build, maintain, and preserve the things around you; on a less-helpful note, it can seem *Restrictive*, *Boring* or *Controlling*.

Although the phrase "stabilizing energy" might seem like a contradiction, it's that energy that holds Creation together. Such Resonance provides the fabric of the Tapestry. It balances random change with calm substance and lasting structure. And so – especially for disciplined scholars, technicians, healers, and martial artists – this can be the most desirable Resonance of all.

• **Descriptions:** *Balanced*, *Calming*, *Industrious*, *Hardworking*, *Protective*, *Rigid*, *Stifling*, *Preserving*, *Enduring*, *Soothing*, *Healing*, and other similar activities.

• **Signatures:** Air of stability or restraint, healing touch, "green thumb" or "carpenter's eye," steady gaze, capable assistants, solid presence, stony skin or eyes, stiff bearing, a pervasive sense of "weight," and so on. Unlike other, wilder forms of Resonance, Stabilizing energies don't often disrupt the surroundings; instead, they tend to reinforce whatever structures appear to be in place, calming chaos and reducing random events. (In game terms, perhaps, high levels of this Resonance might add to the difficulty of other people's Entropy-casting rolls.)

Temperamental

Temperamental Resonance flows from your emotional state, and echoes that state back to you. For better and worse, such energies display a deep connection to one's passions, revealing them even at time when you might not want those feelings known. Folks who "wear their hearts on their sleeves" display such energies... usually by revealing their emotions through activities, but occasionally by manifesting them in stranger ways...

In game terms, a Temperamental Resonance Trait may add to your Willpower-roll difficulties if and when you strive to control or conceal your feelings. At the ***Faint*** and ***Subtle*** levels, it's possible to keep your true feelings under wraps, but someone with ***Overwhelming*** Temperamental Resonance is essentially naked, emotionally speaking. Even when the character denies his true sentiments, those emotions might manifest in the environment around him. Such energies can be extremely helpful for certain social rolls (when those rolls follow your emotional desires), and seriously undermine other ones (rolls that depend upon actions contrary to your current emotional state). In the latter case, the dots might subtract from your dice pool... after all, it's hard to intimidate someone when your Resonance reveals how scared you are.

Passionate people may have several different kinds of Temperamental Resonance (*Wrathful*, *Loving*, *Cowardly*, and so forth), or possess a single Temperamental Trait that expresses whatever their dominant emotion is at that moment (*Capricious*, *Passionate*, *Moody*, etc.). You could, of course, have *both*... but then, your character would be pretty unstable, emotionally speaking.

• **Descriptions:** *Joyous*, *Depressive*, *Melancholy*, *Furious*, *Cheerful*, *Erratic*, *Moody*, *Amorous*, *Cowardly*, *Wounded*, *Malicious*, *Impulsive*, *Restrained*, *Bitter*, etc.

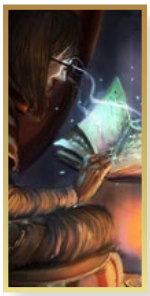
• **Signatures:** Radiating emotional "vibes," symbolic manifestations of the feelings in question (roses, shadows, storm-clouds, etc.), inappropriate expressions of one's true emotions, strong smells (musky, sweet, attractive, unpleasant, and so on), emotional currents that pass from you into other people and animals nearby, emotionally revealing environmental cues (cracking mirrors, blowing leaves, waves of heat or cold), and other expressions of emotional power.

Intimate Mysteries

In a tangential way, these four categories could be seen as extensions of the four Avatar Essences – the "inner directions" said to guide a mage's soul. Temperament might be regarded as an extension of a person's Dynamic qualities, with Elemental Resonance an expression of a Primordial Essence. The Questing Avatar might nurture Devotional energies, while the Stabilizing elements certainly follow the tendencies of a Pattern soul. But yet, people are far more complex, our deeds too varied to be categorized so neatly. And so, for all the philosophical debates that mages (and **Mage** players...) might enjoy about such subjects, the source of such intimate mysteries remains beyond full understanding.

Ultimately, the effects of Resonance within your chronicle depend largely upon the wishes of the Storyteller and players in your group. Although these systems can add lots of color and intensity to your tale, your group may use them, alter them, or discard them as you wish.

Wonders: Objects of Enchantment



Wonders. That name seems so much more evocative than "magic items." Yet, despite the wide range of various Wonders – a range that runs from spirit-imbued skins to high-tech gadgetry – such items encompass the reality-changing powers of magick in solid, transportable, and typically reliable forms.

Depending upon the nature of the item, the powers it commands, and the apparent source of those powers (that is, science or the supernatural), a Wonder may be obviously mystical, totally innocuous, or apparently "normal" in every way that matters to an observer. Regardless of the Wonder's appearance, however, such an object channels Enlightened craftsmanship through intensive effort, creating an item that's far more efficacious than its appearance may suggest. From flying cars to unbreakable glass, flaming swords to dimensional gateways, these treasures make life easier for their owners and more difficult for their enemies.

Mage 20 features some simple rules for the deployment of Wonders in your chronicle. However, for folks who want a more extensive system (at the risk of additional complexity), the following rules may substitute for the simpler systems given in that book.

Type of Wonders

All Wonders involve magick in their construction, and they retain that magick in their final forms. Thanks, however, to the specific types of magick they employ and the ways in which they work, Wonders fall into several different categories, each one capitalized for easy reference. For specific rules dealing with their creation, see the ***Crafting a Wonder chart***, pp. 160-161.

Variations Upon Wonder

For details, see ***Types of Wonders***, below.

Artifact: An object or being imbued with magickal Effects that can be used by a suitable mage.

Charm: A one-use mystic item that features a short-term magickal power.

Device: A sophisticated item of Enlightened technology.

Fetish: Capitalized, a power-object containing a bound spirit entity.

Gadget: A technological Charm.

Grimoire: A written work that teaches and inspires Awakened readers.

Invention: A technological Artifact.

Matrix: A tech-based Quintessence battery or power-source.

Periapt: A mystic source of Quintessence energy.

Primer: A book crafted to inspire Awakening or Enlightenment.

Principia: A tech-based Grimoire.

Relic: A living being or body part imbued with a lasting Effect.

Talisman: A sophisticated magickal item.

Trinket: A single-function item, crafted or enhanced with Spheres but not "magickal" in the sense that other Wonders are magickal.

"Hey – Pass Me That Fetish!"

As with Many Capitalized Terms of Grand Significance, the labels used in this section describe *game*-terms, not *character*-terms. An Etherite tinkerer isn't going to make much distinction between her Devices, Gadgets, and Periapts; instead, she'll refer to her Quantum Stasis Field Generation Matrix (patent pending), her Strontium Dog Flash Canisters, and her K46-D Etheric Storage Units. The various categories discussed in the main text allow **Mage** players to keep track of the rules tied to those contraptions, and the Mighty Capital Letters help distinguish a spirit-leashing Fetish from a sexual predilection involving dog-collars and consent. Don't feel compelled, then, to use the "proper" terminology when your characters speak. As far as mages are concerned, a Wonder by any other name is simply a cool widget that gets a certain job done.

Artifacts

Objects or living beings that have been instilled with certain magickal Effects are often, in game terms, called *Artifacts*. Unlike the ***Devices*** and ***Talismans*** described below, such Wonders have a single function that they perform reliably. A talking statue, silent sneakers, a flaming sword or a bag filled with sleep-dust – such objects, in game-terms, are considered Artifacts.

Unlike Talismans or ***Trinkets***, however, an Artifact requires an Awakened user; in a Sleeper's hands, an Artifact is essentially a mundane object. System-wise, an Artifact uses the Arete Trait of the character who is using that Artifact. The player rolls her mage's Arete, typically against difficulty 7, and a single success activates the Artifact's Effects.

Each Artifact contains Resonance energy that reflects the item's creator, the materials he used, and the process that created the Artifact in question. One flaming sword – a magnificent jian shaped by a Wu Lung Master of Dragon Spirit Kung Fu – could glow with bright blue flames, snarl like a tiger when drawn, and radiate the essence of coiled power held in sharp tension. Another blade, forged by a Templar smith, might resemble a classical European broadsword etched with Latin scriptures that blaze with white light when drawn by a God-fearing hand; this Artifact shimmers with sacred intention, and singes the skins of unrepentant sinners when it touches them. In that regard, then, each Artifact is unique – a mirror of the mage who crafted it and the purpose to which it was forged.

In game terms, each Artifact has a single obvious and paranormal Sphere-based Effect, and several minor atmospheric "signature special effects," like the snarling-tiger sound or the hot surface that singes sinners. These unique "signature special effects" come through storytelling and roleplaying. They're not purchased with points – they simply exist to mark that Artifact as the Wonder that it is. So long as those special effects don't have a significant impact on the Artifact's utility, they can be whatever the item's creator and /or the Storyteller wants them to be. They might not always be beneficial, either; in fact, each Artifact ought to have at least one special effect that's an absolute pain in the ass.

Charms

One-shot Wonders that discharge an Effect, and then either become inert or else completely consume themselves in the Effect, are called *Charms*. Magic bullets, ghost-summoning candles, healing elixirs, magic potions, hyperdrugs, candies that allow a person to breathe fire – these items, and others like them, feature temporary "charms" that grant them that short-lived magick.

System-wise, each Charm is a mystic Effect that has been "held" in time until a certain activity sets the magick free. Essentially, such items contain a delayed-action spell. For that reason, a Charm does not require an Arete roll, and anyone who believes in such things can use one. Technomancers have their own sorts of Charms, called ***Gadgets*** and described below. Mystic allies, meanwhile, can employ Charms... and a suitably impressionable Sleeper can use them too if she spends a point of Willpower, although a Sleeper whose disbelief would trigger Paradox cannot. (For details, see ***Witnesses*** in **Mage 20, p. 531-532.**)

To activate a Charm, the player who's using the Charm rolls the Arete of that Charm, against difficulty 7. The number of successes determines the strength of the Effect. All Paradox, however, becomes the user's problem – a Charm can neither absorb nor deflect Paradox.

Resonance-wise, Charms concentrate the energy of their intended purpose and the materials used in their creation. A set of ghost-summoning candles made of grave-dust infused into beeswax would give off a faint death-radiance, while spicy ginger candies crafted around a fire-spell might feel hot to the touch and smell vaguely of wood smoke. As the nearby ***Crafting a Wonder chart*** explains, a mage can make several Charms or Gadgets at a time. A single crafting-process can produce two Charms or Gadgets for each dot in that character's Arete Trait. Nix, for instance, can craft six enchanted amulets in one sitting, thanks to Nix's Arete of 3. The creator's Arete is the Arete of the Charm itself; Nix's candles, then, would have an Arete of 3. And because Charms require simpler magicks than the other, more complicated Wonders, such items pave the way for greater things as the mage in question deepens his skills.

Background /Experience-Point Costs for Charms and Gadgets

Unless they're been created by the character who uses them, Charms and the related ***Gadgets*** have a given Background cost per batch. Each batch is considered to begin with 10 Charms or Gadgets.

Because Charms and Gadgets are one-shot Wonders, the Background cost per batch is one-half of what it would be (rounded up) if the Charm or Gadget in question was a Wonder that could be used more than once. If, for example, Nix secures a batch of Dr. Hans von Roth's Pan-Entropic Road-Vortex Collapse Modules (that is, little hand-held bombs that use Entropy 3 /Matter 2 to instantly collapse holes in asphalt or concrete), that 10-unit batch of Gadgets would cost Nix three points; a three-dot Wonder would normally cost 6 points; halved, that's three points. When that batch is exhausted, the points are spent. In order to get a new batch, then, Nix's player must spend three more experience points in order to score a new batch of Dr. von Roth's Gadgets.

Yes, this sort of thing can get expensive; considering, though, that such items are one-shot magickal Effects that anyone can use, however, it's not unreasonable to keep them costly and somewhat rare.

Devices

Sophisticated technomagickal contraptions that contain their own self-governed paranormal Effects are known, in game-speak, as *Devices*. Anyone can use a Device, so long as a given character can figure out how it works. System-wise, that usually requires a Wits or Intelligence + Technology or Hypertech roll, with the difficulty based upon the complexity of that Device. (See the sidebar ***You Must be THIS Smart in Order to Use This Device***.) Power-armor suits, AI computer systems, hypertech vehicles, and supercharged firearms tend to be considered Devices. Mystic "devices" get described below as ***Talismans***.

Activating a Device

Each Device has its own Enlightenment Trait, which gets rolled (usually against difficulty 7) when the Device is used. A failed roll usually means that the Device fails to work, while a botched roll reflects catastrophic malfunctions. And because they "cast" their own Effects, Devices and Talismans invoke their own Paradox – a potentially nasty hazard for high-powered Devices. In such cases, the Paradox backlash can rebound upon on the user... sometimes literally blowing him to atoms. (For details, see ***Wonders and Paradox***, p. 150.) Thankfully, the modern paradigm accepts miracles from high technology; as a

You Must be This Smart in Order to Use This Device

Technomancers aren't stupid. If any random moron could operate a Device, then that Device could easily be used against its creators. By the same token, a hypertech Device employs sophisticated theories and requires skilled operation. As a result, most Devices also require certain Abilities – usually ***Biotech***, ***Energy Weapons***, ***Hypertech***, ***Jetpack***, ***Science***, ***Technology***, or other associated Traits – before a character can employ that Device at all. Particularly complex Devices might require a successful Attribute + Ability roll, while simpler ones merely require an operator who has the Ability in question.

The more complex the Device, the higher that roll's difficulty will be; a straightforward Device would be difficulty 4 or 5, while the difficulty would rise to 9 or 10 for a Device whose operation demands intense and specialized training.

Along similar lines, a character might need to belong to a particular group – or share a similar belief and practice – with the Device's creator before that character could employ the Device. It's totally reasonable, for instance, to assume that a Black Suit would be baffled by the mad workings of some Reality Deviant's contraption. The Union, in return, makes machines that function only for properly trained personnel; that way, a homicidal witch won't get far with captured technology, or turn it back upon the Union that constructed it.

(That said, a clever technomancer may be able to puzzle out the functions behind some other group's technology – see the secondary Skill: ***Hypertech***, **Mage 20**, **p. 296**.)

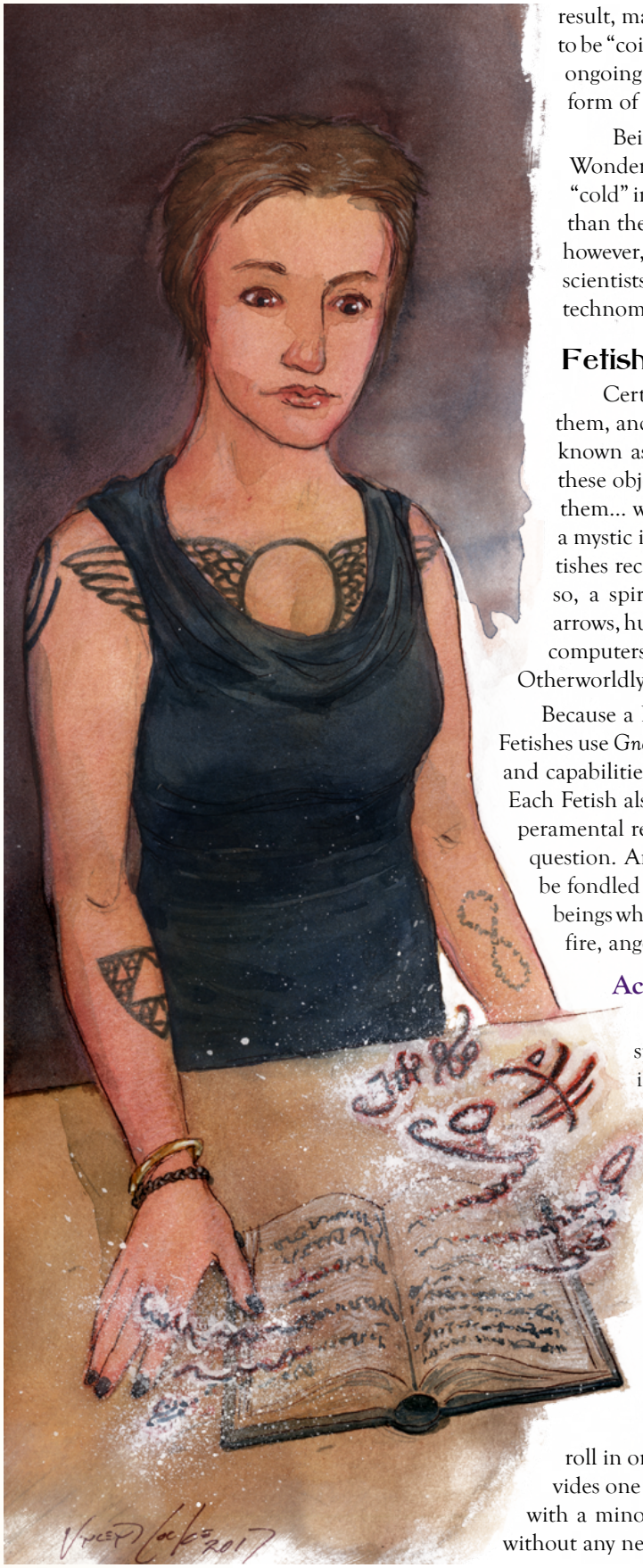
The extent to which a character needs the proper background in order to employ a hypertech Wonder depends upon the complexity of that Wonder and the nature of its creators. Firing a BCD plasma cannon would be easier than piloting a Void Engineer spacecraft, while a Galvanizing Sonic Disrupter Harp crafted by Mad Doctor Mercer of the Etherite Tradition could be incomprehensible to almost everyone. Ultimately, the ability to understand a given Device remains a Storyteller's judgment call. If it's reasonable to assume that a given mage could puzzle out the Device, then it's also reasonable to assume that she can use it; if not... well, it might be entertaining to see what happens when she starts flipping switches at random. (See the ***Mucking About with Wonders*** chart, below.)

Incidentally, this same principle extends to any hypertech Wonder – any Gadget, Invention, Matrix, and so forth – and could be applied to mystic Wonders too. After all, an Occidental orphan mage wouldn't have the slightest idea how to employ a Dragon Wizard's jade chopsticks as anything other than a set of eating utensils.

Mucking About with Wonders

Storyteller rolls one die to determine results, then narrates results according to whim.

1	Something horrible happens.
2	Something dreadful happens.
3	Something bad happens.
4-5	Nothing happens at all.
6-7	Wonder performs as desired.
8	Something good happens.
9	Something great happens.
10	Something magnificent happens.



result, many Devices fit into Consensual Reality and are assumed to be "coincidental"... which explains a lot about the Technocracy's ongoing crusade to make Enlightened Science into the only valid form of magick.

Being instruments of technology, Devices and other tech-based Wonders tend to have a *Mechanical* Resonance. Such things feel "cold" in a mystic sense, radiating the essence of technology rather than the personality of their individual creators. That principle, however, doesn't *always* apply; the strange contraptions of Etherite scientists or the literally *Infernal* machines crafted by Nephandic technomancers often reflect the bizarre geniuses who invent them.

Fetishes

Certain mages know how to capture spirits, or bargain with them, and then put those entities into material objects. Ironically known as *Fetishes* (from the Latin word *facticius*, or "artificial"), these objects channel the powers and essence of the spirit within them... which makes such primal Wonders about as "natural" as a mystic item can be. The oldest sorts of Wonders, these spirit-Fetishes recall the ancient Arts of cave, jungle, and savannah. Even so, a spirit-based Fetish can incorporate technology. Pain-spirit arrows, hunger-spirit drums, death-spirit bullets, and mischief-spirit computers are all considered Fetishes if their power comes from an Otherworldly entity within the object.

Because a Fetish's power comes from a spirit instead of the mage, Fetishes use G*nosis*, not Arete, in order to function. Each Fetish's Gnosis and capabilities depends upon the spirit that's bound into the Fetish. Each Fetish also has a distinct personality that maintains its own temperamental relationship with the person who "owns" the Wonder in question. And because powerful entities rarely allow themselves to be fondled by puny mortals, Fetish-bound spirits tend to be simple beings whose essence comes from equally simple principles: hunger, fire, anger, stone, and so on.

Accessing a Fetish

To employ a Fetish, a character needs to convince the spirit to activate a Fetish's mystic powers. Most often, this involves making a resisted Willpower roll (difficulty 7) against the spirit's Gnosis. A single success is enough to make the Fetish work. The player then rolls the Gnosis Trait as a dice pool for the associated effect; a Fetish with Gnosis 4, for example, will let you roll four dice when your character employs its power. In a more equitable relationship, the mage strikes a bargain with the spirit, performing favors for favors in a partnership sometimes called *chiminage*: the spirit states terms, the mage agrees to them, and both parties help one another out.

In certain cases, the "activated" Fetish simply does whatever it's supposed to do, without needing a Gnosis roll in order to do so; a shirt that repels bullets, for instance, provides one soak die per point of Gnosis, while a raven-skull infused with a minor servant of Raven caws and talks whenever it pleases, without any need for an activation roll.

As vessels for spiritual entities, each Fetish holds a Resonance that fits the spirit within that object. The raven-skull, for example, radiates a tricky sort of wit, while a gourd containing the essence of a tornado quivers with the trapped tempest, emitting a low moaning thunder to folks who can sense the deeper nature of mystical things.

For details about dealing with spirits, see ***Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 90-106**. And for information about spirits and their Gnosis Trait, see **Mage 20, pp. 485-495** and **631-641**.

Gadgets

Single-use technological items, *Gadgets* are essentially Charms in tech-based forms. Such Wonders burn out once they've been used. Madness grenades, stim-packs, injections of nanotech machines... such Gadgets combine limited functions with scientific efficiency.

System-wise, Gadgets follow the systems used for ***Charms*** (described above), and enjoy the usual benefits of tech-based miracles. Because such Wonders tend to be crafted on assembly lines, they usually have a "standardized" Arete that gets rolled when the Gadget gets used. The impersonal Resonance of mass-produced Gadgets gives them a similarly standardized feel, although the Gadgets of mad inventors often feature a "maker's mark" of personalized Resonance. Thus, a clip of Technocracy bullets has the chilly essence of Technocratic unity, while a Marauder artisan crafts her own bullets with the crazed energies of her personal dementia.

As detailed under ***Charms***, above, Gadgets come in batches of 10 for half of the usual price of a comparable Wonder. A batch of 20, then, would cost the standard amount of points. For an example, see ***Bond Fine Tobacco Products***, in the ***Selected Wonders*** section near the end of this chapter.

Grimoires

Harnessing the greatest form of human magick, language, Grimoires offer insights into the Spheres, teach esoteric skills, and spark inspirations that lead to greater illumination. Although "normal" books can furnish knowledge, inspiration and focus (see below), these magickal tomes allow a character to raise Abilities, Spheres, and Arete... presuming, of course, that the reader understands that tome in the first place. Holy Scriptures, Hermetic codices, Books of Shadows, and ineffable sutras often take the form of Grimoires.

Benefits of Grimoires

Unlike most Wonders, a Grimoire doesn't function on command. Instead, it gradually expands a mage's consciousness, opening mental doors that may otherwise remain locked. A properly studied Grimoire (see below) can, *at the Storyteller's discretion*, bestow one or more of the following benefits:

- **Abilities:** Grimoires often teach the deeper levels of a "mundane" Ability – a Knowledge, Skill or (rarely) Talent linked to the nature of the book. In most cases, this involves some specialty of Esoterica or Occult related to the Grimoire; other tomes, however, help a student understand Meditation, Martial Arts, or other associated disciplines. System-wise, you can purchase a new dot in the appropriate Ability at one-half its normal cost, with a minimum cost of one experience point, upon successful completion of the Grimoire.

- **Spheres:** Many Grimoires (though not all of them) expand upon the principles of a given Sphere. A reader who comprehends these teachings might be able to purchase her next dot in the appropriate Sphere at the cost of her current Sphere Rank x 7 - the Grimoire level. An Affinity Sphere costs the current Sphere Rank x 6 - that Grimoire level instead. The new Sphere Rank, however, cannot exceed the level of that Grimoire; a three-dot Wonder, for instance, could reduce the cost of Sphere Ranks 1-3, but could not raise that Sphere Rank above 3.

- **Arete:** Likewise, a Grimoire *may* (Storyteller's call) allow the reader to raise her next dot of Arete without undergoing a Seeking in order to do so. The new point of Arete *must still be purchased with experience points* before it becomes permanent, but it may function for a week or so after the character reads the Grimoire. After that, the illumination fades and the mage returns to her previous level of enlightened "excellence." As with the Spheres above, the level of the new level of Arete cannot exceed the level of the Grimoire; a three-dot Grimoire could help a reader rise to Arete 2 or 3, but not above that point. (In order to access this benefit, the reader must already have at least one dot of Arete; certain "Awakening" tomes, called ***Primers***, are described below.)

Individual Grimoires may have other benefits, depending upon the book in question. The reader may gain only one benefit per reading, and may expand her Arete only once with a given Grimoire. A reader can benefit only once per year from a given Grimoire. All of the benefits described above (and rules below) have been revised from the systems presented in the sourcebook **Forged by Dragon's Fire**, in order to balance and simplify their effects.

Studying a Grimoire

In order to benefit a character, a true Grimoire requires dedicated study. You can't skim such a book, but must focus your full concentration on its contents, and upon their potential ramifications, in order to get the true benefits from that Grimoire. A mage must devote no less than one week of reading and meditation to that book for each level in a particular Grimoire; a two-dot Wonder would require at least two weeks of study, while a five-dot one would demand five weeks or more. Grimoires also tend to feature exercises for the reader: meditations, invocations, purifications, prayers,

chants, equations, quests, katas, and so forth. A reader who skips those exercises, or who employs the Skill: ***Speed-Reading*** when perusing a Grimoire, can't truly grasp the full implications of the work.

For obvious reasons, the reader has to be able to comprehend the contents of a Grimoire before she can get any sort of benefit from that book. Considering that many Grimoires are written in arcane, sacred or "lost" languages (High Latin, Sanskrit, alchemical symbolism, Classical Greek, and so forth), that's not nearly as easy as it sounds. The reader must not only understand the language itself but also put the writings into their proper context... which can be tricky, especially when you're trying to parse out the contents of a book from a radically different time and culture. System-wise, the Storyteller may insist that a character who wants to study a Grimoire must have at least three dots in Research, Esoterica, Occult, and/or an appropriate Knowledge specialty (Medieval Persian Culture, for example) in addition to the ability to decipher the book's language, before she can even *begin* to understand a Grimoire. Books that teach physical disciplines require physical exercise (and the associated Traits) as well. Intelligence, Perception or Wits rolls, combined with those Traits, are perfectly appropriate too.

Beyond all that, the reader must be able to wrap her head around the author's insights. In game terms, she must share a common focus – a paradigm and practice – with the book's author. An Akashic sage could peruse *De Angelis Libris*, and perhaps even find its contents illuminating; because he's not devoted to a Western angelic ritual tradition, however, he won't find the kind of cosmic enlightenment that a Hermetic mystic, Templar or Chorister would discover between that book's covers... and a Hermetic would be just as baffled by the postures and haiku of *The Cloud Dance of Eternal Vision and Joy*, an Eastern "Grimoire" depicting The 101 Sacred Steps and their associated insights.

Without exception, Grimoires are rare and unique works of art. Often hand-bound, hand-lettered, and illuminated with artwork that may transcend its two-dimensional medium, these hefty volumes cannot be mass-produced. Many editions of a particular Grimoire may exist, but each one must be painstakingly crafted with Awakened Arts in order to employ the full effects of its magickal text. Technomagickal books called ***Principia*** (see below) may be mass-printed on special presses, but their lessons cannot hope to match the sublime insights of true Grimoire... as any wizard will tell you if given half a chance!

Although wizards love their books, and – much like game designers – tend to amass huge libraries full of them, a Grimoire transcends the "mere" properties of ink and paper. Into each one, the author pours his deepest revelations, expressions of wisdom often gathered into poems, spells, rituals, puzzles, enigmas, and dazzling displays of visual artistry. Glowing ink, moving images, pictures that "come alive" when the reader concentrates on them... whatever odd things a creative author (and Storyteller) can imagine may be found within the pages of a Grimoire. The mystic tomes featured in the Peter Greenaway film *Prospero's Books* suggest the unearthly illustrations within such works – illustrations that often employ the Forces, Matter, Life, Spirit, and even Time Spheres to shape their transcendent designs. For more details about the power of writing and magick, see ***Books, Scrolls and Periodicals***, ***Languages***, ***Memes***, and ***Writing, Inscriptions and Runes*** under ***Instruments: Tools of Focus*** in **Mage 20**, **pp. 589, 593-594,** and **600**.

Inventions

Technomancers love to craft machines with unusual purposes. Such advanced gear – referred to, in gamespeak, as *Inventions* – features special functions that only the *right* people can access. Such Inventions require Enlightened understanding, often backed up with specialized training. Cybernetic enhancements, hypertech firearms, dimensional gateways, and other such technology can be considered capital-I Inventions.

In game terms, an Invention is simply a technological ***Artifact***. Aside from the creation process (which demands scientific expertise instead of mystic rituals), and the form the Invention assumes (some item of technology rather than of "magic"), an Invention follows the systems given above. Unlike ***Devices***, these Inventions cannot be used by the Masses; an exceptional citizen might be able to pick up one of Doc Eon's specialized Hyperbolic Force Projectile Cannons, but she wouldn't understand how to get, shall we say, the most bang for her buck from that weapon.

Matrices

Portable storage containers for Quintessential energy, ***Matrices*** are tech-based ***Periapts***. Unlike their mystic counterparts (detailed below), these batteries tend to look perfectly mundane, working not off absurd supernatural principles but instead employing the laws of Enlightened Science. Designed for easy use and access, each Matrix plugs into hypertech Devices and other tools of advanced technology. Power packs, microfusion reactors, Etheric batteries, and other receptacles of sublime energy are considered to be Matrices, whether or not they use that name.

In game terms, of course, a Matrix and a Periapt are almost exactly the same things. A Matrix, however, is manufactured as an item of technology – usually mass-produced in Enlightened Science facilities by specialized technicians and machines. Individual mad scientists, of course, produce hand-crafted Matrices according to their own unique theories. So long as a given Matrix has been designed to fit a particular Device or instrument, however, a technomancer can swap out different Matrices to fuel the same machine; recharge a Matrix at an appropriate energy source; employ a Matrix's Quintessence without the usually required concentration; and switch out "empty clips" for fresh Matrices of the same kind.

On the downside, a Matrix cannot be refreshed through the arcane Arts of superstitionist "magic," nor can it absorb energy through ridiculous methods like leaving it sitting beside

an "enchanted pool" or some such nonsense. It might be implanted into a living thing, but will not simply "meld" itself into a functioning biomass. In all other respects, however, a Matrix follows the game systems detailed below.

Periapts

Given the importance of Quintessential energy in magickal and technomagickal workings, a *Periapt* – essentially a Quintessence battery – can be invaluable. Named from the Greek word *periapton* ("hung around" or "fastened upon"), a Periapt "fastens" Quintessence into an object, design, or living thing that acts as a rechargeable container for such energy. With that energy, the mage can fuel Effects, reduce the difficulty of his casting rolls, or otherwise employ Quintessence in the usual ways. (See the ***Quintessence*** Trait entry in **Mage 20, p. 332**, the ***Prime Sphere entry*** in that book's **Chapter Ten, pp. 520-521**, and the uses of Quintessence in magick described in that same chapter, **pp. 537**.) Charged crystals, energized tattoos, soul-reaping axes, and consecrated sacrificial lambs could all become Periapts if properly prepared by the mage who enchants them.

Using Periapts

In game-system terms, a Periapt holds up to five points of Quintessence for each point in the object's Wonder level; a three-dot Periapt, then, could retain 15 points of Quintessence, while a five-dot one might store up to 25 points. Your mage can access this Quintessence as long as she's in physical contact with the Periapt. A Prime 2 Effect allows that mage to access the Quintessence if the Periapt's within close range, and a Correspondence 2 /Prime 2 Effect may access it from a distance if your mage manages to reach the Periapt with the Correspondence spell. Using that Quintessence requires at least one turn of focused concentration; any activity beyond that concentration disrupts the flow of energy that turn. (As noted above, this concentration does not apply to Technological Matrices.)

For convenience's sake, many mages turn their ritual tools into Periapts. That way, a source of Quintessence remains literally close at hand. Of course, such convenience has its downsides: If the instrument gets lost or damaged, then the Periapt suffers the same mishap. And if a Paradox backlash demolishes the Periapt (see below), then the willworker loses her instrument as well.

An external Periapt – such as a jewel, amulet or weapon – can fuse itself into the mage's body if she wears it continually on her bare skin. Generally, this fusion takes 10 weeks, minus one week for the rating of the Periapt. (A five-dot Periapt, then, would merge with its owner in five weeks.) At that point, the character can access the stored Quintessence immediately – it's essentially part of her body's innate mystic energy.

For more details, see ***Employing a Periapt /Matrix*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 44-45**.)

Soulgems and Soulflowers

By the same token, a mage can infuse Quintessence into a living being and turn that creature into a living Periapt. Such miracles demand Life 5 in addition to the usual Periapt-creation process. (See ***Crafting Wonders***, below.) With Life 5 and Prime 5, that creature may be turned into a *Soulflower*: a living extension of the mage's personal energies. A similar enchantment (Matter 4 /Prime 4) crafts an inanimate *Soulgem*: a material receptacle for that willworker's personal essence. In both cases, the Soulflower or Soulgem mirror and contain both the Quintessence and the Resonance from the mage who crafted them. The Periapts add to the mage's Quintessence and Paradox capacities, and allow her to access their Quintessence almost anywhere, even across vast distances (assuming she can reach them with Correspondence-Sphere magick). If and when the mage's Resonance shifts, then the Resonance within those Periapts shifts as well. Their energy is her energy, and her energy becomes their own.

For more details, see ***Crafting Soulgems, Soulflowers, and Assets*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 48**.

Paradox, Resonance, and Periapts

As storage units for Quintessential energy, Periapts also gather Resonance and Paradox energies:

- **Resonance:** Every Periapt concentrates the forces of Resonance, as described earlier in this chapter, under ***Resonance: Physics of Consequence***. The nature of that Resonance depends upon the mage who crafted the Periapt, and the materials he used to create it. If that Resonance conflicts with the spells that the Periapt's owner is trying to cast, then that character may suffer an ***Opposed Resonance*** penalty, detailed on **Mage 20**'s ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart*, p. 503**. If the Resonance fits that spell, however, then it's counted as ***Appropriate Resonance*** on the same chart. Obviously, a Periapt infused with plenty of Quintessence has a pretty high degree of Resonance, while one with very little Quintessence has little Resonance, or none at all.

- **Paradox:** A Periapt's store of Quintessence can hold up to the same amount of Paradox; a three-dot Periapt, for instance, can hold up to 15 points of Quintessence *or* Paradox, *or* up to 15 points of a mixture of both. (It could *not*, however, hold up to 30 points of both.) Essentially, the Periapt becomes a second ***Quintessence /Paradox wheel***, as described in **Mage 20, Chapter Six**, and each point of Paradox within the Periapt displaces one point of Quintessence.

Each time a Periapt gets used to fuel a vulgar magick Effect (*with* or *without witnesses*), that vessel acquires one point of Paradox. For each point of Paradox, the Periapt holds one point less of Quintessence. The Periapt retains that Paradox energy for one month per point of Paradox if the Periapt is

an inanimate object, or one point of Paradox energy per week with a living Periapt. Prime 5 can "unweave" this Paradox more quickly; without such power, though, the only remedy for built-up Paradox is time. If the Periapt gets broken or killed in the meantime, then the Periapt's full amount of Paradox immediately hits the owner with potentially huge backlash.

Note*:** Despite an inference in the sourcebook **Forged by Dragon's Fire**, *a Periapt does* ***not *absorb all the Paradox generated by its owner*. Although that idea gets implied on **p. 41** of that book (contradicting **pps. 10-11**), such benefits – in addition a Periapt's usual powers – are way out of balance with the Background cost involved.

Recharging Periapts

A mage can recharge an existing Periapt either with Prime Sphere magick (the fast way), or by leaving it to absorb Quintessence at a Node (the slow way).

- **The Quick Way:** Prime 3 allows a mage to channel Quintessence into the Periapt from Tass, a Node, or her own personal Quintessence supply. Prime 4 allows her to draw that energy out from an inanimate object, and Prime 5 allows her to pull it from the Pattern of a living thing. The ***Quintessence Amounts chart*** **(Mage 20, p. 507)** shows the levels of Quintessence you can get from various creatures. The amount of Quintessence you might obtain from material substances is up to the Storyteller's discretion, but could be based upon the Structure of the object in question – see ***Sample Objects and Surfaces*** in **Mage 20, p. 457**.

  Many mages – especially technomancers – craft Devices to recharge their Periapts. The Technocracy employs such machines for obvious reasons. Typically, those "juicing stations" employ Prime 4 to draw Quintessence from raw materials (stone, shale, gold, etc.), although especially cruel ones use Prime 5 to pull life-essence from living things instead. Technological Periapts are generally referred to as ***Matrices***, described above.

- **The Slow Way:** Left within a few feet of a Node or a large amount of Tass (10 Quintessence points or more), the Periapt will recharge itself at a rate of its point rating per day. A five-dot Periapt, for instance, would absorb five Quintessence points per day.

- **Recharging Resonance:** In both cases, the Resonance of the source will flavor the Resonance within the Periapt. Say that Jennifer Rollins has a shaped-leather mask that she uses as a Periapt. If she restores its Quintessence supply by painting it with her own blood, then that mask acquires Jennifer's current Resonance; if she leaves it for a fortnight at a deep-forest glade, then her mask absorbs the *Calm* elemental essence of that Node; and if she wears it while fucking a weretiger – using Prime 5 to channel his life-force into the mask – then the Periapt blazes with an *Animalistic* passion that matches the fury of their sex. A simple Prime 1 Effect can filter that Resonance, wiping it "clean" unless it's got an extremely powerful signature. A wise mage uses such magick whenever she crafts, charges or refills a Periapt; if all mages were wise, however, then the Ascension War would never have begun.

Primers

Certain texts have been created to inspire Sleepers to Awaken. Often called *Primers* (from "first," "best," "to risk," "to strike"), such books, scrolls, puzzles, and even games cut through the murk of everyday lethargy, waking certain readers up to the possibilities beyond mundane existence. For most people, Primers appear to be esoteric, obtuse, even nonsensical. An imaginative person, however, can grasp the deeper significance of that work and perhaps use it to blow open the doors of possibility. The *Kitab al-Alacir* remains the world's most famous Primer, but many others exist... often right in plain sight.

Essentially a special sort of ***Grimoire***, a Primer might be entertaining, frustrating or fascinating in its own right. Its true purpose, however, involves shaking the reader out of her mundane Sleep. System-wise, an unusually intelligent and dedicated reader may Awaken, acquiring her first dot of Arete without paying experience points to gain it. As with any Grimoire, that reader must first absorb the text, comprehend its deeper levels, and then put those insights into use. For an Awakened mage, a Primer won't do anything unusual – she's already gotten that particular memo. An unAwakened character, however, may discover her career as a mage between the pages of some esoteric tome whose contents are far more powerful than they might seem otherwise...

Principiae

Mystic mages aren't the only folks who can pass on powerful memes and impart arcane information through the written word. Writing *is* a technology, after all, and so the Technocracy and other technomagickal groups – the Virtual Adepts, the Society of Ether, and other sects dedicated to Enlightened Science – employ *Principiae* in order to advance their goals. Unlike those musty tomes crafted by doddering wizards, though, Principiae are sleek vehicles of Enlightened insight. Advanced computing codes, brain-wrenching textbooks, radical-culture magazines, and other methods of scientific esotericism can be seen as Principiae.

In all ways that matter, a Principia is a ***Grimoire*** that deals in Enlightened Science instead of Awakened Magick. Its paradigms, practices, and presentation follow technology, not mysticism. As a result, a Principia is neither hand-crafted nor unique in the ways that Grimoires are unique. Such texts can be disseminated through printed books, computer codes, mathematical formulae, even videos or PowerPoint presentations. Even so, a Principia demands advanced

understanding, specialized training, Enlightened awareness, and dedicated study before its deeper levels become obvious. The average reader – even if he's a total tech-geek – can't get anything but a headache from reading a Principia. To the Masses, the work seems like gibberish... fascinating, perhaps, but utterly impractical.

An Enlightened technomancer whose paradigm and practices synch up with the Principia's design may enjoy the same sorts of benefits that a mystic mage gets from a properly understood Grimoire, as detailed above. Once again, however, a mage without the appropriate training and mindset will remain baffled. An Etherite might glean astonishing insights from an Iteration X presentation, but he won't find it especially useful in a game-system sense; likewise, the Black Suit who tries to parse a Principia posted in a dark-net VA website may find herself beating her shaved head against the nearest wall in frustration before she gleans any sort of helpful data from such rubbish. Given the modular nature of technology, of course, it's perfectly possible for a technomancer *with the right background* to understand Principia created by a rival group. Considering the elite attitude of many tech-geeks, however, that sort of access tends to be restricted by inside jokes, obscure lingo, passcodes, and other hypertech arcana. (For potential decryption rules, see the entry for ***Cryptanalysis and Codes*** in the ***Computer Systems*** section of this book, **pp. 120-121**.)

Relics, Cybernetics, Biocrafting, and Soulflowers

Old and powerful spells can invest mystic energy into living vessels. Hypertechnology can do the same thing through the wonders of Inspired science, utilizing cybernetics, genegineering, and biocrafting tech. The lines between such Arts and Sciences get so blurry at times that the game-term *Relic* embraces all forms of living Wonder. Considering that the Latin root *relinquere* means "to leave behind," you could say that Relics involve mages "leaving behind" an Effect inside a living organism.

Building the Relic

Story-wise, a Relic's "creator" takes a living thing – a frog, a child, a body brewed up in a vat or stitched together from harvested parts, whatever – and then instills reality-altering effects into its Pattern. Obviously, this demands high-level magick: Life 5 to bind the Effect into the living host, Mind 5 to give it a working consciousness, and Prime 5 to reweave its vital energies, plus whatever other Spheres the Effect itself requires. (For details, see ***Creating Living Things*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 24**.) A creature built from dead parts or cybernetic hardware also demands an additional Matter 4 Effect to merge or transform inanimate materials into functional animated tissue. Once the foundation has been crafted, these Spheres provide the "glue" that binds all of the elements into an integrated whole.

Activating the Relic

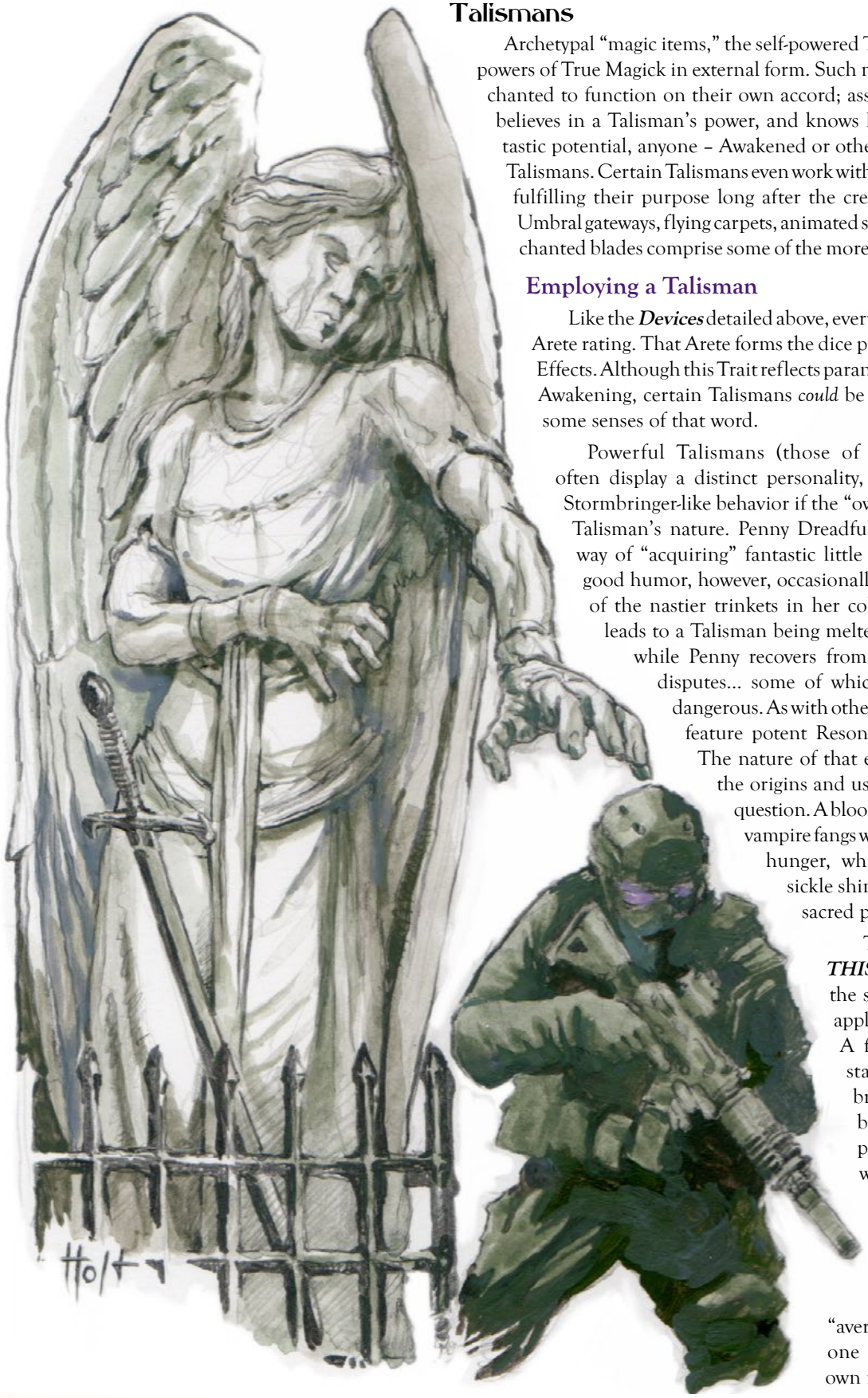
In most cases, the creator maintains a certain degree of control over the magick she weaves into her Relic. If and when she wishes to employ that magick, she merely needs to build a "trigger" into the Relic that allows her to access the power upon command. In hypertech Relics, this involves an override command that asserts command over the technology built into the organism. To utilize that command across a distance, however, the creator (regardless of the practice and process she employs) needs to add a Correspondence 5 Effect that allows her to take control over the organism and its integrated Effects... and that level of command is pretty hard to master! As with any other major Wonder-work, the mage must invest a point of permanent Willpower into her Relic, although Technocratic facilities seem to skirt this requirement. (Or *do* they? This investiture may explain the high rate of burnout among Technocratic technicians...)

A creator who wants to override the objections of her creation must add a Mind 4 Effect in order to control the Relic's thoughts. Said "Relic" isn't going to be terribly pleased with such commands, of course, which explains why lots of mad scientists and dominating wizards tend to condition their "children" into subservience. And no, that's not an especially nice thing to do to your creations, though such mistreatment is rather traditional.

Unless conditioned otherwise, a Relic can use his powers at will. A "golden child" who has been enchanted by his mother can employ those powers without her assistance. Folklore and fiction tell us how often that sort of thing backfires upon creators, but that doesn't stop mages from continuing to play God with living organisms.

Many mages build Relics into their own Patterns, shaping "magic fingers" and cybernetic hearts. Obviously, such creators don't need to override their own objections or bridge space between their minds and the powers they have instilled into their bodies, and so self-enchantment remains a safer, easier process than enchanting other beings into carrying around your magick for you.

As mentioned in the sidebar ***Living and Virtual Foundations*** (**p. 154**), a living being takes on one point of permanent Paradox for each level in the Wonder. This doesn't count the Life and Prime Effects used to create the Wonder in the first place, although it *would* count the Correspondence and/or Mind Effects used to control the Relic from a distance. And as mentioned earlier, you can just use the ***Enhancement*** Background to reflect cybernetically enhanced characters, unless you want to invent new types of biotech from scratch; in that case, use the Relic rules, and craft those enhancements accordingly. For more details, see that Background Trait described in **Mage 20 (pp. 312-313)**, and the ***Biotech*** entry in that same book, **ppg 657-661**.



Talismans

Archetypal "magic items," the self-powered Talismans contain the powers of True Magick in external form. Such miracles have been enchanted to function on their own accord; assuming that someone believes in a Talisman's power, and knows how to access its fantastic potential, anyone – Awakened or otherwise – can use most Talismans. Certain Talismans even work without human guidance, fulfilling their purpose long after the creating mage has died. Umbral gateways, flying carpets, animated statues, and mighty-enchanted blades comprise some of the more legendary Talismans.

Employing a Talisman

Like the ***Devices*** detailed above, every Talisman has its own Arete rating. That Arete forms the dice pool for the Talisman's Effects. Although this Trait reflects paranormal power, not true Awakening, certain Talismans *could* be considered "alive" in some senses of that word.

Powerful Talismans (those of Arete 5 or higher) often display a distinct personality, and may indulge in Stormbringer-like behavior if the "owner" doesn't suit the Talisman's nature. Penny Dreadful, for example, has a way of "acquiring" fantastic little treasures; her innate good humor, however, occasionally conflicts with some of the nastier trinkets in her collection, which often leads to a Talisman being melted down or discarded while Penny recovers from the effects of those disputes... some of which can become quite dangerous. As with other Wonders, Talismans feature potent Resonance signatures, too. The nature of that energy depends upon the origins and uses of the Talisman in question. A blood-drinking necklace of vampire fangs will radiate a *Malevolent* hunger, while a blessed golden sickle shimmers with *Calm* and sacred purpose.

The ***You Must be THIS Smart*** principle (see the sidebar of that name) applies to many Talismans. A flying broom, for instance, may be just a broom unless a would-be pilot knows the proper invocation, while an enchanted ax seems to be a battered old relic until a worthy warrior grasps its hilt. There's no such thing as the "average" Talisman. Each one is a Wonder in its own right.

Trinkets

Certain enchanted items, though wondrous in themselves, aren't really Wonders in the sense that they channel Sphere-based effects. A consecrated dagger, a bullet-resistant business suit, a window made of see-through steel – such *Trinkets* provide trivial yet precious aid to folks who know how to use them right.

The word *trinket* means "trivial." In that spirit, Trinkets are simple, trivial things. In **Mage** terms, a capital-T Trinket has unusual properties but doesn't employ the Spheres once it has been created. Of course, no one actually *calls* such items "Trinkets" – that's simply an awkward term of convenience. In the sourcebook **Forged by Dragon's Fire** (see **p. 17**), such treasures get referred to as *faux-Artifacts*: minor treasures crafted with Pattern Spheres so that they possess properties greater than their usual capacity. Life grows or strengthens them; Matter reinforces them; Forces alters their essential properties and reworks the physics of light, sound, and radiance. Quintessence, meanwhile, allows a mage to consecrate Trinkets, turning them into instruments of a greater Reality. The various Sphere entries describe the possible modifications a mage can make to an apparently "normal" object with those Spheres, and those modifications make a Trinket into a minor sort of Wonder.

As a rule, assume that a Trinket is made or one or two common material substances – cloth, glass, stone, wood, and so forth. It cannot involve complex interactions, and its purpose must be simple and straightforward. A gun, for instance, could be a Trinket, but a car or computer could not. Meanwhile, the Effect involved must also be simple and straightforward: silence, bullet-proofing, the ability to inflict or resist aggravated damage, and so forth. Complex items with complicated purposes are ***Artifacts***, ***Inventions***, ***Talismans***, and so forth, not Trinkets.

Even so, "trivial" Wonders have certain benefits. A Trinket's owner doesn't need to roll an activation roll, and the item doesn't have Arete, generate Paradox, or employ Quintessence – it simply fulfills a useful function. Sphere magick facilitates the *creation* of such Trinkets, but anyone can use them once they've been made. Such things don't have to be recharged, but although Trinkets can be tough, they lose their properties once they get destroyed.

Point Costs for Trinkets

Trinkets, like Charms and Gadgets, are "lesser Wonders" – that is, Wonders that have more limited applications and powers than other such items. And so, in terms of Background points, assume that a Trinket costs one freebie or experience point for each point in the Rank of the highest Sphere involved in its creation. A ring that lets its wearer inflict aggravated Life damage with a punch, for example, would cost three points (Life 3 = 3 points).

As a Background Wonder, a low-powered Trinket is worth one dot, a useful one is two dots, an impressive one is worth three, a powerful one is worth four, and a devastating one is worth five. If that object gets destroyed, of course, then the power is lost forever. And if it gets taken away, then the thief might score a larger treasure than she'd expected to obtain...

Wonder Systems

Crafted with Awakened Arts and Sciences, each Wonder employs the power of the Spheres. An object that has been reinforced, crafted or consecrated with the Spheres – like a T-shirt hardened with Matter, a wooden spear grown with Life, or a dagger invested with Prime magick so that it inflicts aggravated damage – is not actually a Wonder unless, as with a Trinket, its unusual nature is permanent. By definition, Wonders have been invested with paranormal powers. Those powers depend upon the type of Wonder involved (see above), but they always involve a bit of True Magick or Enlightened Science.

Activating a Wonder

In most cases, a Wonder has a particular activation roll, often represented by an Arete Trait. Certain Wonders have their own Arete, while others use the Arete of the person using the item, the Arete of the person who created it, or simply a default Arete that applies to the Wonder in question.

(Technological Wonders have an Enlightenment Trait; it's the exact same thing as the Arete Trait, but reflects the difference between a mystic Wonder and a hypertech Wonder. Yeah, that's semantics – but semantics, for mages, can be important.)

To use a Wonder, roll that Wonder's Arete as a dice pool. In most cases, the difficulty is 7, although certain items may be easier or harder to employ, at the Storyteller's discretion. Older **Mage** rules used the same highest Sphere + *coincidental/vulgar without witnesses/vulgar with witnesses* system that mages employ for their own spells, but a default difficulty of 7 offers a quick and easy solution.

Most Wonders have a Quintessence Trait as well. Each Quintessence point counts as one "charge" for the item, and that energy must be replaced with a Prime 3 Effect (or a ***Periapt*** or ***Matrix***) if you want to keep your Wonder in working order. Depending upon its shape and form, a particular Wonder might be vulgar (a rod of lightning, a flaming sword), coincidental (a turbocharged gun or laptop computer), or somewhere in between (a deck of uncannily accurate Tarot cards). The specifics vary from object to object, and might depend upon *who's* using *what*, *how* he's using it, and *where* he happens to be using it at the time.

What do I Believe I Can Use?

Here's an essential rule that applies to Wonders created by a rival mage or faction: *If your worldview doesn't accept a Wonder, then you probably can't use it.* A Black Suit, for instance, would view a witch's cauldron as Reality Deviance, while an Appalachian hoodoo-man would spit at the idea of tiny robots involved in "nanotech." Certain Wonders, of course, are easy to use: swords, guns, hammers, and the like are pretty universal tools. Even so, a character with a diametrically opposed belief system can't access the greater powers involved with a Wonder, if only because he doesn't believe in such things. Sure, Secret Agent John Courage can accept that a Reality

Deviant uses a paranormal cauldron. Does that mean he can brew potions in it himself? No – after all, he's not some goddamn *superstitionist!*

Mage 20's section ***Focus and the Arts***, and this book's **Chapter Three**, both deal extensively with the various practices, tools, and associated belief-systems that a mage can have. When crafting or employing Wonders, check out the many instruments described under ***Tools: The Instruments of Focus***; almost all of them can become Wonders when they're properly prepared by someone who uses them in his Arts and Sciences.

Wonders and Paradox

Because they employ magick to alter reality, Wonders tend to generate Paradox. The amount of Paradox, however, relies upon whether or not a given item is considered *coincidental* or *vulgar*, and whether or not Sleeper "witnesses" are present at the time. A jetpack used around a military base at night won't generate nearly as much Paradox energy as a flying carpet zipping down Wall Street. In all cases, the amount of Paradox follows the rules detailed in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Ten**.

The Coincidental Edge

Fortunately, Wonders tend to make many "vulgar" acts seem rather coincidental. Especially among mass-media cultures, folks are more willing to accept weird stuff if there's a machine or similar object involved. For obvious reasons, this gives the coincidental edge to Wonders that involve some form of acceptable technology... which, in the twenty-first century, can get pretty advanced before people start questioning its viability! Even so, certain Wonders have strong footholds in the public imagination – a cross, for example, brandished in the hands of a priest, or a fistful of colorful dust in the hands of a wild stranger – and may be considered "coincidental" under the right circumstances.

"Silent Wonders"

Certain Wonders have no discernable effects, and so rarely generate Paradox at all. The ***Grimoires*** and ***Primers***, for example, that stimulate a character's inner self, don't invoke Paradox unless they feature some bizarre phenomenon as well – screaming pages, dancing illustrations, a voice that speaks flaming words into the air, that sort of thing.

Other Wonders function in very subtle ways. A flask that gets someone immediately drunk, or a bullet that shatters inside the body and then disappears, both use Sphere magick in ways that no normal eyes can see. Again, this sort of Wonder avoids Paradox unless some Sleeper witness notices impossible things going on.

Permanent Paradox

On the flipside, certain Wonders ripple the Consensus simply by existing. The Background: ***Enhancement*** invokes that kind of permanent Paradox, and certain other things do as well. For the most part, permanent Paradox comes about through certain lasting modifications – moving tattoos, glowing horns and the like. In general, assume that a Wonder that can be turned off or set aside does not generate permanent Paradox. If a Wonder *does* involve permanent Paradox, then that Paradox gets added to the mage's Quintessence /Paradox wheel. (For details about ***Permanent Paradox***, see that entry in **Mage 20**, **pp. 547-548**.)

Wonders Absorbing Paradox

If and when a Wonder generates Paradox, the mage using it has two options:

- She can choose to let the Wonder absorb the Paradox energies; or...
- she can elect to take them on herself. If she decides to do so, then the Paradox points get added to her Paradox /Quintessence wheel.

The decision must be made before the Wonder gets used. After that, it's too late to choose.

An unAwakened character has no such option – the Paradox goes directly into the Wonder.

A Wonder can sustain one point of Paradox for every point in its Quintessence Trait. A Device, for example, that holds 10 Quintessence can hold up to 10 points of Paradox. Once the Paradox exceeds the Quintessence trait, the Wonder suffers a backlash – usually exploding, melting, bursting into flames, shattering, or otherwise undergoing a dramatic case of self-annihilation. A Wonder destroyed by Paradox can't usually be repaired, although certain simple machines or objects might be fixable with the Storyteller's consent. For rules about repairing Wonders, see the ***Crafting Wonders*** section, below.

Note: The sourcebook **Forged by Dragon's Fire** presents some additional rules for Paradox and wonders. Thanks to their complexity, however, those systems can be considered optional. **Mage 20** does not use them.

Background Costs

As described in the ***Wonder Background entry*** in **Mage 20**, **p. 328**, Wonders get rated by their overall power-level:

- • Minor item worth 1-3 freebie or experience points.
- •• Notable item worth 4-6 points.
- ••• Significant item worth 7-9 points.
- •••• Impressive item worth 10-12 points.
- ••••• Mighty item worth 13-15 points.

(A Wonder *could* be worth more than 15 points, especially if it's a vehicle or some other potent piece of hardware. We do *not*, however, recommend allowing individual player-characters to own such devastating goodies except as temporary plot-devices that go away at the end of a given story. Ignore this advice at your peril!)

An individual Wonder can have up to one separate power for each dot in that Background. A three-dot Wonder, for instance, can have up to three different powers, although many three-dot Wonders have only one or two abilities.

Because each Wonder uses Sphere-based Effects, those dots depend upon the Sphere Rank of the object's most powerful Effect. A Talisman, for instance, that uses a Forces 4 /Prime 4 Effect would be a four-dot Background, with an Arete Trait as high as 4.

As an *optional rule*, a Wonder may have a higher Arete than usual; for one extra Background point, that four-dot Talisman could have an Arete of 5. Generally, Wonders have a capacity of five Quintessence points for each point of Arete. That four-dot Arete 5 Talisman, then, could hold up to 25 Quintessence, and would cost nine freebie or experience points.

Points and Requisitions

The ***Requisitions Background*** (see **Mage 20, p. 321-322**) gives Technocratic characters a range of points with which they can temporarily "buy" gear from their division. That gear doesn't actually belong to those operatives, but by pooling those points the Background allows Union agents to obtain vehicles, weapons, and other goodies that are normally way above their pay-grade.

Background /Experience Cost for Crafted Wonders

Because a mage who creates a Wonder must invest it with energy, and has to go through all of the other necessary steps described below, *a player does not have to spend experience and/or Background points to obtain a Wonder that the mage herself has created.* The given costs are for items that have been obtained from sources, rather than for Wonders crafted by the mage.

Crafting Wonders

The following Wonder-crafting systems can become rather complex. A much simpler process for crafting Wonders can be found in ***Mage 20, 652-653****. Troupes that want to use a more detailed system, however, can employ the following optional rules instead.*

As objects of rare craftsmanship, Wonders demand great skill from their makers. A character who wishes to make such things must possess not only the Spheres involved in the magickal Effects, but also the material skills involved in the shaping of the object itself. If you can't build a *normal* computer, after all, then you can't hope to build a hypertech one... and if you don't know how to use a particular Sphere well enough to employ its effects on your own, how then could you hope to build those Effects into a Device? In short, before you can craft a Wonder, you've got to know what you're doing. A character who tries to work beyond his limits has only himself to blame for his failure.

(It stands to reason, too, that a character who wants to craft a Wonder ought to have at least one dot in the associated Abilities for each dot in the Wonder he's crafting. Better still, he ought to have no less than three dots in such Abilities. After all, a dude with Computer 1 shouldn't be able to build a four-dot computer-based Device. For more details, see ***Minimum Abilities***, **Mage 20, p. 276.**)

For the sake of brevity, sanity and simplicity, assume that the following rules do not apply when a character uses the ***Enhancements*** Background. In such cases, let the Background Trait itself handle all the associated rules.

Traits and Rolls

Each type of Wonder involves a different creation process. Rather than lay out a complex set of rules for every kind of Wonder, we've featured the essential Traits and rolls on the nearby ***Crafting a Wonder chart***. The specific Spheres involved can also be found on the ***Common Magickal Effects chart*** in **Mage 20, p. 508**. Ideally, you and your Storyteller should narrate out a detailed creation process – probably staged during down-time – that suits the characters, materials and Wonder involved.

In every task, of course, you've got potentials for success, failure, and utter disaster:

- **Success:** The creation process results in the desired Wonder. Although the player may decide to include a ***flaw*** that lowers the Background cost of that item (see that sidebar), the Wonder is damn-near perfect.
- **Failure:** The creator doesn't get what she was going for. Either the Wonder has a significant flaw, or else it simply doesn't work (Storyteller's choice). Back to the drawing-board!
- **Botch:** Catastrophic failure. The Wonder doesn't work, and the process leads to some dramatic... and potentially explosive... setback for the creator and her efforts.

For more elaborate descriptions of the creation-process behind various Wonders, see **The Technomancer's Toybox**, the **Mage Storyteller's Companion**, and **Forged by Dragon's Fire**. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, however, assume that the systems given in **Mage 20** override the complex and sometimes contradictory systems given in those sourcebooks.

Group Creation

A group of mages may work together when crafting a Wonder; especially in workshop-type situations – as in the Technocratic Union – collaborative craftwork is more the rule than the exception. From a game-system perspective, this sort of process is handled as ***Acting in Concert***, as described in **Mage 20, pp. 542-543**; the mage with the highest Arete is essentially the "designer" behind the process, with the other characters assisting in whatever ways they can manage.

The Creation Process

Story-wise, the creation of a Wonder involves elaborate craftsmanship, precious materials, exacting specifications, and a trail-and-error process that requires weeks, months, sometimes even years of effort before the final miraculous results emerge.

The details of that process depend upon the mage, his practice, and the power of the item he's creating. When Jennifer Rollins crafts an item, she employs her artistic skills to shape raw materials into masks or paintings based on sketches and brainstorming inspiration; once she settles upon a design, the



witch spends days of constant work channeling her inspiration and intents into the physical object, imbuing it with literal sweat and blood in addition to the time and energy employed. Dr. von Roth, on the other hand, slaves over experiments in automotive excellence and temporal/mass theorems; working up schematics, he tinkers with expensive machines, casting and chopping the pieces until his brilliance manifests. Jennifer makes shamanic works of art, Dr. von Roth makes amazing machines, and both of them – in game terms – use different techniques to get similar results. Wonder-crafting, then, is an elaborate form of roleplaying and story-telling in which the player decides how her character would create the object she desires, the Storyteller narrates the most significant elements of that process, and a few die-rolls determine the success or failure of that task.

Regardless of the Wonder or procedure involved, every Wonder requires the following steps, all of which get detailed below:

Step One: Foundation

First, the mage must decide what he wants to create, how he wants to do it, and how he plans to use the Wonder once it's been completed. All three elements of this *foundation* depend upon the beliefs, practices, and instruments employed by that character – in short, the focus he employs in his Arts and Sciences. That focus, in turn, determines the Abilities, materials and process involved in the creation of the foundation of what will eventually become a Wonder.

System-wise, this step involves an extended roll with the appropriate Abilities. Having gathered all the necessary materials, the mage goes to work, and the player rolls to find out how well that work succeeded. A simple foundation may require a handful of successes, while complex ones may demand dozens of successes with several different Abilities and materials involved.

Assuming that things go well, the character winds up with a foundation for the next two steps...

Step Two: Energy

Before the foundation can be invested with power, that power must be fueled by Quintessential energy. Depending upon the mage and his creation process, that energy could come from a variety of sources. In any case, this step demands Prime Sphere magick and a successful Arete roll to perform the necessary Effect. Without that Sphere, a mage may craft neat things but cannot invest them with Awakened powers.

Step Three: Investment

Once the foundation has been crafted and energized, the mage invests that Wonder with the reality-shaking powers of True Magick/Enlightened Science. Story-wise, the mage exerts

his Arete and Spheres through his focus, casting his powers into the object and turning it into a Wonder.

From there, the player rolls his character's Arete. The details depend upon the Wonder in question, and can be found on the ***Crafting a Wonder chart***. Assuming a successful investment, the foundation becomes a Wonder.

An optional step, ***Purification***, clarifies your character's intentions and provides a sterile or sacred atmosphere for the Wonder's creation. Although this step's not required, it makes the final investment process much easier.

Step One: Foundation - Materials and Craftsmanship

A foundation is the Wonder's basis – the book, blade, cloak, computer program, set of clothing, piece of statuary, injection of fluid, or whatever else the mage wants to invest with his magick or technology. Typically, that foundation is a material object; it could, however, be a virtual program, a performance, or even a living creature. (For details about such Wonders, see the sidebar ***Living and Virtual Foundations***.) So long as that foundation provides a reliable focus for the Wonder's Effects, a mage can employ almost anything that the Storyteller allows him to use... assuming, of course, that such foundations suit that mage's beliefs and practices.

What Shall I Create?

Any material object can be turned into a Wonder. Generally, the materials involved should be very high-quality goods, although a mage *could* enchant a battered store-bought teddy bear if he's dedicated enough to that task. (For details about materials, see below.)

As a general rule, however, mages make Wonders out of things that are important to their view of the world... and do so using the practices that fit those beliefs. Put simply, *a mage must work within his focus – his belief, practice and instruments – when crafting a Wonder*. John Courage, as shown earlier, isn't going to use witchcraft to enchant a cauldron, any more than that old Appalachian hoodoo-man would use reality hacking to craft nanotech. And although many mystics employ technology these days, that practice must still fit the mage's focus before he can use it to craft tech-based Wonders.

Traits for Craftsmanship

System-wise, your character needs to have the Abilities (***Art***, ***Biotech***, ***Computer***, ***Craftsman***, ***Firearms***, ***Hypertech***, etc.) involved in creating a particular wonder... preferably at three dots or more in each of them, as noted above.

In the same vein, he must have the proper Spheres – at the proper levels – before he can place a given Effect into his creation. If Dr. Hans von Roth wants to build a car with Correspondence 3 and Time 3 Effects worked into its design, then he must first know how to work on cars *and* must have both Correspondence 3 and Time 3.

Obviously, a mage also needs an Arete Trait no lower than the Arete he wishes to build into the Wonder. If you don't possess that level of Enlightenment, then you certainly can't invest it into something else!

The **Mage 20** section about ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology*** **(pp. 463-464)** has plenty of systems and suggestions for players who want to have their characters build or modify Wonders. And although those systems deal mostly with mechanical tinkering, those same rules apply to acts of artistry (painting, sculpture, song, etc.) and non-mechanical craftsmanship (woodworking, tailoring, leatherwork, and the like).

Practice Makes Perfect

Just as a mage needs to believe in the power of his instruments, *he must also use his practice in order to craft a Wonder*. Dr. Hans von Roth would use craftwork and weird science to make his Devices; John Courage employs hypertech to craft his special weapons; Jennifer Rollins incorporates a mixture of gutter magick and witchcraft into her artwork, while Jodi Blake combines maleficia with the Art of Desire in order to shape Wonders that entice people into sin. A mage can't make Wonders while using a practice he doesn't understand – that would be like trying to build a 3D plasma-screen TV when you don't even know basic electronics.

Materials: The Right Stuff

For the most part, a mage must use the best available materials – pure gold, crushed pearls, herbs plucked from the deep woods at midnight on Midsummer even, that sort of thing – when crafting a Wonder. Substandard materials add to the possibility of ***Flaws***, as described below under the entry for ***Wonder Flaws***. Yes, it's perfectly appropriate for a Marauder to enchant a cheap knockoff Spider-Man action figure purchased at a Soho flea-market... it's just not going to be a very reliable Talisman once it's finished.

(The artisans who crafted ancient Wonders, of course, rarely had access to the range and quality of materials that are available today; as a result, the few Wonders that survive from elder days are extraordinarily well-made, shaped from materials whose quality remains breathtaking even in our industrial age. The perfectionism inherent in such work, in fact, often makes them far superior to the Wonders crafted in our era, if only because so much more effort and skill went into making them in the first place.)

The Storyteller may rule that high-powered Wonders – those rated at four dots or more – cannot be crafted with anything less than the finest materials. Sure, you can MacGyver some one-shot Charm out of junk in order to get yourself out of trouble, but don't expect to craft a power-armor suit out of anything less than top-secret Stark Industries technology! Even "primitive" Fetishes demand a certain level of quality; no spirit with any sort of dignity will inhabit a bunch of tobacco scavenged from leftover cigarette butts. If you wish to deal with a powerful spirit, then only fine, organically grown tobacco, harvested in the Old Way, will suffice!

Again, the specific materials involved in Wonder-crafting will depend upon the mage's practice and beliefs, and also upon the sort of the Wonder under construction. An old Atari computer might provide useful materials for a gutter-magick Charm or Fetish, but a hypertech Device requires far better technology.

Step Two: Energy - Quintessence, Tass, and Resonance

As items of reality-shifting power, all Wonders (including Trinkets made with Prime magick) must be fueled by a certain amount of Quintessential energy during the creation process. Without such energy, an item may be well-crafted but not truly Wondrous. The invested energy also serves as a "lock" for the ensuing Effects that are instilled into the item during its creation process; this way, the Wonder's creator doesn't need to "lock the Effect" with additional Effects (as described under ***Locking an Effect***, **Mage 20, pp. 511-512**) because the Wonder has been energetically prepared to retain that magick.

Arete Roll

As mentioned above, the creator needs to make an Arete roll when using the Prime Sphere to instill the Wonder-to-be with the required Quintessence. This roll's difficulty is the same as the roll needed during the creation process itself, which gets detailed below in ***Step Three***, under ***Difficulty: Is It Paradoxical?*** This initial roll energizes the item, while the second roll (or, more often, *series* of rolls) invests the now-energized item with additional powers.

Base Quintessence Cost

As a general rule, assume that the creation process of a Wonder demands at least five Quintessence points per level in that Wonder. A two-dot Wonder, then, would require no less than 10 points, while a four-dot Wonder would need at least 20.

Living and Virtual Foundations

Although it's unusual, certain mages invest their magicks into living things (trees, pets, artificially created entities) or virtual media (writings, performances, computer programs, etc.). Such foundations aren't as stable or reliable as material objects, and they occasionally have minds of their own. A computer virus, the "skin" of a Digital Web icon, an enchanted grove, a song that literally casts a spell upon its listeners even if the musician is long dead... Although these foundations are tricky to use, they're quite traditional, yet make powerful tools in the age of digital media.

In game terms, a mage needs Life magick in order to invest her Spheres into a living host; Mind magick to invest it into an idea or performance; and computer-based Correspondence, Entropy, Forces or Mind magick in order to invest it into a computer program, depending upon what that program is supposed to do once it has become a Wonder. If your group employs the optional ***Data Sphere*** (detailed in **Mage 20, pp. 524-525**), then that Sphere allows the mage to build Wonders into computer-data foundations as if it was a combination of the Correspondence and Mind Spheres. Meanwhile, Forces, Matter, and Prime can invest visual elements into a book, allowing that book to manifest sounds, winds, visions, and similar special effects. And if you're planning to turn a living creature into your personal Talisman, it's generally a good idea to use some Mind magick so that it doesn't decide to kick your ass for such presumptions.

(Theoretically, a mage could turn a spirit into a foundation for enchantment using Rank 4 or 5 Spirit Arts; whether that's possible or not is a Storyteller decision. Either way, that sort of thing will *not* go down well with shamans or other spirits, who would view such violations as sacrilege.)

Virtual Wonder Flaws

Because virtual foundations are less stable than material ones, the Storyteller may decide to instill one or two flaws into every virtual Wonder. Those flaws aren't worth any points, but reflect the changing nature of ideas, whose essence is more flexible than the more reliable Patterns of physical objects.

Living Wonders, Relics, Soulflowers, and Paradox

The time-honored practice of placing magickal spells into living organisms (plants, dogs, children, etc.) alters such organisms on a fundamental level. And so, with regards to living Wonders, assume that a creature invested with Sphere Effects has one point of permanent Paradox for each level in the Wonder. A five-dot living Device, for example, would have five points of permanent Paradox. This reflects the conflict between the creature's "natural" form and the reality-bending nature of the powers that have been invested into its Pattern. Although an unAwakened creature can't suffer a Paradox backlash, it may endure the effects of ***Unbelief*** (see **Mage 20, p. 553**), and will add to the Paradox poll of the mage who uses them, if and when that mage suffers her own backlash.

The exception to the permanent Paradox rule involves ***Soulflowers***: living Periapts infused with Quintessence until they become walking vessels of the mage's energy. These living foundations get detailed further under ***Periapts***. Thanks to those infusions of Quintessence, Soulflowers do not carry their own permanent Paradox; they *do*, however, absorb Paradox if the mage who "owns" them gains Paradox that winds up stored in the Periapt. For details, again, see the ***Periapts*** entry, **pp. 145-146**.

Special properties – like an increased Arete or some other optional improvement described nearby – require five more Quintessence points per point invested in that property. An extra point of Arete, for instance, would add five points to the base Quintessence cost of that Wonder.

Fetishes, Matrices, and Periapts do not require infusions of Quintessence. Fetishes get their energy from the spirits bound within them, while Matrices and Periapts are crafted out of Tass merged into matter or living tissue.

Sources of Energy

Where does this energy come from? That depends upon the mage and her preferred creation process:

- **Tass:** In many cases, Wonder-crafting mages prefer to draw energy from sources of solidified Tass – werewolf blood, dragon scales, enchanted spring water, powdered vampire fangs, and other sources of paranormal power. Enchanted items tend to be crafted out of such things because items like white buffalo pelts, gryphon feathers, and so forth contain Quintessential energy.

  In game terms, the mage gathers up an appropriate sort of Tass and then uses Prime 3 to drain its power into the Wonder. That Wonder, of course, could be crafted out of the Tass material – hence, cat-eye Charms and books bound from human skin. Regardless of the process in question, the Tass invests its energy into the Wonder. The material and the Wonder become one and the same.

- **Raw Quintessence Energy:** Using Prime 4 (for inanimate objects) or Prime 5 (for living beings), the creator could pull Quintessence directly from material objects and organic entities. Technocrats and other technomancers tend to break down shale, gold, diamonds, recyclable rubbish, and other sources of potential energy with Prime 4 Devices. Naturally, this process destroys the source of energy – a perfectly moral thing if you're recycling trash, a really bad idea if you're annihilating black cats or human babies. In either case, the Primal Energy invested in that resource goes into the Wonder, while the material form decays into nothingness. (For details, see ***Disintegrating Things/Liquidating Assets*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 49**.)

- **Personal Life-Force:** Desperate or powerful mages can invest their own personal Quintessence into a Wonder. Story-wise, the character draws blood, breathes into the wonder, gives birth to it, or performs some other action that makes that Wonder a part of herself. System-wise, this requires Prime 3 and enough innate Quintessence to fuel the Wonder's creation. Obviously, the mage needs to have enough Quintessence in her personal reserve before she can attempt this sort of thing.

- **Combined Sources?** Whether or not a character can mix-and-match energy sources is a Storyteller's call. Dramatically, it may be extremely appropriate to gather a bunch of Tass and then seal the enchantment with some personal Quintessence. From a gaming standpoint, however, a combined-source option may be abused by certain types of players. Ultimately, then, we leave the final decision to you, the Storyteller. Only you know your own players and the effects their actions have within your chronicle.

Step Three: Investment – Quickening the Wonder

Finally, the mage invests her Awakened Arts (or Enlightened Sciences) into the Wonder. Story-wise, this culminates in a powerful rite or procedure – sometimes referred to as *quickening* – wherein the character instills the essence of power into the foundation.

In game terms, the player makes an extended Arete roll. That roll's difficulty depends upon what she's doing and how she's doing it, and the number of successes depends upon the type of Wonder she's trying to create; the more powerful the Wonder, the more successes she has to roll.

Required Successes: How Powerful is the Item?

As a general rule, assume that a player must roll at least three successes for each dot in the Wonder. A three-dot Wonder, then, would demand no less than nine successes, while a five-dot Wonder would demand 15 successes or more.

Each additional point of Arete, or every special feature, adds three more successes to the necessary amount. A three-dot wonder with Arete 5, therefore, would require at least 15 successes.

Every Arete roll reflects one hour of work. Powerful Wonders, then, may demand complex rituals or long hours in the workshop. The rules given in the section about ***Ritual, Rolls, and Extended Successes*** **(Mage 20, pp. 538-542)** can be applied if your Storyteller wants to get into the nitty-gritty of long-term spellcasting.

In any case, a failure ends the investment process and spoils the energy used in the procedure; from there, the mage must start again, with fresh Quintessence. A botch reflects a disaster – things go horribly wrong, and both the foundation and the energy (possibly even the workspace and the mage) are utterly destroyed.

Difficulty: Is it Paradoxical?

In most cases, Wonder-crafting requires vulgar magick. Unless high-tech machines are involved (and often even when they are), such procedures tend to feature spectacular pyrotechnics, chanting weirdoes, eerie manifestations, arcing bolts of energy, and other things that make folks go "*What the fuck was* ***that****?!?!*" As a result, the investment process is usually vulgar magick. For that reason, among others, mages prefer to use specially prepared ***Sanctums/Laboratories***, ***Chantries***, and ***Nodes*** (as per those Background Traits) when they add the magickal elements to their creations.

Aside from Charms, Fetishes, and Trinkets, most Wonders require a vulgar Prime 4 or 5 Effect to seal the deal. Every other Effect sealed into the Wonder must be invested into the foundation as well, which also tends to use vulgar magick. As shown by the rules in **Mage 20**, the difficulty of casting magickal Effects (of any variety) is as follows:

Coincidental: Difficulty = highest Sphere + 3

Vulgar Without Witnesses: Difficulty = highest Sphere + 4

Vulgar With Witnesses: Difficulty = highest Sphere + 5

Thus, unless your mage in working in her Sanctum (where her Effects are coincidental), most investment procedures have a base difficulty of 8; even in the Sanctum, that base is 7. Certain modifiers can reduce that difficulty by a maximum of -3. In short, then, making Wonders isn't easy... and, more often than not, it attracts Paradox as well.

All the Right Spheres

As mentioned earlier, your character must have all of the appropriate Spheres, at all the appropriate Ranks, in order to invest Effects into a Wonder. During the investment process, those Effects get cast into the foundation, hopefully taking hold when the Prime magick melds the energy into the process and binds the whole thing together.

Appropriate Resonance and Synergy

Quintessential energy carries signatures, and so the right kind of energy can help you craft a Wonder. Conversely, the *wrong* sort of energy can corrupt it. The phenomena called ***Resonance*** and ***Synergy*** – detailed earlier in this chapter – reflect the sorts of energies that can work for or against a Wonder's creation and usability.

Briefly put, the appropriate sort of energy enhances the creation of a Wonder. Powdered vampire fangs, for instance, would be perfect for a poison that makes someone ravenously hungry, but would be a *terrible* addition to a healing potion. In the latter case, the energy in that Quintessence *conflicts* with the purpose of the Wonder. Using such materials would weaken the magick, not enhance it.

As a general rule, assume that a Resonance or Synergy that fits the Wonder aids the creation process, while energies that oppose the nature of that Wonder detract from the process. In each case, that energy either reduces the difficulty of the investment roll, or else adds to it. Both modifiers can be found on the ***Creating Wonders charts***.

For more information about these energies, see ***Resonance: Physics of Consequence***, pp. 128-138.

Purification: Keeping Things Clean

Craftsmanship demands precision and intent. An artist, inventor, or technician who does sloppy work gets sloppy results. And so, when a mage crafts a Wonder, that Wonder should be *purified:* processed through a ritual or procedure that hopefully removes its flaws and protects it from spiritual or material contamination.

Once again, a character's practice and beliefs will determine the purification process he prefers. A Q Division tech would work with special tools in sterile conditions; a Hermetic of House Flambeau would pass her Talisman three times through mystic fire; a gutter-mage could rinse his brand-new creation in the clear cold water of a park fountain, while an Infernalist consecrates her nasty new toy in a river of freshly-shed blood. Whatever fits the mage and his or her process may serve as purification, so long as it's done with dedicated intent.

System-wise, a purification process requires several Prime 2 Effects – one per level of purification. Simple items with neutral energy won't require many successes, but complex items with messy energy may demand quite a few of them. Each purification process lowers the difficulty of ***Step Three***'s Arete roll. If there's conflicting energy in the process, then that modifier counters the associated penalty.

The ***Investment Roll Modifiers chart*** offers three levels of purification and their associated bonuses. The more complex and time-consuming the purification process is, the more it helps the mage who's crafting that Wonder. Especially if there's conflicting energy involved in ***Step Two***, the purification process is worth a bit of extra work.

Features and Flaws (Optional Rule)

Beyond the obvious magickal Effects stored within a Wonder, certain treasures have strange blessings or awful curses. Sometimes, these "features" get built into the Wonder: user-recognition programs, homing enchantments, feelings of serenity that radiate into the owner's hand when she clutches the Wonder... that sort of thing. And occasionally, a friendly spirit or quirk of good luck simply drops those goodies into the mix as a bonus from Fate.

Ah, but then other Wonders wind up flawed, either by poor workmanship, tainted Quintessence, malignant spirits, or other twists of fortune. These flaws dog the Wonder's owner, making her life miserable and testing her commitment to the troublesome "treasure" in her possession. In really nasty situations, she has no choice but deal with it; the Wonder refuses to be discarded, and once you've got it, it's got you too!

In all cases, features and flaws are more like story-elements than like reliable powers. For the most part, they don't rely upon die-rolls or game systems, but simply manifest as narrative devices: the voice that whispers sweet suggestions at all the right (or wrong) times, the hackles that rise up the back of a gunman's neck when he's got one bullet left in the chamber of his modified Barretta, the "bad feeling" a hacker gets when she opens her laptop just as someone's spying on her through its camera... such features and flaws make a Wonder more... well, *wondrous*.

Secret Features or Flaws

At the Storyteller's option, a given Wonder might have features or flaws that the player doesn't know about. Essentially, the Storyteller decides to "add a little something extra" to

Features and Flaws

Each feature adds its cost to the base cost of the Wonder. Flaws will not reduce cost of a Wonder below one dot (two points).

All Traits bestowed upon the user depend upon the Wonder being in that person's possession; without the Wonder, that Merit, Flaw, or Background goes away.

Features

1-pt. Feature	Minor benefit (grants user +1 die to Perception rolls, bestows feelings of comfort or calm upon user, gives user one-dot Background Trait, etc.)
2-pt. Feature	Helpful feature (can be summoned to hand from a yard or so away, gives user a 1- to 3-pt. Merit or two-dot Background Trait, ID programmable – works only for "registered" users, etc.)
3-pt. Feature	Powerful aid ("danger sense" on successful Arete roll, speaks and has cooperative personality, gives user a 4- to 5-pt. Merit or three-dot Background Trait, etc.)

Flaws

1-pt. Flaw	Minor annoyance (works only at night, must be stored in rare or expensive substance, "feels weird," gives owner nightmares, etc.)
2-pt. Flaw	Troublesome hassles (demands blood when used, has distinct personality, gives user a 1- to 3-pt. Flaw Trait, comes back when thrown away, etc.)
3-pt. Flaw	Awful Curse (drains one year of life from user when employed, demands live sacrifices, has obnoxious personality... and talks, gives user a 4- to 5-pt. Flaw Trait, etc.)

the item, providing surprises for the player and her mage. Obviously, these secret features and flaws don't affect the cost of a created Wonder – if they *did*, then they wouldn't be secrets! Such enigmas, however, are quite traditional for the magical items of legend and literature.

Wonder Features

When the Fates smile down upon a hardworking mage, when a clever artisan adds a bit of finesse to her creation, when a helpful spirit bonds with a human partner, then too, do small benefits get added to the greater powers of a Wonder. Although they're not as impressive as the Sphere Effects instilled within the object, these features can make a mage's life a little bit better... and, in the case of significant features, *quite* a bit better.

Merits or Backgrounds as Features

As a possible *optional rule*, a given Wonder may have a Background or Merit attached to its ownership. The person who has bonded with the Wonder (in whatever form that looks like in your chronicle) gets the benefits of that Trait so long as the Wonder is close at hand. Say, for example, that an enchanted mask allows its wearer to sense things more clearly (the ***Acute Senses*** Merit); or that a bank card allows its PIN holder to access funds outside his usual bank account (the ***Resources*** Background); or that a holosynaptic ID card represents a selection of fake identities or special permits (the ***Alternate Identity*** and ***Certification*** Backgrounds). From the ***Iron Will*** instilled into a cowboy hat, to the ***Blessing*** laid upon a lucky pair of boxer shorts, such features can be very helpful indeed.

This sort of thing can get out of hand, however; a perpetual flow of money or assistance could easily unbalance your chronicle. And so, such features must be limited to between one and three dots of Backgrounds, or 1 to 5 points of Merits, with Storyteller approval required for each one. We suggest that ***no more than*** *three features, total*, be added to a Wonder unless the Storyteller has added them secretly, and that a player should be limited to only one 3-pt. feature when his mage creates a Wonder.

For obvious reasons, these features disappear if and when the Wonder is stolen, lost, or destroyed. Such favors remain tied to the Wonder, not to the owner, unless they get purchased – with experience points – for the character himself.

Sentient Wonders

Sentient Wonders – singing swords, AI computers, English-accented power-suit guidance systems, and so forth – could, *with the Storyteller's permission*, be purchased with a Background like ***Ally***, ***Familiar***, ***Mentor*** or ***Retainer***. In this case, the character is the Wonder and the Wonder is the character.

Like any other character, of course, a sentient Wonder will have its own personality, desires, agendas and needs... characteristics that the "owner" might not share. Perf's homicidal relationship with the Sword of Fighting in the webseries *JourneyQuest* shows just how obnoxious such bonds can become.



Wonder Flaws

Even the greatest artisans make mistakes, and the finest materials can fail upon occasion. And so, flaws can manifest during a Wonder's creation process, or else haunt the owners of a cursed piece of treasure. Conflicting Resonance, warped materials, a pissed-off spirit who's bent on destroying anyone bold enough to own a certain magical lamp – such strokes of misfortune tarnish the good name of Wonders in general.

Flaw Traits as Flaws

Characters can have flaws, and Wonders can as well. In this case, the Flaw Traits reflect awful luck or influence: psychosis, neurosis, a tendency to go berserk or find yourself haunted by enemies you didn't know you had until now... Like the Merits that reflect the good side of ownership, such afflictions harass a person with a cursed Talisman or flawed Invention.

Flaws like these are especially appropriate for mad-scientist underlings, or for Technocrats of dubious loyalty. Technocracy characters with the Background: ***Secret Weapons*** **(Mage 20, p. 325)** often find themselves getting stuck with flawed Devices, Gadgets, Inventions, and so forth. That's the price of being Q Division's guinea pigs. Likewise, an agent whose ***Requisitions*** score is low, or who's in trouble with someone with inconvenient levels of influence, will discover that he's using flawed gear... often at the worst possible times.

System-wise, these features and flaws either add to or subtract points from the cost of a created Wonder. As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller may allow players to employ features and flaws when crafting Wonders for the mages, use them himself as hidden quirks, or both.

Alternately, the player could use the Supernatural Flaw: ***Jinx /Infernal Contraption*** in order to "buy down" the cost of the Wonder. In this case, the Wonder is simply an almighty pain in the ass. For details, see **Chapter One**, **pp. 88-89**.

Regardless of the flaws it may possess, a Wonder Background – with the exception of ***Charms***, ***Gadgets***, and ***Trinkets***, the "lesser Wonders" that can be used up and then replaced later – can never cost than one Background dot, or two points, through the value of its flaws.

Once again, the Flaw Traits remain part and parcel of the Wonder; if it goes, they go too. Problem is, buggy wonders have a nasty tendency to keep coming back no matter how many times a person tries to get rid of them...

Repairing, Unmaking, or Destroying Wonders

That which can be made can also be broken; in many cases, that which has been broken may also be repaired by a sufficiently skillful artisan or tech. As a general rule, a damaged Wonder can be fixed by someone who has the Arete, Spheres, and Abilities necessary to create that Wonder in the first place. If you could make it once, after all, you should usually be able to remake it again.

This rule, of course, depends upon the materials involved in crafting that Wonder. A suit of dragon-hide armor can't be mended if all the dragons are gone. A Talisman that has been crafted from the finger-bones of a saint is ruined if those bones are crushed, and so the mystic properties of such a treasure get lost forever. An ancestral sword that gets shattered against some HIT Mark's head can't be fixed with Krazy-Glue. In certain situations, then, a broken Wonder cannot be repaired at all.

Tech Repair

Machines, thankfully, tend to be far easier to repair, especially when they've been crafted from replaceable parts. In yet another benefit of technology, standardized Devices (like those employed by the Technocracy) can be fixed by any Enlightened technician with the proper parts and training. This mass-produced resourcefulness gives the Union a massive edge over renegade inventors and "traditional" mages, with their unique forms of hocus-pocus gadgetry. While the brilliant Etherite mourns the loss of his one-of-a-kind Space Modulator, Q Division repairs busted Spectre limousines as a matter of course.

Unmaking Your Own Creation

I brought you into this world and I can take you out of it is a sentiment any Wonder-maker can understand... for although certain durable Wonders may resist destruction – especially the ones that are, in a practical sense, alive – most Wonders can be "unmade" by the people who create them.

In story terms, this may be easier said than done. That power-armor suit with a built-in AI will certainly have other ideas if its maker wants to turn it into scrap. The unmaking of a given Wonder could provide the backdrop of an entire story or chronicle. In game terms, however, the process is usually simple: The mage employs the same powers she used to craft that Wonder, reducing it to its component parts... possibly even to its Quintessence, although that energy will probably be changed by the unmaking process and the resentment, rage, or sorrow involved in it.

Destroying Someone Else's Wonder

If and when your group finds itself playing Frodo with an implacable Wonder, the Storyteller has the final say. Simple Charms or Trinkets should be easy to destroy, but powerful Talismans or Doomsday Machines ought to provide a dramatic sense of challenge and peril.

In most cases, the destruction of a mighty Wonder should involve fantastic pyrotechnics, collapsing headquarters, screaming storms of ghostly refugees, and other cinematic bursts of frenzy. A potent Wonder, after all, is a focus for incredible power; its annihilation, therefore, should mark an explosive climax for your tale, if not your chronicle.

Selected Wonders

Couldn't we all use a bigger toybox to play with? Mages of all sorts can certainly enjoy a wealth of goodies, and so the following Wonders can be added to the collection presented in **Mage 20**'s **Appendix II *Toybox***, as well as to the goodies presented in other related sourcebooks.

·· Bond Fine Tobacco Products (Gadgets)

Enlightenment 4, Primal Energy 10 (per pack), Background Cost 6 pts. (per pack of 20)

Isn't it funny how easily a person can unburden himself when he's got a good cigarette and a friendly companion? Sharing a smoke and conversation can be remarkably cathartic, especially when someone's got a guilty conscience. And so, Technocracy operatives (especially Black Suits, interrogators, police allies, and street-level agents) employ the fine-tasting cigarettes from Bond – smokes that encourage even the most tight-lipped folks to let little details slip...

System: Each Bond cigarette tastes incredibly good, thanks to specially-grown tobacco and a Mind 2 Effect that encourages the smoker to trust the person who gave him that cigarette. He'll trust her so much, in fact, that he'll probably answer any question she asks him, provided that she asks nicely. The "Enlightenment" in each cigarette provides four dice to roll for that Effect. And because people normally associate smoking with "bonding" behavior, the Effect is coincidental, with a difficulty based upon the smoker's Willpower. Most people simply start gabbing unless they've got a reason to distrust the operative (as in, say, an interrogation situation). Bond fine tobacco products aren't terribly effective, though, if the target doesn't like to smoke.

Each pack of Bond contains 20 special cigarettes (two batches of 10), and although Ecstatics have been known to craft similar cigarettes, joints, bongs, vape cigs, and so on, the official Bond tobacco products (available also in boxes of cigars) can be obtained only through the Technocratic Union.

·· Kismet Bindi (Periapt)

Arete N/A, Quintessence 20, Background Cost 4 pts.

Formed from a *bindi* – the traditional Hindu ornament that focuses the energy of the wearer's third eye – this Periapt allows an Ecstatic or Thanatoic mage to carry a potent supply of Quintessence... and possibly to absorb a fair amount of Paradox as well. Given the visionary nature of a bindi, such energies flow best when used for scrying, influence, and perceptions outside the realm of mortal vision.

System: Stuck to the mage's forehead (or possibly even fused into it), this vessel holds up to 20 points of Quintessence and /or Paradox. For as long as she wears the Periapt, these energies become part of her personal Quintessence /Paradox wheel. As a result, she's well-advised to avoid vulgar magicks. The messy potential of a 20-point Paradox backlash centered at the front of one's skull is easy to envision...

Creating Wonders

Step One: Foundation

Extended Attribute + Ability roll to craft suitable foundation.

Step Two: Energy

Arete roll (base = three successes per dot in Wonder) to infuse foundation with Quintessence (Prime 3 from Tass or self /Prime 4 from materials /Prime 5 from living things). Fetishes, Matrices, and Periapts do not require this step.

Step Three: Investment

Extended Arete roll (base = three successes per dot in Wonder); vulgar Prime Effect + appropriate Spheres for Wonder's Effects.

Purification reduces difficulty of Step Three roll.

Crafting a Wonder

Wonder	Investment Description (after crafting the foundation and investing energy #1)
Artifact	Prime 4 + Spheres in Wonder's Effects #2
Charm	Simple Charm = Prime 2 (appropriate energy), Prime 3 (any energy), or Prime 4 + Life 3 (living Charm) + Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Mage may craft up to Arete x 2 in Charms at one time. Only one Effect possible, works only once.
Device #3	Prime 4 + Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Each successful Arete roll costs one point of personal Quintessence *in addition to normal energy cost*. Technomancer also invests one point of *permanent* Willpower into Device.
Fetish	Spirit 4 (to bind unwilling spirit), or working out an agreement with the spirit + Prime 4 (willing spirit). Unwilling spirits create unreliable Fetishes, which have several flaws. No Prime Effect or Quintessence necessary.
Gadget	Simple Gadget = Prime 2 (appropriate energy), Prime 3 (any energy), or Prime 4 /Life 3 (living Charm) + Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Technomancer may craft up to Arete x 2 in Gadgets at one time. Only one Effect possible, works only once.
Grimoire	Prime 4 /Mind 3 (for authors with Art or Expression 1-3), or Prime 4 /Mind 2 (for authors with Art or Expression 4 or higher). Additional Effects require Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Each benefit beyond the first one adds +1 to Wonder's cost and three more successes to Arete roll. Mage also invests one point of *permanent* Willpower into Grimoire.
Invention	Prime 4 + Spheres in Wonder's Effects #2
Matrix	Matter 5 (inanimate) or Life 5 (living) + Prime 3. Requires 10 points of Tass *with the same kind of energy*. Effect fuses Tass into foundation, creating permanent vessel for Quintessence. If different sorts of Tass are used, then Wonder has a flaw. No other Quintessence required.
Periapt	Matter 5 (inanimate) or Life 5 (living) + Prime 3. Requires 10 points of Tass *with the same kind of energy*. Effect fuses Tass into foundation, creating permanent vessel for Quintessence. If different sorts of Tass are used, then Wonder has a flaw. No other Quintessence required.
Primer	Prime 4 /Mind 3 /Spirit 3. Mage also invests *two* points of permanent Willpower into Primer, must have an Arete no lower than 5, and achieve no fewer than 30 successes on a series of foundation-crafting rolls that include Art, Expression, and other Abilities appropriate to the Primer in question.
Principia #3	Prime 4 /Mind 3. Additional Effects require Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Each benefit beyond the first one adds +1 to Wonder's cost and three more successes to Arete roll. Mage also invests one point of *permanent* Willpower into Principia.
Relic	Life 5 /Prime 5 + Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Mage also invests one point of *permanent* Willpower into Relic, and employs some form of activity which bridges the energy, magick, and the organism involved (blessing it, performing surgery on it, giving birth to it, etc.).

Wonder	Investment Description (after crafting the foundation and investing energy #1)
Talisman	Prime 4 + Spheres in Wonder's Effects. Each successful Arete roll costs one point of personal Quintessence *in addition to normal energy cost.* Mage also invests one point of *permanent* Willpower into Device.
Trinket	Prime 2 (to consecrate), and /or Spheres used to create Wonder's Effect. Mage must roll at least twice the number of successes that are necessary to cast the Effect normally. Only one simple Effect possible. Must be a simple, functional item, not a complex piece of machinery or other abstract foundation.

Notes

#1 = The foundation must first be crafted, using whatever Attribute + Ability rolls and materials the mage needs in order to craft that foundation. An enchanted silver pendent, for example, would require high-quality silver (materials) and an extended Dexterity + Craftsmanship roll (crafting the medallion) before the energy and magick can be invested into the foundation. The Spheres and processes listed under ***Investment Description*** are the ones required to seal magick into the Wonder.

#2 = *Spheres in Wonder's Effects* means that the mage must also cast whichever Effects she wants to have in the Wonder. A cloak that makes the wearer invisible, for example, would require a Forces 2 Effect in order to bend light waves around the cloak. Thus, the Wonder needs a Forces 2 Effect in addition to the Prime 4 Effect that seals the magick into the cloak.

#3 = Technocratic Union facilities produce Devices and Principiae without the Willpower or personal Quintessence requirements. Individual technomancers and Technocrats, however, must invest Willpower and personal Quintessence into their Devices. Only specialized personnel are allowed access to these facilities; abuse of such access is deeply unmutual.

Foundation-Roll Modifiers

Circumstances	Difficulty (maximum +/-3)
Crappy Materials	+1
Good Materials	+0
Best Materials	-1
Rush Job	+2
Extra Time	-1
Extensive Research	-2

Investment-Roll Modifiers

Circumstances	Difficulty (maximum +/-3)
Appropriate Resonance /Synergy	-2
Suitable Resonance /Synergy	-1
Conflicting Resonance /Synergy	+1
Opposed Resonance /Synergy	+2
No Purification	-0
Simple Purification	-1
Extensive Purification	-2
Elaborate Purification	-3

··· Ectoplasmic Disruption Rounds (Gadgets)

Enlightenment N/A, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 3 pts. (per clip of 10)

Designed to shoot Juxtadimensional Manifestation Paraconsciousness Reality Deviants (in plain English, ghosts), these bullets come in all standard calibers as well as the special gauges used by advanced Technocratic sidearms. When fired, they lock onto the ectoplasmic signature of a not-so-friendly ghost, match its vibrational matrix, and then explode. Thanks to the cross-dimensional capabilities of Enlightened technology, such bullets inflict the usual amounts of damage against entities that can't normally be harmed by material weaponry... and as an extra bonus, they blast nasty holes in those annoying vampire-things too.

System: In most regards, EDRs are simply bullets that can shoot un-materialized spirits. As a plus, they inflict aggravated damage against vampires (the partly dead) and werecreatures (the partly-spirit). Against living targets, these projectiles inflict normal firearms damage; in both cases, that damage is based on the gun-type involved. Manufactured with Primal Energy, EDRs are *extremely* expensive. Operatives get issued such bullets only when the Manager's data suggests that cross-dimensional incursions seem likely, and those Managers get rather bent out of shape if a team burns through its EDR ammo for anything less than a werewolf pack or major cross-dimensional incursion.

··· Energy Drinks (Gadgets)

Enlightenment N/A, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 2 pts. (per six-pack)

Among the Masses, "energy drinks" are caffeinated marketing strategies. The purpose behind such drinks, however, extends beyond merely making money; after all, if the Masses can accept the idea that a drink will make you smarter, faster, healthier, and more energetic, then they'll easily accept the effects of true Technocratic energy drinks: Clarity, Boost, Snap, and the several flavors of Erg Cola – all of which actually *do* what mundane "energy drinks" merely *promise* to do. These drinks, however, work only for Enlightened /Awakened mages and their extraordinary allies (translation: *consors* and *extraordinary citizens*). Simple Sleepers feel hypercaffeinated after drinking these beverages, but can't enjoy the greater effects.

System: Each bottle of a Technocratic energy drink provides one "dose" of the following Effects:

- **Clarity:** A bright orange fizzy drink, Clarity boosts the Perception Trait by one dot for four continuous hours. Drinking several Clarity bottles can raise Perception by up to three dots, or – at a rate of one bottle per hour, more or less – keep it boosted for four hours per dose, up to a maximum length of 12 hours.
- **Boost:** Sweet, cool, and purple, Boost adds one dot to the Intelligence Trait, under the same conditions as Clarity, and with the same limitations as well.
- **Snap:** Fresh green Snap does exactly the same things for the drinker's Wits trait.
- **Erg Red:** Bubbly crimson Erg fires up the drinker's Strength in all the same ways as the previous drinks, but with a ferocious physical crash afterward. Once the drink wears off, the drinker loses as many dots in Strength as she had gained by way of the beverage, down to a minimum of Strength 1. If she drinks more than three Erg Reds in a row, her subsequent crash leaves her weak as a baby for roughly a day afterward, and with nasty muscle-aches for at least two days and possibly more.
- **Erg Blue:** The sharp cold bite of Erg Blue accelerates reactions and coordination. System-wise, this drink adds to Dexterity the same way Erg Red adds to Strength, with identical aftereffects.
- **Erg Green:** Smooth-tasting Erg Green adds to Stamina the same way as Erg Red adds to Strength... and with the same drawbacks.
- **Erg Indigo:** A bottle of cool, refreshing Erg Indigo restores all health levels lost to bashing damage. It does nothing, unfortunately, for damage lost to lethal or aggravated harm.
- **Erg X-Treme:** Often called *Erg-X* or *Zerker Juice*, Erg X-Treme boosts Strength *and* Stamina by one dot each, for one hour per bottle, with a top-off of three dots for three hours. That's the good part. The bad part includes a wicked weakening crash (as above), the ***Stress Atavism*** Flaw, and whatever other consequences come about due to being 'roided to the gills for an hour or three. Technocratic Managers rarely give Erg-X to anyone they want to keep around for long. Among the upper ranks, it's known as *DAC*, or *Degree Absolute in a Can*. (Erg's not actually packaged *in* cans, but you get the idea...) To DAC someone is to point him at the enemy, pull the trigger by handing him some Erg-X, and then watch the fireworks from a safe distance.

··· Ginger Dragons (Charms)

Arete N/A, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 2 pts. per bag

Typically found in tiny cellophane bags of five to 10 tiny ginger candies, these chewy red dragons allow a person to breathe out a single gout of fire. The "fortunate" gourmet pops one of the little red dragons into his mouth, chews vigorously, and experiences an invigorating rush of burning spice just

before the magick within the Charm ignites. The next turn, a burst of flames roars upward from his gut, exploding from his mouth as an aggravated fire-damage attack against a character who's standing within 10 feet of that character's face. Yum-yum!

Although the origin of these goodies remains uncertain, someone's obviously producing them in Asia. Wu Lung sorcerers appear to be the obvious culprits, but the candies might come from an imaginatively militant branch of the Akashayana, the lost Wu Keng, an inventive renegade, or some other undiscovered sect. Bound up in bright red-and-yellow paper wrappers decorated with hand-lettered Mandarin calligraphy, these Charms occasionally show up in open-air market stalls or secluded Chinese shops. The periodic horrors that occur when some unsuspecting kid gets her hands on a bag of ginger dragons suggest that perhaps a Mad or Fallen mage is behind the distribution. Even so, ginger dragons can be remarkably useful for mages in a tight spot.

System: A five-die Forces 3 /Life 3 /Prime 2 Effect allows the character to blast out a mouthful of fire without dying in the process. The drawback of these Wonders, however, includes their painfully spicy nature. A character chewing on a ginger dragon suffers a temporary -1 penalty to all of his die-rolls until he's able to drink some cold juice or water, thanks to the profuse sweating, hot mouth, and watery eyes that accompany the tasty treat and its incendiary aftermath. This flaw reduces the cost of these potent candies to a mere two points per bag.

···· Oracle: The Essence (Trinket /Primer)

Arete N/A, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 8 pts.

Yes, it's a game – but it's also far more than that. Crafted, according to rumor, by Archmaster Porthos Fitz-Empress, this sturdy RPG tome runs nearly 700 pages in length, and features esoteric concepts too puzzling for all but the most visionary gamers. Within that game, players take the role of enlightened mystic masters, moving throughout a dangerous world filled with soul-ripping perils... the worst of which come from within. Basically, *The Essence* is an interactive parable of Hermetic Awakening. For an established mage, its contents are obvious; to the Sleepers for which it was intended, though, such insights could change their world forever.

Supposedly, 50 copies of this Primer exist throughout the world. It has been said that this was Porthos' final enterprise after his publication of *The Fragile Path*. If that rumor's even partially true, it might explain the wizard's frequent bouts with feeble-mindedness and insanity. Surely, the sheer expenditure of willpower involved in such a task would ravage even the sturdiest of minds!

System: A significantly smart, dedicated, and imaginative player who reads and meditates upon the entire bulk of this monumental game system, and who then enacts the rituals involved with playing it, stands a fair-to-middling chance of Awakening to the mystic Path... possibly, though not inevitably, as a prospective initiate for the Order of Hermes. *Oracle* fans who also indulge their darker appetites through Black Dog Game Factory products, however, might find themselves drawn to the Nephandic Path – see the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** series for details about Black Dog games and their unholy effects.

···· Wolf-Paw Amulet (Talisman)

Arete 5, Quintessence 15, Background Cost 2 pts.

Channeling the berserk fury of a werewolf, this Pagan Talisman invokes powerful Arts of strength and healing... but at the cost of insane rage and the immediate enmity of all Garou, who recognize the stolen essence of their own kind locked within the Wonder.

Traditionally, this amulet involves a mystically preserved paw, hacked off of a Lupus-breed werewolf or one of their lupine Kinfolk. Linked to an iron chain, this paw sends its spiritual vitality into the person wearing the Talisman. Such atrocities date back mostly to the European medieval era and the early years of the sorcerers' crusade, when Verbena witches and their forebears sought every possible advantage against the rising Daedalean hoards and the vicious armies of Tezghul the Insane. Legends also link these amulets to Die Wulffgilde, an elite Daedalean force that hunted werewolves and witches alike. More recently, over half-a-dozen wolf-paw amulet were traced to Werwolf, a Nazi guerilla-warfare force which continued to wage a rear-action resistance for over a year after the German surrender. Although a variety of practices have preserved these paws (some for hundreds of years), a handful have been crafted within the last decade or two... to the understandable annoyance of their lycanthropic associates. Wearing or creating a wolf-paw amulet is a sure way to find out why true werewolves are the most fearsome Night-Folk on either end of life's vast spectrum.

System: Several linked Life 3 Effects allow the amulet's wearer to automatically heal one health level of bashing or lethal damage per turn, gain the Merit: ***Berserker***, grow sharp claws (damage is Strength +1, lethal), soak lethal and aggravated damage, and raise her physical Strength. By rolling the amulet's Arete (difficulty 6) and spending one Quintessence point, that wearer gets one dot of Strength per success. This Strength lasts until the end of that scene, and features a fantastic surge of raw vitality.

On the downside, such Talismans earn the boundless hatred of the Garou and their allies. With a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8), any Garou or Kinfolk can smell a wolf-paw amulet within two or three yards. **(Werewolf: The Apocalypse** players can use Primal Urge instead of Alertness.) The obvious resulting hostility cannot in any way be mitigated with appeals to their good nature – so far as such desecrations of their kind are concerned, the werewolves *have* none! Werewolf *hunters*, however, will find a wolf-paw owner quite

respectable; the character gains two dots of Influence among enemies of the Garou.

Meanwhile, the downside of that Berserker "Merit" also includes the ***Feral Mind*** Flaw in addition to the ***Stress Atavism*** aspect of Berserker. Other Flaws, like ***Short Fuse*** and ***Witch-Hunted***, also apply to anyone brave and stupid enough to wear a wolf-paw and invoke its primal nature. These many disadvantages reduce the cost of a fairly potent Talisman, but also make life difficult for whomever dares to employ it.

···· or ····· Totem Tattoo (Talisman)

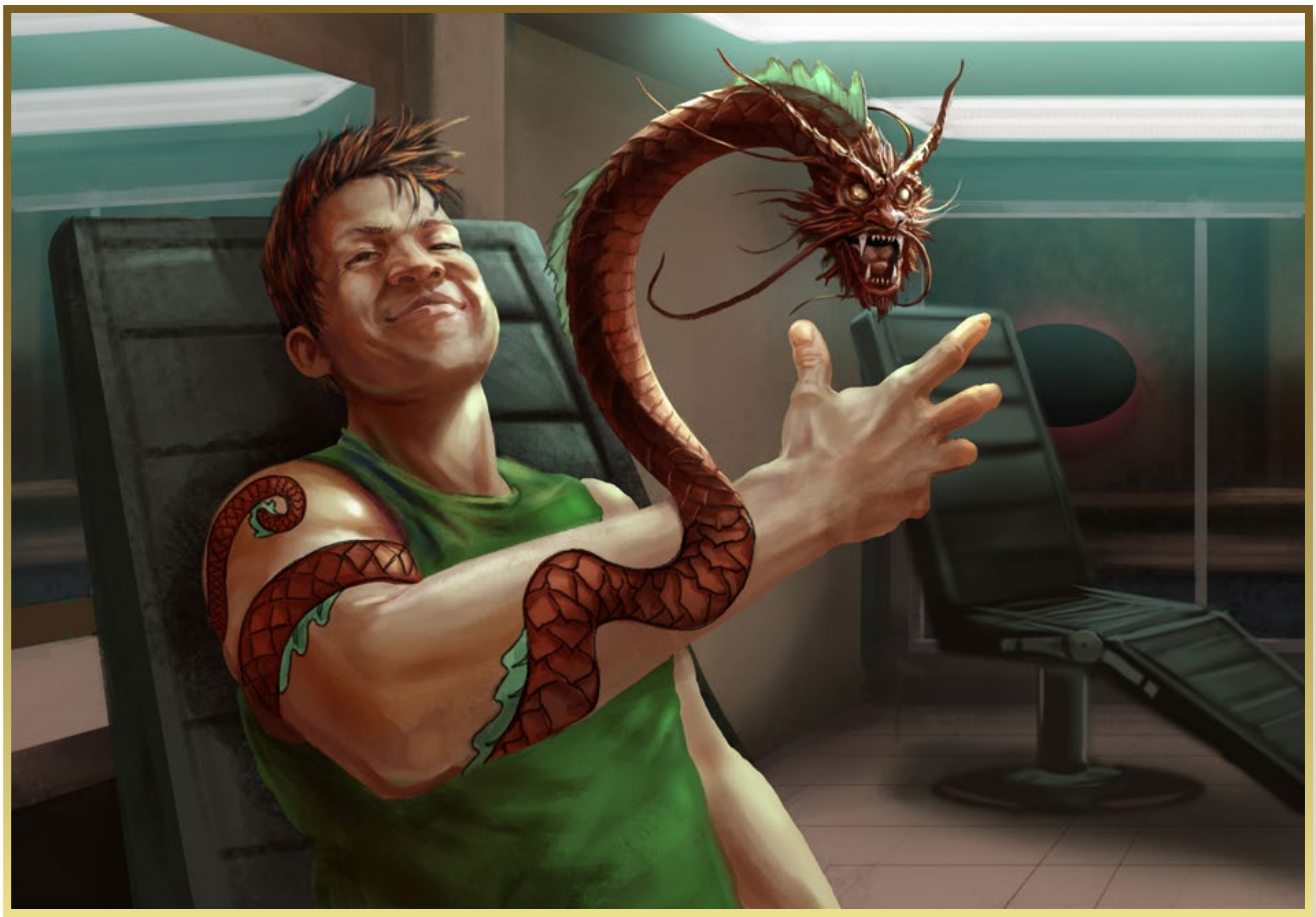
Arete 4-5, Quintessence 20-25, Background Cost 8 to 10 pts.

The ancient art of tattooing continues to grow in popularity and sophistication. These days, it's hard to find a major city in the industrialized world that doesn't have at least one decent tattoo studio, and the tools and skills of the art's practitioners have grown from the grimly disreputable chop-shops of Sailor Jerry's heyday into sleek temples of ink-etching professionalism. Even so, the underground glamour of body art continues to inspire mages who rebel against conformity. And whether those mages prefer the venerable traditions of Polynesian initiatory designs, the grimy allure of the outlaw underground, or the bloody-edge studios of twenty-first-century body mods, the magick that gets under your skin is more pervasive than ever before. (See the ***Expanded Instruments*** entry for ***Body Modification*** in this book's **Chapter Three, [pp. 205-206].**)

Perhaps the finest mark of a tattoo-mage's art combines totem-spirit magick with contemporary tattoo skills. Working with the idea of body art as a sacred practice, certain artists use enchanted inks and tools to literally change the shape and form of a favored client. The artist works gorgeous designs into the skin of a devotee; when the art is finished, that person will be able to connect with the image on the design, shape-changing into whatever form the artist has portrayed.

As the name of this particular Talisman suggests, a totem tattoo invokes the power of the client's patron spirit. Assuming that the spirit consents to the design, that devotee – whether she's Awakened or not – can assume an appropriate animal form by focusing her beliefs upon the design. A daughter of Crow can become a large blackbird; a wolf-fond girl can become a real, live wolf. Such magick is never performed lightly, though – it demands a skilled and Awakened artist whose capacity for magick matches his capacity for ink, and such people take their work *very* seriously!

System: After arduous rituals and grueling inking sessions (two to six sessions of several hours each, depending upon



the complexity of the design), the recipient of a totem tattoo employs a vulgar Life 4 /Spirit 2 in order to embody her totem in physical form. A higher-level version (Life 4 /Spirit 3, 9 points) lets her step sideways, and an even more sacred design (Life 4 /Spirit 4, 10 points) turns the devotee into a living, human Fetish through which the totem spirit works its power. This last form of tattoo is *extremely* rare, as it requires rare skill, intense devotion, and the consent of the spirit itself. (For details about making deals with spirit-entities, check out ***The Bargaining Process*** and ***Invoking Spirit Possession*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 91-95** and **123-125**.)

In game terms, the base power of this tattoo lets the devotee shapeshift into an animal form, as if she possessed Life 4. This shapeshifting power is vulgar almost everywhere on Earth, and it's limited to a single form. That form has the devotee's Traits, but it might possess certain innate physical capabilities of the animal in question (sharp teeth, claws, wings, the ability to breathe water, etc.). In most cases, that's a normal beast-form with the same basic mass and size as the human character – a stag, a coyote, etc. Radical shapeshifts (into a hummingbird, butterfly, elephant, etc.) demand Life 5 and a five-dot, 10-point tattoo. A mythic creature might be possible at the Storyteller's option, but a tattoo that turns someone into a dragon or phoenix would certainly require Life 5 (again, five dots and 10 points simply to change shape) and other Spheres in order to handle the various supernatural abilities associated with that form.

The Spirit 3 variant adds the ability to step through the Gauntlet, and the Spirit 4 Fetish /Talisman creates a permanent link between the totem and its devotee. In that case, the mage must also have at least three dots in the ***Totem*** Background (purchased separately), and the Storyteller determines the exact abilities of the tattoo, based upon the totem in question.

Because the shapeshifting magick is literally part of the devotee's Pattern, this tattoo bestows four or five points of permanent Paradox upon the devotee – one point for each dot in the Wonder. This Paradox does not go away unless the tattoo is removed... a painful and scar-laden process even in these days of laser-aided removal technology.

For more details about totems and the bonds they share with their devotees, see **Mage 20, pp. 326-328** and **633-636**, as well as the **Mage 20** sourcebook **Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers**. For various animal templates, see ***The Bestiary*** in **Mage 20, pp. 618-620**.

····· SPECM (Standardized Primal Energy Containment Matrix)

Enlightenment N/A, Primal Energy 10-100, Background Cost 5-30 pts.

Manufactured in highly secure refinement facilities, the line of SPECM ("*Spec-'em*") units provide Primal Energy power-packs for a wide spectrum of Technocratic hardware. Standardized to fit most Union gear, these Matrices range from tiny clips that fit into sidearms and personal computers, to the heavy-duty power-sources for cross-dimensional gateways, mainframe computers, large vehicles, and other mainstays of the Technocratic cause.

System: These units are simply Technocratic Periapts, sized to fit almost any standard-issue hypertech machine. (Experimental gadgets and one-off inventions may or may not be sized and calibrated correctly.) Most snap in or out within a turn, although the largest units require several minutes, special equipment, and two or three trained installation technicians. Pocket-sized units contain 10 Quintessence, while the SPECMs that deal with 50 Quintessence or more range from the size of window AC units (50) to the size of truck trailers (100).

Despite their ubiquity, these units remain fairly expensive – hence the high cost per unit. Why? Because Tass isn't cheap, even when it's refined through Technocratic factories. Although most Union hardware is SPECM-compatible, most operatives need to requisition SPECM units – and must explain why they *need* one, too. Incidentally, the pyrotechnics involved in a 100-point SPECM Paradox Effect explosion are impressive to say the least. Such blasts can vaporize whole Constructs... or neighborhoods... and are thus avoided at all costs.

A Tale for Every Treasure

Underneath all the rules and Traits, each Wonder is a story unto itself. Such treasures don't come into being, after all, without incredible expenditures of time, money, work, and power. Mages craft their Wonder to meet important needs; behind every Wonder that appears in your chronicle, there's a vital need that was met by someone with the power to make it so.

When you introduce a Wonder – whether you're a player or a Storyteller – make certain that your Wonder has a history: a need that it fulfilled, a creator who met that need, the process he endured in order to craft that vital treasure, and the things that happened once that object had appeared. Bound into each simple "magic item," you could introduce tales of love, sympathy, hatred, fury, revenge, frustration, terror, desperation... all the many passions that drive a person with the power of a god.

Remember, too, that all Wonders – by definition – change reality. In the course of your saga, reveal the changes they have wrought. Show your players the trail of rumors and tragedies that follow a cursed sword or strange invention; tell your Storyteller how the concoction you've distilled came from the recipe handed down from your character's great-grandmother – a woman who defied law and convention to explore weird physics in a time when women were supposed to be mothers and wives, not scientists. Give your Wonders a history, a personality, and an effect upon your chronicle. In short, make them *wonders*: things that arouse admiration, surprise, astonishment, and awe.



Chapter Three: Matters of Focus

Without magic, this world is unbearable.
– Herman Hesse

Ashpaw dips her stick in the ashes at the edge of the world. Her toes sweep glowing ember-patterns, glyphs for an unspoken language hovering at the edge of her mind. Dawnlight gleams across strands of purple hair, their tendrils falling across her face. In her throat, Ashpaw croons a song, then raises it higher in the early morning sky.

Breeze stirs the ashes. Distant barks echo her song. From his distant vantage in the Always World, Coyote hears their voices. His own voice joins the chorus as the sun breaks the horizon and climbs free.

Ashpaw's foot stomps in burning dust. With one hand on her walking-stick, she draws the other hand to the sky in ritual gesture. Her shadow spreads across the ground. Warm breath fogs the morning air.

Worn heavy across bare shoulders, her coyote-skin mantle stares with sightless eyes. Chill morning winds brush their fingers through its fur. Far off, coyotes and Coyote meld their voice to hers until it resounds with uncanny cross-dimensional effect.

Above the ashes where the fire had danced, a swirling vortex curls from smoke. That smoke mingles with Ashpaw's misty breath. Her stomping foot and crooning throat reverberate in the space between worlds, calling up Coyote and shaping the smoke into form.

Assuming shape, the four-legged ashen ghost arises, stretches, shakes itself to life, and settles into the fur across her shoulders. The fur ripples, warms, expands. Sightless eyes glow with wry awareness. Empty ears perk up with mystic infusion. The fur rustles, slides off Ashpaw's shoulders, and drops to the ground. By the time the fur's paws hit the dirt, Coyote stands cloaked in the sanctified skin of his fallen child. His feet chuff through embers and dust. He shakes his shaggy head, jaw lolling in a toothy grin.

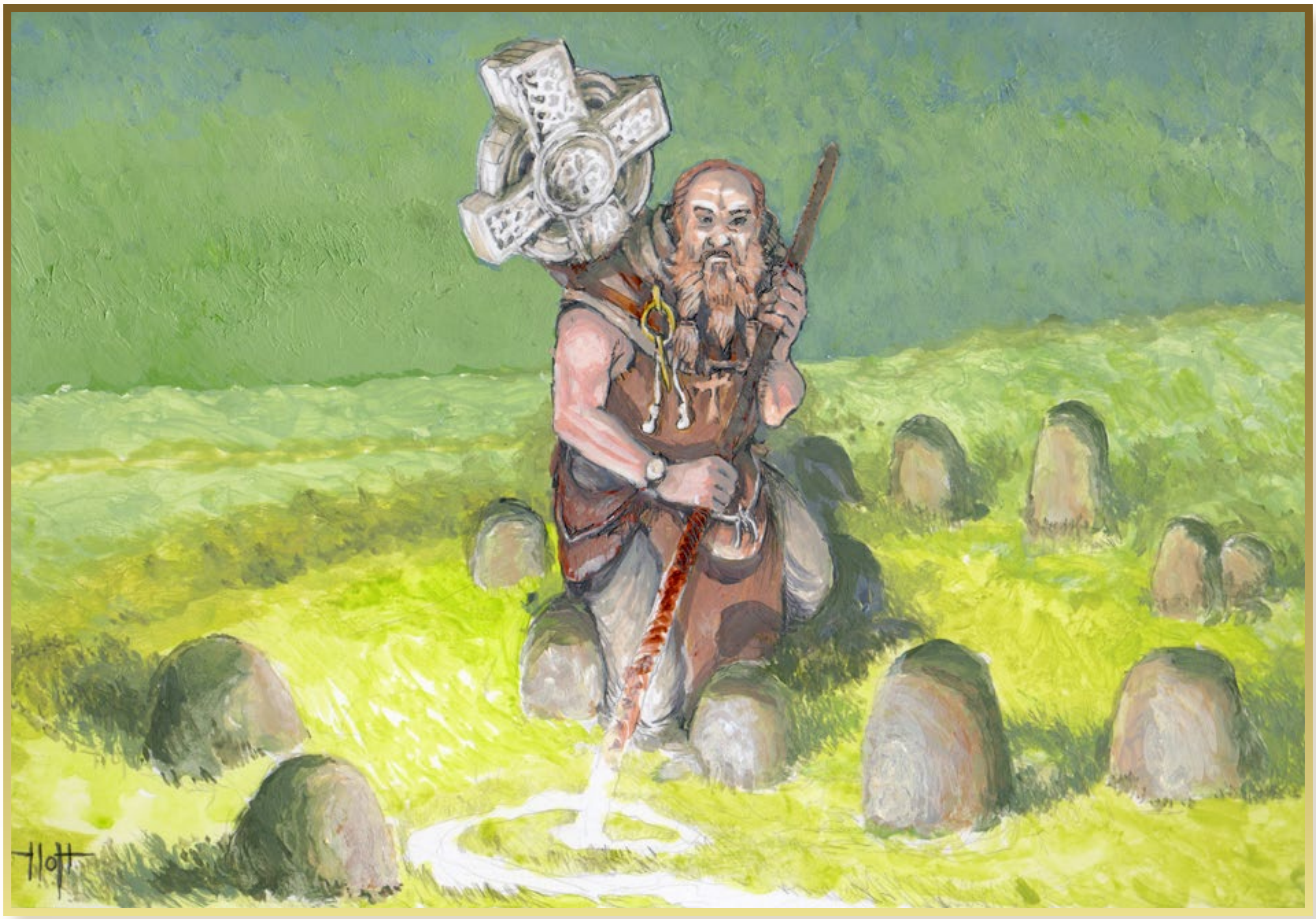
Ashpaw ducks her head in submission, long purple hair draping across her eyes. Coyote hops, skips, stretches himself, then steps into the embers and meets Ashpaw's gaze.

"So, daughter," he says in an affectionate growl, "what can I do for you today?"

How Focus Works

Focus, as defined in **Mage 20**, can be summed up simply: *paradigm + practice + instruments = focus*.

In character terms, what you believe (*paradigm*) influences what you do (*practice*); what you do influences what you use (*instruments*); what you use directs what you create (*the magick you cast*). Thus, your magick is focused by the beliefs you embrace, the practice which flows from those beliefs, and the tools employed by that practice in order to make things happen.



The following chapter expands on the paradigms, practices, and instruments presented in **Mage 20**'s ***Focus and the Arts*** section. Beyond those new options, though, we'll also glance at the interactions between character and focus, go step-by-step through the basic process of focus creation, answer certain questions that folks have had regarding the new focus rules, and offer several ***Examples in Play*** which show how a character's concept and backstory shape that mage's focus and the way in which that mage employs it.

The Role of Need

The **Mage 20** focus rules allow players to customize the tools and practices their characters employ when casting magickal Effects – and just for clarity's sake, we'll use the word *magick* throughout this chapter to address all forms of Awakened Sphere-craft, regardless of the paradigms involved. (See **Mage 20, p. 498**.) Under these rules, the player determines what his mage does when performing magick, how he does it, why he thinks it should work, and which sorts of tools he employs in the process.

Although certain practices encourage (or in some cases, demand) certain tools, the specifics of each **Mage** character's focus depend upon the needs that character has and the way he meets those needs. Thus, on a personal level, every mage (and **Mage** character) employs a focus that meets that mage's needs.

Magick, on a practical level, *does* meet needs. Although it's true that some folks – this author included – study metaphysical Arts because such fields are interesting, most people who pursue magickal disciplines do so because those disciplines fulfill a need in a person's life. People study magick because they need something that magick provides. Maybe that need involves a sense of surety in a chaotic world... or the ability to grow food in a parched climate... or the power to protect one's loved ones from a hostile government. At the core of a mage's chosen focus, you'll find the need that inspired him to pursue magick in the first place. And so, when examining focus in the world of **Mage**, the most important questions you can ask and answer for your character are: *What needs does my character's magick fulfill, and how does that mage's focus answer those needs?*

The Role of Culture

Whether or not a given mage belongs to a metaphysical culture like a Tradition, Convention or Craft, culture plays a major role in the beliefs, practices, and tools involved in its metaphysical practices. As a result, a character from a given culture tends to choose beliefs, practices, and tools appropriate to that character's culture. A deeply religious mage from an Irish Catholic background, for instance, probably embraces a magickal focus based upon the mystical side of Irish Catholicism (most likely the paradigm of *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*),

employing practices like *faith* and *High Ritual Magick* (in this case, Celtic Catholic rites), and traditional tools like *prayer*, *blessings and curses*, *food and drink* (holy wafers, wine, and water), *languages* (Latin), *offerings and sacrifices* (confession, penance, "hail Marys," and the like), *sacred iconography* (the crucifix and other Catholic holy symbols), and possibly clerical vestments (*fashion*) and /or *social domination* ("*The power of Christ compels you!*"). He might be celibate (another *offering and sacrifice*, possibly an *ordeal and exertion*), and may even employ some traditional Irish folk-magick (the *witchcraft* practice, with tools like *circles and designs*, *cups and vessels*, *herbs and plants*, and perhaps the traditional *language* of Irish Gaelic) when he thinks no one but God is watching. That mage employs the beliefs, practices, and tools that feel most familiar to him and carry the best chance – in his mind, at least – of meeting his mystic and practical needs.

Metaphysical cultures, of course, emphasize certain beliefs, practices, and tools. A shared approach to metaphysical disciplines, after all, is the foundation of a metaphysical culture. NWO Black Suits employ physical and psychological technologies in pursuit of order; Verbenae favor a primal approach to nature-centered Arts; Ecstatics push boundaries in order to achieve transcendence, while Solificati refine arcane formulae wherein physical materials, natural forces, and spiritual symbology combine to create synergies that are greater than any single element involved. The ***Focus*** entry on each two-page spread of **Mage 20** describes the preferred focus of the metaphysical society in question, and although certain individual variations are allowed – say, a Verbena witch using a computer – members of that society employ most, if not all, of the focus elements mentioned within that entry.

While a given mage will probably start from a cultural base that feels familiar to him, the specific details depend on that person, his situation, his magickal society – assuming that he belongs to one – and the needs which inspire and guide his pursuit of magick. The guy who rejects his Catholic upbringing and becomes a militant atheist isn't likely to employ a Catholic religious focus; his beliefs would depend on technology or philosophy, not on contact with a god he no longer believes in. A person who hates the woods is far more likely to become a Virtual Adept than a Verbena, but if that person feels drawn powerfully toward the ideals of Nature despite a physical impediment which keeps him home-bound, then he might conceivably join the Verbena but work his Arts with computers and houseplants rather than with blood and soil. Ultimately, then, the beliefs, practices, and tools chosen by an individual mage reflect that mage's culture, personality, and needs.

Assigning Practices and Instruments to Effects

Focus follows function. A mage who loves to dance, and whose beliefs involve moving through life gracefully, will cast many of his Effects through *dance and movements*; a mechanically inclined technomancer builds inventions, employs workshops and specialized tools, and employs designs that have been honed by theory, trial, error, and success. A ceremonial magus employs the rituals he has learned, passed down through generations of research, practice, and protocol. A crazy-wisdom contrary, on the other hand, takes whatever expectations people might have had and turns those expectations profanely upside-down. When deciding, then, which instruments to use when performing your mage's magickal Effects, use the tools that best bridge the character's background with the spells he casts.

Because magick (under any name) tends to be logical, an instrument should have some logical tie to the spell in question. A cyborg uses energy-weapons when firing off blasts of focused Forces /Prime Effects; a witch employs herbs, chants, and tools that symbolize the thing she's trying to accomplish; a High Ritualist checks his books, memorizes ritual phrases, and conducts everything by exact specifications, while a chaos mage infuses poetically appropriate tools with his immediate intentions. In short, *let the instrument fit the spell and the mage who casts it.*

And that's where roleplaying comes in...

Roleplaying, Storytelling, Resonance, Merits, and Flaws

Like magick itself, focus in **Mage** is an extension of your character. Think of the paradigm, practices, and tools as your character's metaphysical arms and legs and voice and senses, processing her beliefs and putting them out there in the world. Although we can offer creative advice, and research can suggest appropriate instruments for certain practices, only *you* can determine which tools and instruments best fit your mage, her culture, her needs, and her beliefs. The more you know about your mage, then, the better your grasp on her focus becomes – and the more fun you'll have playing her, too!

By that same principle, focus shapes the way your character affects her surroundings. It influences the sorts of people (or other entities) she considers friends, intimates, and enemies. It reflects the way she moves through the world in general, and the effect she tends to have when she does. As you choose Merits and Flaws and companion characters, therefore, make choices based on the way your character interacts with her world; focus provides a major element of that interaction, so take those beliefs, practices, and instruments into account when you decide on the other stuff as well.

Meanwhile, Storytellers should also take their players' focus into account when roleplaying the supporting cast, narrating descriptions, and keeping the players on their toes. Seekings, Paradox backlashes, Resonance, and other dramatic complications will depend a great deal on the focus of the characters involved. An Ecstatic rock star will attract different sorts of attention than a quiet student of unhallowed arts would get, and a mad inventor's laboratory wouldn't bear much resemblance to the desolate alley that a street-mage calls home. As the Storyteller, then, let focus inspire your creativity, provide frameworks for your story, and – when necessary – hand you a nice big stick with which to remind your players that, especially in **Mage**, what do you *does* return to you in poetically appropriate ways.

Focus, Step-By-Step

Okay, so you're creating a new **Mage** character. How do you determine an appropriate focus for your mage?

Follow these steps:

Step One - Concept

Decide on the type of mage you want to play, as described in **Mage 20, Chapter Six, pp. 254-265**.

Step Two - Society

If your character belongs to one of the metaphysical societies described in **Mage 20, Chapter Five**, then check out the ***Focus*** entry on the appropriate two-page spread and then decide which options fit your character's concept, culture, and needs, as discussed above.

If he doesn't belong to one of the "official" societies, then determine where he comes from, what he needs, and how he meets those needs through metaphysical pursuits.

Step Three - Paradigm

Choose one or more of the paradigms from the ***Common Mage Paradigms*** featured in **Mage 20, Chapter Ten**, and in the ***Expanded Paradigms*** section presented later in this chapter. If you select several of the listed paradigms, then combine them into a single sentence which sums up your character's beliefs, as shown in the ***Examples in Play*** later in this chapter.

Step Four - Practice

Select one or more of the practices from **Mage 20** and the ***Expanded Practices*** section of this chapter. Choose ones that suit your concept best, and figure out how your character fits them together. Each entry has paradigms and instruments, as well as associated Abilities, which suit the practice in question, so use that for ***Steps Three and Five***.

Step Five - Instruments

Choose instruments, as with paradigms and practices above. Decide how your mage uses those tools and/or activities, selecting one of them to be your *primary instrument*, as detailed in the nearby sidebar of that name.

Step Six - Using the Focus

Based on your concept, decide how your character puts her beliefs, practice, and instruments into action. As shown throughout this chapter, and under the examples of Jinx and Malcolm in **Mage 20, Chapter Six**, the details of that usage will depend on what your mage believes, how she puts that belief into action, and which tools and activities she uses when doing so. Make choices that encourage cool roleplaying and evocative Storytelling, and play up the focus for maximum dramatic effect.

For roleplaying suggestions, see the ***Examples of Play*** given in this chapter and the ***Enforcing Focus*** and ***Jinxing the Cops*** entries in **Mage 20, pp. 371-373**. For the game-rule benefits of playing up your focus in dramatic ways, see the entry ***One Point – Focus*** in **Mage 20, p. 335**.

An old misperception among **Mage** players involves viewing "foci" as a nuisance, to be ignored whenever possible and ditched as soon as one's Arete Trait allows. From a roleplaying perspective, though, your mage's focus provides you with a great way to show off your imagination, distinguish your character's unique qualities, and give your mage an intriguing spark of life. A memorable focus makes your mage more memorable too, so explore that character's possibilities and bring them forward as you design and roleplay the focus elements you choose.

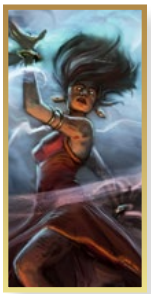
Primary Instruments

No mage relies on each instrument equally. Although three different Ecstatics might use bodywork as an instrument, one of them might be a professional massage practitioner who bases his metaphysical work on physical touch, another might enjoy backrubs but can take or leave them, and the third might crave skin-on-skin touch on an emotional level but rarely uses such contact in a magickal way. For the first mage, then, bodywork becomes his *primary instrument* – that is, his go-to tool or technique, and the one that seems most fundamental to the way he practices his magick.

Although a primary instrument *does not grant any additional bonuses*, it's the one your mage is most likely to use, and the one he'll employ most often. It's also the last instrument he'll discard as he advances in ability – after all, it's the one he's come to rely upon the most, so it'll be the hardest tool to let go of. As a mage narrows down his list of tools, he places more and more reliance upon that primary instrument; when he achieves ultimate confidence in his abilities, however, he can finally put that tool aside.

When you determine your mage's array of instruments, then, select one of them as your primary instrument. That tool will be the one that's most closely tied to his beliefs and practice – katas for a martial artist, computers for a hacker, prayers for a religious mystic, and so on. As your mage advances in Arete and discards instruments, use the primary tool as his default instrument. If and when he reaches Arete 9 (assuming he's not a Technocrat), he finally recognizes, on a soul-deep level, that the ultimate instrument of his magick is himself.

Focus FAQ



Mage 20 has inspired a number of questions, and although we've answered the majority of those questions at the beginning of this book's **Chapter Five**, the following questions are best answered in a chapter dedicated to the focus rules.

Why Do We Start Off with at Least Seven Instruments?

Although that number might seem arbitrary, it allows a mage to advance beyond the need for tools; because most **Mage** characters begin with an Arete of 2 or 3, the number 7 lets you discard one instrument per point of Arete between Arete 2 and Arete 9.

Also, as mentioned in **Mage 20**, 7 is an auspicious number, and while that in itself isn't important in terms of game balance, that significance adds a bit of flavor to the game itself.

Do We Need to Start with Seven Instruments? Can't I Just Begin Play with One?

Unless your Storyteller decides otherwise, you *do* need to begin play with at least seven instruments. As shown under the ***Examples in Play***, you can have a lot more than seven instruments, some of which get used often and others of which get used only under certain circumstances. But no, you cannot choose only one or two instruments. Why not?

- Partly because it's just too easy to start off with one or two instruments, get rid of them as soon as possible, and then have a super-mage who casts spells just because he *can*, which messes with game-balance and makes your mage a special-snowflake sort of character.

- But mostly because real-world metaphysical practices don't work that way. Such practices are based on *manifesting belief through activity* – on doing a thing that makes another thing happen, because you believe that doing that first thing will make that second thing happen. No real-world metaphysical discipline is based on just *wishing* for magickal things to happen; if you want to change reality, you need to *do* things in order to transform it.

Although **Mage** is a game about changing reality through the gift of Enlightened Will, the power to do so by Will alone is supposed to be something *your character works up to*, not something he can do right out of the box. The ability to alter reality simply through belief is big-league stuff. If it was simple and easy to do that, then every mage would be running around casting spells with little-or-no effort involved, which would be more like a high-powered superhero setting than like the dark parody of our real world that the World of Darkness represents.

What if I Start Off with More Than Seven Instruments?

Assuming that you're not playing a Technocrat, you can still discard all of your instruments by Arete 9. To represent the growing skill and confidence a mage has as she becomes more adept with magick, start by discarding only one instrument per point of Arete up until Arete 5; after that, you can discard two instruments per point of Arete between 6 and 9, so long as there's at least one instrument left by the time you reach Arete 8.

How Do I Determine Which Instruments to Discard First?

As mentioned in **Mage 20, p. 329**, you start by discarding the instruments your mage replies upon *least*. If, for example, Ashpaw replies more upon dance, drugs, and blood than on her staff, then her player Ashley can discard Ashpaw's need for the staff before discarding her reliance upon dance, drugs, and blood.

The specifics will depend upon your character and how you play her. For practical advice, however, see the sidebar ***Primary Instruments***, and the section about ***Assigning Practices and Instruments to Effects***, given earlier in this chapter.

Do I Get a Bonus for Still Using an Instrument That My Character Has Discarded?

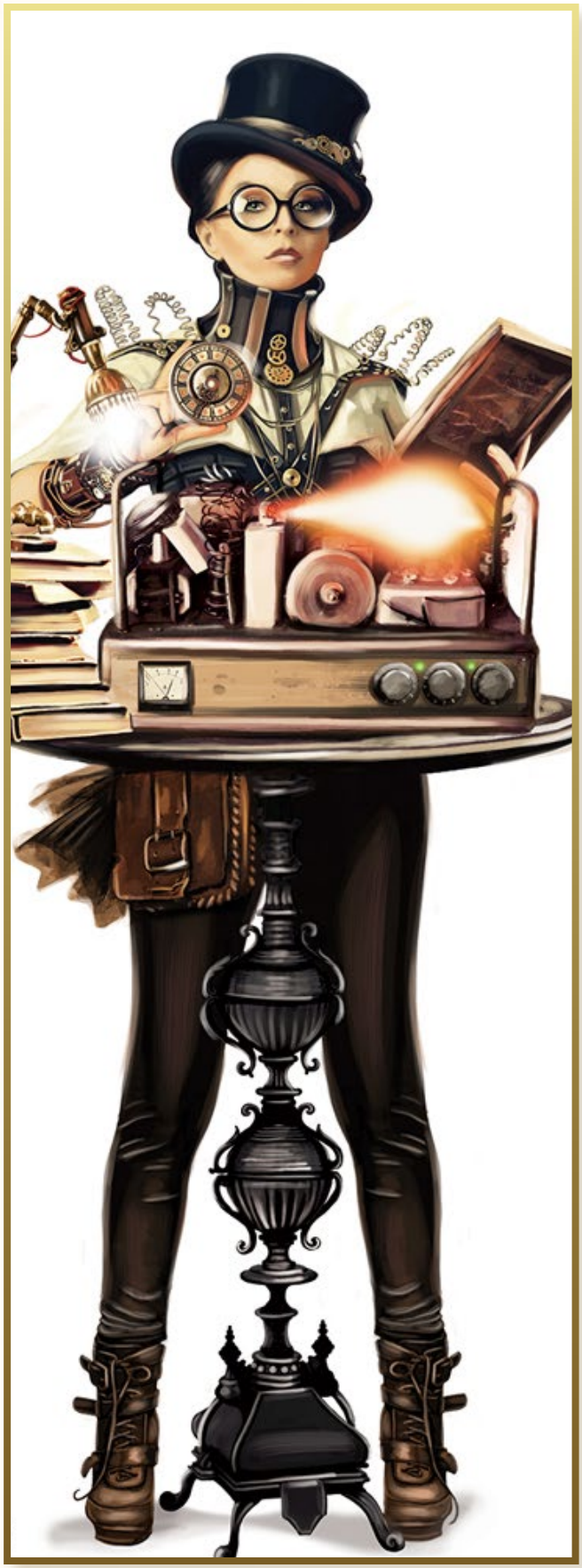
Yes – see **Mage 20, p. 503**, and the entry ***Using instruments when you don't need to*** on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers*** chart.

Does an Instrument Have to be an Item?

No. An instrument can be an activity too. Doing a ritual dance is an instrument; looking someone in the eye is an instrument; putting on cosmetics, bribing a guard, and even ordering your personal assistant to fetch you a certain set of files – they're all instruments. The details about how a given instrument is used can be found in the various entries about each instrument, but no, those "tools" do not have to be physical objects.

Does My Mage Have to Use the Instrument When She Casts an Effect, or Can She Use It Beforehand?

An instrument can be used as preparation for a given task: donning ritual garb, praying for guidance before going into battle, or working out the trajectory for your Transdimensional Plasma Cannon before you fire it. So long as that action is performed, or that tool is used, with the intentions of employing



the Effect (say, praying for luck in battle, not just saying grace at the table), it can be counted as the focus for the metaphysical task in question.

Some instruments can also be employed – in some cases, *have* to be employed – long before the Effect in question gets cast. For details, see ***"Prepped and Ready" Instrumental Operations***, p. 206.

Does My Mage Need to Use All of Her Instruments Every Time She Casts a Spell?

No. Most spells demand only one instrument, while rituals often require the use of several instruments together. It really depends upon what your mage's practice is and what he does in order to make a given thing happen with his magick.

How Do I Determine How Many Instruments I Need to Use, or Decide which Ones to Use When Casting a Certain Effect?

As a general rule, a mage needs to use only one particular instrument when casting a simple Effect; Sanjay Sachdeva doesn't need to use his business suit, his briefcase, and his cybernetic claws in order to use a Mind Effect to intimidate someone – any one of those instruments will work.

On the other hand, a complicated Effect – as in, an extended-roll ritual (detailed in **Mage 20, pps. 538-543**) – might demand a number of tools used over the course of the casting process; Dr. Hans von Roth uses various shop-tools, devices, and money in order to modify his cars, and so those four different instruments (*household tools*, *devices and machines*, *money*, and *vehicles*) would come into play whenever he crafts a new hypertech hotrod.

Look at the use of instruments in the casting process as a storytelling opportunity that says a lot about your character. A technician focuses her craft through the tools of her trade; a warrior utilizes weapons and fighting techniques, and a wizard employs the rituals that her magickal schooling demand. *Let the character guide the focus*, and choose the practices and tools that suit her best. For guidance, see the ***Examples in Play*** which follow this section.

As I Discard Instruments, How Do I Decide Which Effects I Can Use Without Using an Instrument?

Use your best judgment. If your mage needs to perform a yoga posture in order to employ a certain Effect, and you discard the instrument *dances and movement*, then your mage can perform that Effect without using the instrument.

Can a Single Instrument Be Used Several Different Ways? And Could I Use Different Instruments to Cast the Same Sort of Effect?

Yes, to both. In fact, that's usually the case. Your mage could use the same tool for many different purposes... and, by extension, could also use several different tools to cast similar spells.

Let's say, as an example, that Ashpaw is trying to see into the Otherworlds. She could ask Lucy Furr for advice, and "hear" the coyote pelt tell her what's on the other side of the Gauntlet. She could dance around in a mad whirling spin, and then view the Gauntlet opening before her eyes as she gets progressively dizzier. Her most likely instrument involves dropping acid or smoking a bowl, but that's not the only way she can see beyond the Gauntlet. Essentially, she could use whichever tools seem to make the most sense when casting a given spell.

Does My Character Need to Have All of the Associated Abilities Mentioned Under Each Practice Entry in Order to Use That Practice?

No. But he should probably have at least three of them, and he *does* need at least one of them. The Abilities chosen will be the ones most associated with the instruments he uses; if he employs *artwork* as an instrument, for example, then he needs at least one dot in the Talent: ***Art***.

You *do*, of course, need whichever Abilities your practice and instruments require; a medicine-worker, for example, could get by without ***Empathy*** but can't practice healing without the ***Medicine*** Knowledge.

Do All of the Members of Group Whatever (Akashayana, Progenitors, Bata'a, etc.) Use the Same Instruments? If Not, Then How Should I Decide the Types of Instrument My [Group Whatever] Mage Employs?

No, they don't all use the same tools for the same spells or Spheres. That's a **Mage 1st Edition** thing, and we ditched it long ago.

That said, certain groups *do* emphasize certain sets of beliefs, practices, and tools, as mentioned under ***The Role of Culture***, above. The amount of latitude given within that group with regards to that focus really depends on the rigidity of the society itself. Mages from a group that employs a very regimented sort of practice – like, say, one of the Houses of Hermes, wherein magickal techniques are taught in formalized order – will all use very similar tools; one does not, for instance, use the Fifth Pentacle of the Sun when summoning demons. (One uses the Fifth Pentacle of Mars... among other precautions.) Groups with a looser structure – like the Cult of Ecstasy, Dreamspeakers or Hollow Ones – are much less formalized and far more individualistic when it comes to the focus beliefs, practices, and tools involved.

That said, certain types of tools are favored over others within a given group; you won't, for example, find Progenitors using kung-fu katas to create clones, any more than you'd see Akashayana using incubation chambers to punch someone in the face. For the most part, those sorts of tools are obvious, and described under the ***Focus*** entry for each group's section in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Five**.

Are Instruments Tied to Certain Spheres (i.e., Art to Forces, Sex and Sensuality to Life, and so Forth)?

No. Again, the link in some old sourcebooks between a certain focus (instrument) and a certain Sphere is a **1st-Edition**ism and should be ignored.

Even so, a focus *will* have some logical connection to the spell in question, as mentioned earlier under ***Assigning Practices and Instruments to Effects***, p. 169.

Can I Combine Several Paradigms Together into a Single One?

Yes, so long as those paradigms make sense when they're combined. The character entries in this chapter's ***Examples in Play*** blend two or three paradigms together into one, and the descriptions show you how that works.

Mutually incompatible paradigms, however – like, for instance, *Technology Holds All the Answers* and *We are Meant to be Wild* – should not be combined unless maybe the character has a serious case of Multiple Personality Disorder, and possibly not even then. After all, it is the paradigm that provides the foundation for a mage's metaphysical focus, and that foundation needs to be firm enough to change his world.

Where Can I Find Suggestions for the Instruments My Mage Would Use?

This book's ***Suggested Sources*** section, given at the end of **Chapter Five**, contains a lot of good reference works and fictional inspirations. You can also look up metaphysical practices online, and gather material that way. **Mage Revised**'s **Dead Magick** sourcebooks feature overviews of roughly a dozen real-world mystic traditions, this book's ***Examples in Play*** contain descriptions of various focus elements, and the various Awakened characters listed throughout the **Mage 20** series of sourcebooks include a ***Focus*** entry that offers similar information. You don't need to know all the details about how, say, a Taoist alchemist would employ jade dust; just find the tools, beliefs, and practices that seem to fit your character concept, as described in the following section, and run with whatever works best for your game.

Can I Create New Paradigms / Practices /Instruments? And if Yes, Then How do I do it?

Yes, you can. Guidelines for ***Creating Other Paradigms*** can be found under the heading of that name in **Mage 20, pp. 571-572**. Use those same guidelines for new practices and / or instruments, making sure that the new creations make sense within the character concept, support the metaphysical weight being placed upon them, and aren't frivolous or easily abused.

If and when you create new paradigms, practices, and instruments for your chronicle, do some research into real-life metaphysical practices – including "alternative technologies" and bleeding-edge scientific theories. By grounding your imaginative creations in authentic foundations, you'll bring an element of realism into your **Mage** game that would be lacking otherwise.

How Many Practices Can I Have?

Really, a given mage generally has a single personalized practice; that practice, however, can be made up from several different practices that the mage in question has combined into his approach to magick. For demonstrations, see the ***Examples in Play*** presented in this chapter, and the ***Focus*** entries given for Awakened characters in **Mage 20**, the **Mage 20 Quickstart** book, and other **Mage 20** sourcebooks.

Can a Mage Who Uses One Type of Focus Learn Magick from a Mage Who Uses a Different Kind of Focus? And if So, Then How Does that Work?

As **Mage 20** says on **p. 337**, it's pretty hard to learn Spheres and so forth from someone whose beliefs are practices are radically different than your own. You *can* do it, but the learning process will take longer and be more difficult than it would have been if you'd been learning from a mage whose beliefs and practices resemble the ones you employ.

To reflect the challenges of learning from a teacher whose beliefs and practices differ from your own, you pay two extra points of experience over the amount you would normally have paid; the teaching process also takes twice as long as usual, thanks to the long explanations, heated arguments, and countless do-overs involved in training under someone whose approach to magick and /or hyperscience makes no apparent sense to you.

These costs do not apply, however, to agents of the Technocracy who train under other agents of the Technocracy. The Union has refined intensive training programs and protocols, and so operatives of different Conventions can cross-train with one another at no extra cost or effort. Yes, conformity has its benefits.

By the same token, assume that *a Technocrat cannot train a member of the Traditions or Crafts, or vice versa, at all*. We are, after all, talking about major differences in philosophy and metaphysics... and a serious case of Reality Deviance, to boot! To adopt the enemy mindset, a character needs to jump through the various hoops described in **Mage 20** under ***Changing Focus and Allegiance*, p. 339, have a suitable Merit, or both**. Essentially, she needs to convert to the opposing side, and that shit does not come easy!

How Can My Mage Learn New Practices in Addition to the Ones He Already Pursues?

So long as the mage in question isn't violating the foundation of her approach to magick (again, as described under ***Changing Focus and Allegiance***), use the following process:

- Play out the learning process as part of the story.
- Buy at least one dot in at least one of the appropriate Abilities for that new practice (as per the ***Associated Abilities*** given under each practice). If the character already has the appropriate Abilities, then disregard this step.
- Purchase a new ***Esoterica*** specialty to reflect the newly acquired practice. (This costs four points – for details, see **Mage 20, p. 284**.) If the character doesn't already have the Esoterica Knowledge, then the player needs to buy it and choose the new discipline as the initial Esoterica specialty. If she has Esoterica at less than four dots, then she needs to buy it up to four dots before she can acquire new practices – an amateur, it stands to reason, needs a stronger foundation in arcane principles before she can start adding new practices to the ones she already understands.

  Technomancer characters can use the ***Science*** Knowledge Trait in place of Esoterica. A character with the ***Weird Science*** practice, however, could use either one – his approach to esoterica is decidedly scientific, and his approach to science is weird enough to be esoteric!

Examples in Play

An instrument is more a matter of what one *does* than of what one *holds*. In many ways, it's also an extension of who one *is*. Although each practice has tools associated with its trade, the specific paradigm, practice, and instruments of a given mage all depend upon the temperament of that mage. And so, as examples of how a mage's concept guides that mage's focus, we present six very different mages with six very different approaches to their magicks.

In addition to the names of the player and character, each of the following entries features certain elements:

Concept: The type of mage the player wants to run.

Paradigm: A sentence, drawn from the ***Paradigm*** entries in **Mage 20 (pps. 568-571)** and this chapter (**pps. 188-196**), which summarizes the character's metaphysical beliefs.

Practices: The practices this mage employs in order to work with magick.

Instruments: The tools used by the mage in question.

Spheres: Obviously, this refers to the Spheres used by the mage in question.

Each entry briefly describes the ways in which the concept guides the focus, and shows how the character uses their instruments and practices to manipulate the Spheres and craft magickal Effects. The illustrations, meanwhile, show how all those pieces work together to complete those characters in story terms.

As these examples show, you get to build the focus from the ground up, based on the vision you have for your character and the way that character views their world. Sure, certain types of mages use certain archetypal tools; witches have their brooms and cauldrons, ritual wizards their ornate diagrams, cyborgs their intrinsic machinery, and mad scientists their baroque inventions. The way your mage uses their tools, though, will depend upon the practices that mage favors and the beliefs behind those practices. And in that way, every mage in **Mage** is a unique, dynamic character in an ever-changing world.



Able Ferox

Transformative Reality Hacker

Paradigm: *Consciousness is the only true reality, and so we must embrace the threshold because we are* ***not*** *men!*

Practices: Cybernetics, reality hacking, and weird science.

Instruments: Artwork, body modification, computer gear, cybernetic implants, dances and movement, fashion, formulae and mathematics, gadgets and inventions, Internet activity, languages, mass media, social domination, symbols, weapons

Spheres: Correspondence, Entropy, Forces, Mind, Life

Player Ryn wants a shapeshifting reality-hacker. And so, Ryn creates the genderqueer technomancer Able Ferox ("*to hold ferociousness*"). Unlike a "traditionalist" shapechanger, Able doesn't mess around with animal remains and bestial spirits; instead, they – the preferred gender pronoun for both Able and Ryn – craft evocative transhumanist garb (*fashion*), personalized *cybernetics*, subversive *artwork*, and other weird *gadgets and inventions* that crack the Consensus and mess with people's heads.

In service to said messing with heads, Able remakes "reality" as those people perceive it. To this end, Able – a professional artist – creates videos, memes, and graffiti (*mass media*, *languages*, and *symbols*) that plant suggestions (by way of Mind Effects) in people's heads, undermine expectations, and spark new ideas. Able employs computers to hack databases, pull and alter information, and "hack the reality code" by computing arcane *formulae and math* that reprogram the structure of Reality. Such tools allow Able to effect areas that are geographically separate yet intrinsically connected (by way of the Correspondence Sphere). A tinkerer by vocation, Able also messes with established technology, altering its purpose through applications of Entropy and Forces.

On a more personal level, Able alters their physical form (Life) and social identity (Mind) through unconventional pronouns and terminology (again, *language*), *cybernetic implants*, and a commanding presence and behavior (*social domination*) that's often enhanced with radical clothing and makeup (again *fashion*), challenging the way folks perceive Able. As a hobby, Able also pursues the freerunning discipline parkour (*dances and movement*), which keeps Able physically fit while enhancing their ability to get into (and out of) tight situations. When pressed, the reality-hacker uses home-made and modified *weapons* to handle enemies that Able can't escape or dissuade any other way.



Ashpaw Ten Sticks

Coyote Trickster Shaman

Paradigm: *In a world of gods and monsters, we are meant to be wild, so it's all good – have faith!*

Practices: Animalism, crazy wisdom, medicine-work, and shamanism.

Instruments: Art, blood and fluids, cannibalism, dances and movement, drugs, energy, fashion, herbs and plants, meditation, music, ordeals and exertions, prayers, sex and sensuality, voice and vocalizations, wands and staves

Spheres: Life, Mind, Prime, Spirit, Time

Ashley envisions her Ecstatic shaman Ashpaw as a young Appalachian woman of Anglo-Cherokee descent. Hearing the spirits since childhood, autistic Ashpaw learned a mélange of psychedelic witchcraft, neoshamanism, Catholic mysticism, and piecemeal bits of reputed "Native American medicine" – both authentic and bastardized – from a variety of friends and relatives as she grew to adulthood. Ashpaw had always related better with animals than with other people, and so she's more than a bit animalistic herself. During a near-fatal vision quest, Ashpaw met an aspect of Coyote the Trickster, who appreciated her *courage*, if not her *sense*. According to Ashpaw, Coyote saved her life and chose her to be part of his human pack. Since that encounter, she's been a wandering "psychedelic nun": a contrary of sorts who combines various spiritual traditions with Burning Man eclecticism.

Thanks to a lifetime relationship with chronic pain, Ashpaw uses that pain for focus her concentration; combining that practice with a tendency to challenge the elements and survive, Ashpaw employs *ordeals and exertions* as her primary magickal instrument – the one she's most familiar with and probably the last one she'll surrender. It's also her default instrument when dealing with Life, Mind, and Spirit-based spells. She *prays* to her totem-spirit Coyote when improvising off-the-cuff spells. Combining *art* and *fashion* as instruments, Ashpaw crafts her own clothes from pieces of cast-off clothing, fur, bone, and other remnants. She also paints circular designs on things when she's working a ritual (again, *art*), and wears a coyote pelt she calls Lucy Furr, who Ashpaw occasionally feeds, snuggles, and asks for advice (a tool for Mind-based insights and Time-based prophecies). As part of her medicine-work, she employs various *herbs*, including the cannabis and Psilocybin mushrooms (*drugs*) which Ashpaw uses for pain-relief and healing (Life), mental focus (Mind), and sensory expansion (Rank 1 for all of her Spheres).

Like her predatory totem, Ashpaw enjoys eating meat; occasionally, she even kills animals and eats them raw (*cannibalism*), employing their *blood* (often her own as well) in her spells, and incorporating their remains into her clothing. She *dances* herself into trance-states (*meditation*), which she also induces with prayer, fasting, and drugs. A skilled practitioner of *energy-work*, Ashpaw is essentially a psychic vampire (*cannibalism* again), especially when she's using someone else's energy for sustenance and power. *Sex and sensuality* provide perhaps her favorite form of energetic and physical contact, with Ashpaw's vigorous and often bloody approach to sex incorporating biting, clawing, and licking the blood of her paramours. Finally, Ashpaw carries an elaborately carved, leather-wrapped, and crystal-enhanced *staff* that she made out of a branch she found at a Pagan festival. When casting spells, she often employs the staff as her most obvious instrument; otherwise, she uses it for a walking-stick as Ashpaw wanders the country in search of spiritual illumination, playmates, and the occasional bloody meal.


WAKE
UP!

Corvia Delbaeth

Elementalist Witch

Paradigm: *Creation is divine and alive, and all power comes from our gods.*

Practices: Elementalism, medicine-work, and witchcraft

Instruments: Blessings and curses, blood, bodywork, cups and vessels, elements, energy, eye contact, food and drink, group rites, herbs and plants, meditation, prayer, sex and sensuality, voice and vocalizations, weapons

Spheres: Forces, Life, Matter, Prime, Spirit

Sandi's modern witch believes in the Old Gods as literal entities – not as symbols but as spiritual beings in their own right. According to Sandra, Corvia's patron gods are Mab, Brigid, Cernunnos, and the Morrigan. The latter association suggested her craft-name, Corvia; initially, Corvia had chosen the name Badb Catha ("Battle Crow"), but she didn't like the way it sounded as a name, and preferred to be known as a healer rather than as a bringer of death. From a character standpoint, this choice of names also underscores Corvia's magickal emphasis: healing when possible, destruction when need be. Despite her Latin-based name, Corvia's patron gods are all Celtic deities, echoing the preferred element of her Irish /Polish /Germanic heritage. Sure, it's sort of a stereotypical concept for a **Mage** game, but as Sandra knows, stereotypes still have power.

Corvia's primary practices combine traditional medicine-work and Celtic witchcraft with postmodern synergies that incorporate Ayurvedic medicine, European herb-lore, Japanese reiki, and Swedish massage – thus, the instruments of *bodywork*, *energy*, *food and drink*, and various *herbs and plants* tied to her healing practices. Her rituals tend to feature same-faith collaborators (*group rites*) sharing sacred meals (*food and drink*) while working toward a common purpose. When working alone, Corvia practices intense *meditation*, plus *prayers* to her patron deities. Occasionally, when doing something drastic or working with plants or fire, she'll sacrifice her own *blood* in order to emphasize her need for immediate results. More often than not, she speaks her intentions in a ritualistic fashion (*voice and vocalizations*), using quiet *eye contact* to pass on blessings and curses, engage another person, or scry out things she needs to see (in game terms, Rank 1 Effects). *Sex and sensuality*, being communions of the most intimate kind, help Corvia work Prime-based energy-spells and Life-based influence magicks. (See ***Tweaking Chemistry***, ***Invoking Spirit Possession***, and ***Sleep Spells*** in the ***Uncanny Influence*** section of **How Do You *DO* That?**) And although her athame is more of a ritual dagger than a practical *weapon*, it still comes in handy when someone's trying to kill you.

When she's working with the elements, Corvia calls upon the elemental spirits while using her athame to make ritual cuts and sprinkle some *blood* on amounts of the *element(s)* in question. As her name suggests, Corvia also holds an affinity for crows and ravens, summoning them with crow-like cries (again, *voice and vocalizations*) and talking to them as if they were people... which, of course, they are. Unlike hardcore elementalists, Corvia works with all of the traditional Western elements (earth, air, fire, water), rather than dedicating herself to specializing in only one. Thus, she can summon winds and fire, grow plants, conjure water and earth, and perform other spells that reflect her ties to the primal earthly realm.



Dr. Hans von Roth

Mad Gadgeteer

Paradigm: *In a mechanistic cosmos, tech holds all the answers!*

Practices: Craftwork, hypertech, and weird science.

Instruments: Devices and machines, drugs, gadgets and inventions, household tools, money and wealth, vehicles, weapons

Spheres: Correspondence, Forces, Matter, Prime, Time

Ryan wants to whip up a car-obsessed psychedelic Etherite. And so, it begins: the strange genesis of Dr. Hans von Roth, the Ed "Big Daddy" Roth (hence the Etherite's moniker) of twenty-first-century mad science! A restless, deranged genius from Southern California, the future Dr. von Roth had been souping up cars since he was old enough to hold a wrench. His parents owned a prosperous auto-customizing shop, and little Hans grew up learning everything there was to know about cars, bikes, trucks, and so forth. His teenage Enlightenment did nothing to dislodge his first love: modifying the shit out of cars. Now, he turns his considerable skill and fortune into crafting a motor pool's worth of tricked-out crazy machines.

Although he's capable of tossing strange machinery together on the fly (using "*household tools*" which are actually an array of mechanic's tools), Dr. von Roth prefers to tinker in his workshop (again, *household tools*), testing odd theories and bending physics (the Correspondence, Forces, Matter, and Time Spheres) to suit his vision. To fire up his visionary imagination, von Roth chugs smart-drinks, drops acid, and concocts various psychotropic *drugs* that he ingests during marathon work-sessions. Those chemical insights do indeed let him transcend the laws of conventional physics, at the cost of driving him more than a little bugfuck crazy. A seemingly endless array of *devices and machines*, *gadgets and inventions*, frightening *weapons*, and hopped-up *vehicles* fills his workshop – a collection of projects fueled by the *money and wealth* he built up from his parents' own fortune, Unlike his idol Tesla, von Roth is savvy enough to have accumulated a substantial portfolio of patents for his more "conventional" inventions – that is, the ones that don't demand an Awakened owner before they can operate! Thus, he's flush enough to keep the party going for the foreseeable future, a Tony Stark of bizarre automotives for whom the open road is just a playground for his skillful hands and blazing intellect.



Sanjay Sachdeva
Cybernetic Field Operative

Paradigm: *Might is right, and tech holds all answers.*

Practices: Cybernetics, dominion, hypertech, and martial arts.

Instruments: Armor, brain /computer interface, computer gear, cybernetic implants, devices and machines, fashion, management and human resources, money and wealth, social domination, weapons

Spheres: Correspondence, Forces, Mind, Prime

Rahul creates his Iteration X agent to be a covert-operations cyborg, enhanced by training and biotech to consider himself the superior of most (if not all) "normal" human beings. That said, Sanjay Sachdeva is a covert op, not a war-machine. His training and modifications emphasize subtlety and skill over raw violent power.

Sanjay's *armor* is built directly into his body; his *brain-computer interface* and *cybernetic implants* are likewise. These enhancements (which are also ***Enhancements***, as per the Background Trait) allow the agent to remotely access computers, raise his Physical Traits (with Life), repair damage to his biological form (again, Life), and scan things with Rank 1 sensory Effects. *Weapons*, both cybernetic and exterior, allow Sanjay to deal out attacks with Life- (claws) and Forces /Prime-based (energy guns and shock-grasp implants) Effects. When forced to fight, he's got formidable *martial arts* skill as well. That's the obvious cyborg stuff.

On a far subtler level, Sanjay employs psychological tools as instruments of his Mind Sphere Effects: *fashion* (expensive suits and grooming), *money* (a vast credit rating and Technocratic funding), *management and human resources* (backed by his public position as a corporate mover-and-shaker, his secret identity as a Technocratic field agent, and his training as both), and *social domination* techniques (as per that training and his near-inhuman level of confidence in his abilities) focus Sanjay's Mind-based influence. That influence is his major weapon, and often renders his more physical tools unnecessary. (See the wide range of Effects detailed in the ***Uncanny Influence*** section of **How Do You *DO* That?**) His glasses (*fashion* again) access a VDAS datacrawl (see **Mage 20, p. 655-666**), and his briefcase contains a collection of compact hypertech *weapons*, *devices and machines*. Thus, Sanjay can pack one hell of a punch in combat if he must, but prefers to exhibit his innate superiority to the Masses through charm, wealth, and devastating social acumen. Compared to that sort of thing, slung thunderbolts are the mark of rank amateurs.



Tanisha Royale

Martial Artist

Paradigm: *Everything is chaos unless we remember that ancient wisdom is the key.*

Practices: Invigoration, martial arts, and psionics.

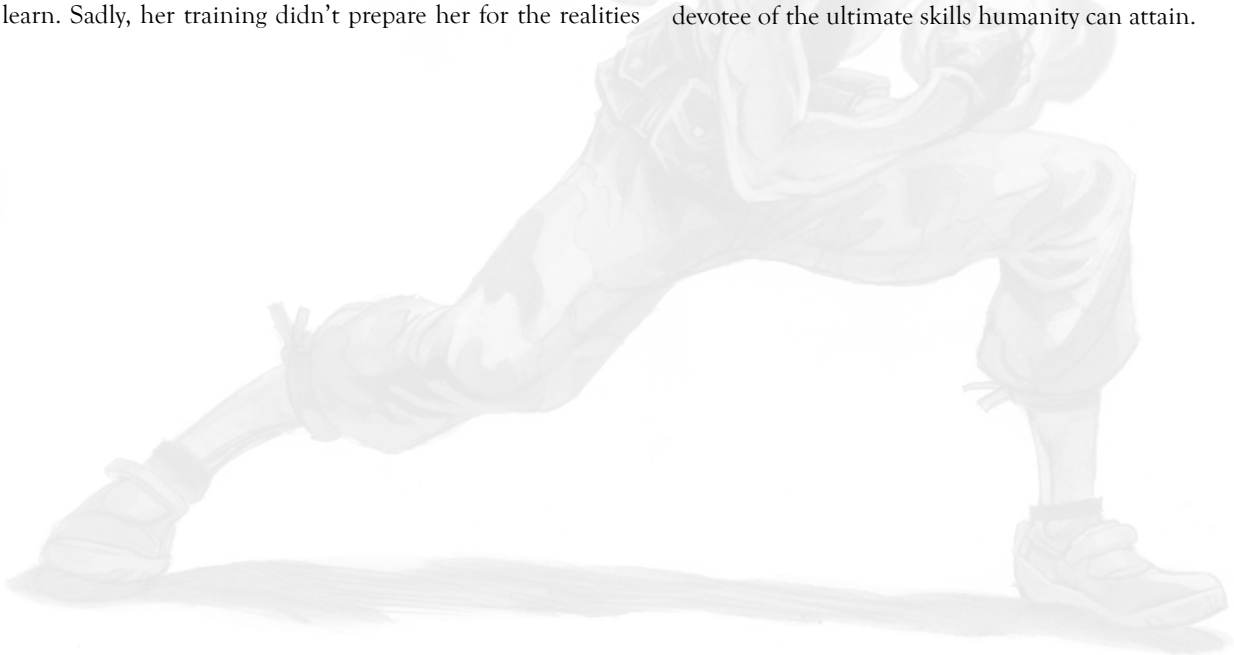
Instruments: Dances and movement, energy, eye contact, food and drink, meditation, ordeals and exertions, social domination, voice and vocalizations, weapons

Spheres: Life, Mind, Prime, Spirit, Time

Our world's insane, and there's nothing you can count on in that crazy world except yourself. That's Abie's real-life philosophy, and so her character Tanisha – who does not consider herself any sort of "mage" even though she's Awakened to the greater truth – specializes in Arts that draw upon and enhance her capabilities through discipline and vigorous hard work.

Raised by a single mom whose own experiences with abuse instilled the importance of martial-arts training in her young daughter, Tanisha was a local champion before she'd hit puberty. She dealt with the usual teenage stresses by pursing a single-minded devotion to Buddhist philosophy and a growing assortment of fighting arts: wu shu, tae kwon do, capoeira, t'ai chi, boxing, wrestling, Muay Thai, Engolo, Escrima, jeet kun do, krav maga... the more she learned, the more she craved to learn. Sadly, her training didn't prepare her for the realities of actual violence, and so Tanisha's first encounter with an assailant who was sincerely trying to harm her shook her so badly that she pushed herself even harder when she recovered from the assault. That stress, in turn, led to her Awakening, and a lifetime pursuit of superhuman skill that soon escalated from physical mastery to the arts of the Enlightened mind.

In game terms, Tanisha employs her martial training (*dances and movement*, *meditation*, *ordeals and exertions*) to access many of the paranormal powers detailed in the ***Martial Arts*** section of **How Do You *DO* That?** Endless katas (again, *movement*), a strict vegetarian diet (*food and drink*), *weapon*-skill, and the occasional kiai shout (*voice and vocalizations*) focus her invigoration and martial-arts practices. Mastery of life-energy allows Tanisha to manipulate Prime through skillful use of chi (*energy*), and her intense focus grants her a charismatic, often-intimidating presence (*social domination*) that she has honed to an art in its own right. Through *eye contact*, she can psyche out opponents (Mind influence), spot openings, and sense phenomena that few people are disciplined enough to perceive (Rank 1 Sphere perceptions). Essentially an atheistic Buddhist, Tanisha believes in nothing except her own abilities and the disciplines of ancient masters. Despite appearances, she's no Akashic disciple, but a devotee of the ultimate skills humanity can attain.





Expanded Paradigms



Belief is a tricky thing. Some folks can find themselves contemplating suicide in order to join an impending alien visitation, while others worship long-dead carpenters or Bronze-Age fertility gods. Paradoxically, our world has opened many of us up to ideas and paradigms that were inconceivable a few decades ago – and yet, that same world has some people scrambling for surety in creeds that were forged by warlike nomads millennia ago.

For mages, whose minds have been opened so far they occasionally fall out and splatter across the floor, the concept of belief is trickier than usual. Again in a paradox, Awakened people are capable of seeing Creation in a much wider vista than most people can conceive of, and yet remain saddled with all the cultural baggage and personal uncertainties they had before they Awakened. Magick's ability to remake "reality" forces a mage into complex philosophical corners, especially when it comes to hashing out the hows and whys behind that ability to rework things that are apparently "real."

The various paradigms presented in **Mage 20**, and below, summarize just a few of the potential belief-systems a mage could employ in order to justify magick, the universe, and everything. And each one has many potential blends and variations ("*I believe that God is an alien in a world that's an illusory prison for other aliens...*") that can take these basic ideas and run with them down corners only you can think of. Even so, a mage's paradigm *must* be able to sustain the weight of that mage's place in a strange and changeable world. Though a given paradigm might seem insane to everybody else (and, especially in the case of Marauders, might actually *be* demented), it has to make sense to the mage in question. A fragile paradigm cannot sustain the strains of magick and Awakening for long.

The following paradigms can be added to the ***Common Mage Paradigms*** presented in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Ten**. And because these belief systems are appearing in a different book, we've also added an ***Associated Practices*** entry to the following paradigms so that you can see a few of the **Mage 20** practices that might incorporate such beliefs into them.

Aliens Make Us What We Are

What we call "magick" is not magical at all. It is science – alien science. Advanced ideas advance humanity, and our ideas come from a source far greater than the human mind – not "god," but the technology of advanced races from the stars. You can see their fingerprints all over human history: pyramids, ley lines, the weird coincidences that reveal more-than-human hands at work in our reality. Yes, you may call such things "divine providence" if you like, but the clear mind recognizes science when we see it. As for the idea of aliens – seriously, is the concept that much more absurd than the genocidal sky-faerie revered by the so-called "people of the book," who worship Iron-Age mythology as if it had some relevance in a world that's left such foolishness behind? Through mathematical probability alone, the idea of higher intelligences visiting here from alien worlds is infinitely greater than the probability of a raging father-god whose grand plans for humanity hinge upon madmen who wandered millennia ago through one of the least hospitable places on earth. You can have your superstitions – your earth-spirits and sky-gods and all that other nonsense. Higher beings *do* exist, the evidence for that conclusion is clear enough, but our benefactors and occasional enemies have been *aliens*, not gods!

To those who accept the existence of advanced intelligences but reject the quaint idea of gods, there's only one acceptable paradigm: alien influence and technology. Certain folks who do believe in "gods" maintain that those supposedly divine beings are (or were) in fact, alien beings from a highly advanced world. On the darker and more nihilistic end of that spectrum, you've got the supposition (or worse still, the certainty) that our "gods" are illusions and that the true "lords of this world" are alien entities of malevolent intent... sleeping now, perhaps, but apt to awaken at any moment and plunge this world back into primordial chaos. The Latin root, *alienus*, means "of or belonging to (an)other," and so regardless of the origins and intentions of these beings, the aliens are not us... and yet, something about us is reliant upon their presence and legacy.

The arguments in favor of alien technology that seems magical to us silly human apes include the apparently drastic uplift of humanity from all other primates, the staggering architectural feats of ancient peoples, the prevalence of alien-like presence throughout history, and the mathematical odds that there's *something else* out there that's not only intelligent but is far more intelligent than we are. For mages who've experienced the Umbral Realms (which many have), the presence of such unearthly landscapes proves the existence of alien worlds and entities. According to the Technocracy, all "spirit worlds" and "Umbrood" are, in fact, extradimensional alien realms and beings that seem, for the most part, to be malignant toward humanity. Alien influence and technology, then, feels like a far more rational and plausible explanation than "magic" or "gods." As a result, this paradigm is especially popular among technomancers of all kinds.

According to this paradigm, Awakened Enlightenment is our perception of alien-inspired consciousness, and "magick" is an understanding of principles and technologies that unEnlightened humans cannot grasp. The Avatar /Genius, then, is either an alien in telepathic contact with the mage, or else is a reflection of the mage's own alien self. To some folks who adhere to this belief, we are aliens too... descendants, perhaps, of some greater race (which may or may not have had our best interests at heart) or their servitors. The legends we think we

know are actually stories about alien visitations, garbled by millennia of folklore and flawed, egotistical translations. The reputed Pure Ones were extraterrestrial voyagers or exiles, and they passed their knowledge down to us in a form we now consider to be magick. Those "magical treasures" uncovered amidst ruins and forgotten archives are technological devices and texts. Maybe Jesus or Lucifer were aliens. Or aliens parted the Red Sea for Moses, dictated the Quran, Analects, and Ramayana, or raised the pyramids with technologies humanity still cannot grasp. Those ideas may be blasphemy to most folks, but alien-intelligence experts consider them to be just the tip of an extraterrestrial (or maybe extradimensional) iceberg. From Atlantis to Area 51 and beyond, aliens guide us, direct us, perhaps feed on us, and may well destroy us. (All that "lizard-people" stuff seems pretty reasonable once you've had a glimpse behind the scenes at the World of Darkness, doesn't it...?) As a paradigm, then, *Aliens Make Us What We Are* lays most, if not all, of the Awakened world and its mysteries into the oddly comforting embrace of advanced intelligences, with "ascension" as it were, being the final reconciliation between a human "mage" and the true masters of the human realm.

Associated Practices: Chaos magick (which has plenty of weird ties to Lovecraft and UFOs), craftwork (replicating alien manufacture, of course!), crazy wisdom, cybernetics, faith (in godlike aliens and /or alien gods), god-bonding (likewise), hypertech, invigoration, maleficia (especially of the "secrets from the Void" variety), martial arts (alien fighting techniques), mediumship (channeling alien entities), psionics, reality hacking, weird science, and postmodern variations on yoga

All Power Comes from God(s)

"Awakening" is a lie. In reality, a mage's power comes from God or His Adversary. A mage is merely the human conduit for Divine or infernal essence. All mages are thus pieces in a game of cosmic forces – *favored* pieces, to be sure, but still vessels of their patron's will. A mage, then, must remain reverent of her maker, grateful for her powers, and open to the call of That Whom She Serves. By extension, though, a mage who does not serve the proper godhead probably serves a rival god... or worse, the rebel Adversary who opposes God and therefore becomes anathema to all good servants of the Lord.

In a slightly different light, that mage might draw her powers from a deep sense of love for her god. Rather than being a pawn, she's a devotee – perhaps even, as with the Sufi saint Rabia Basri, a chaste "lover" of her god. (In certain Pagan and Hindu traditions, there's nothing chaste about that love at all – it's divinely erotic instead.) Divine power still flows through that person, but it comes as a gift of love, not a mark of ownership.

The obvious paradigm for deeply religious mages, this belief-system rejects the idea that magick comes from the mage herself. Under this assumption, Awakening, the Avatar, Seekings, the Spheres, and even the Willpower Trait all become manifestations of the mage's divine patron. It's the power of God, Goddess, or the Gods that flows through the mage; that human vessel can strengthen or weaken her devotion and belief, but the ebb and flow of power are beyond her. Although this view presents a radical departure from the self-oriented mechanics of **Mage**'s magick system, the character's belief system rejects the idea that the mage controls her mystical abilities. Instead, it's her bond with Divinity that allows her to employ those abilities. And while **Mage**'s rules don't require a tie to godhead before a mage can access their magick, that mage's own beliefs may deny her such access if she feels she has broken faith with her god. (See the Flaw: ***Faithless***, p. 93.)

Obviously, a player who selects this paradigm must have a comprehensive concept of the mage's godhead and its associated demands. Roleplaying that set of beliefs provides an essential part of this paradigm; it's vital to *all* of them, really, but most especially to a belief-system that asserts a deity's favor as the source of a mage's power. If the mage stumbles from her Path, then she'll be called to task by her god(s), if only because her own mind insists that it must be so. And because many gods can be rather bloodthirsty (even the supposedly "good ones"), a true believer in this paradigm has another name to folks who might not share her faith: *fanatic*, with all the potential excess that word implies.

Associated Practices: Dominion, faith, god-bonding (obviously), gutter magick (those in the gutter are often those with the most faith in their divinity), High Ritual Magick (which often demands obedience to God as part of the ritual requirements), maleficia (so *about* those bloody-minded gods...), martial arts ("*I kick ass for the Lord!*"), medicine-work (often tied to faith in the Creator), Voudoun (in which most power flows from your connection to the Loa), witchcraft (the Old Gods)

All the World's a Stage

Maybe the Bard wasn't being poetic when he expressed the idea of the world as a stage for actors playing our roles. Perhaps we really *are* acting out a pre-arranged show for the entertainment of cosmic voyeurs. Certain predeterminist religious creeds, after all, insist that God already has a predestined plan for everyone and everything, and by such reasoning we *are* all playing out roles and stories that make sense only if you see the *really* Big Picture. On a more jaded note, it's not inconceivable to think that the world as we know it is an epic reality TV show that's being staged for the benefit of immortal viewers. We could be a huge *Truman Show* production wherein we remain stuck with a nagging perception that there's more going on than we're allowed to see. To all these variations of a paradigm, mages are the folks who get a glimpse backstage, and who get to chew the scenery in ways that few other "actors" can match.

A peculiar take on Gnosticism, the world-stage paradigm assumes that magick comes either from a favored place in the production, a realization that this *is* all a big show, or both. A mage might see himself as a dude who got a glance at the stage directions... or who slept with the casting director... or who's especially good at upstaging everyone else while improvising

like mad. The improvisational aspect of **Mage**'s magick system fits this idea especially well, as **Mage**'s rules *are* based upon an improvisational approach to magick. (See the section about ***Improvisational Storytelling*** in **Mage 20**, **pp. 342-343**.) Even without improvisation, though, the idea that you're an actor in a cosmic drama (or perhaps a really dark comedy) is a powerful one, most especially in this era of movies, TV, and other mass-media productions. Given the deliberately staged nature of life in the twenty-first century, doesn't that paradigm make a frightening amount of sense?

If you really want to get meta, this paradigm literally *is* true for roleplaying game characters. Their world *is* a stage, and they *are* roles being acted out by players. Perhaps a few characters realize this, and – Deadpool-like – even comment on their situation. Sure, that seems insane to everybody else (see ***The Mad Masque?*** in **Mage 20**'s section about ***The Mad***, **p. 243**), but when that conceit reveals the true nature of the characters' situation, the mage who recognizes it certainly understands more about their world than one who does not.

Associated Practices: The Art of Desire, bardism, crazy wisdom (once you've seen the truth, you're crazy), dominion, gutter magick (this puts the senselessness of life into perspective), hypertech, invigoration ("*act well your part – there all the honor lies!*"), mediumship (in connection with the *real* audience), psionics, reality hacking ("*because* ***I've*** *got the script, motherfuckers!*"), weird science

Ancient Wisdom is the Key

The ancients understood more about reality than we ever will. Guided by profound insights –possibly also by alien helpmates, divine helpmates, or divine helpmates who were actually aliens – the primordial civilizations (Mu, Meru, Atlantis, Hyperborea, or whatever names those ancient peoples used to define themselves) employed advanced arts and/or technologies that have since been lost to all but a handful of modern folk. The mages who've uncovered those secrets, though, can use them to advance their understanding of reality and unlock the doors to vast understanding.

According to this paradigm – one that's especially favored by certain Etherite factions, throwback technomancers, Theosophists, "ancient world" mystics, and, of course, the Akashayana – the decadent modern era has lost sight of true wisdom. Only by returning to the legacies of cultures that have been "lost" to the view of conventional history can a person achieve true enlightenment. Shortcuts exist, of course – otherwise *all* mages would pursue those ancient practices, which clearly isn't true. Those shortcuts, though, contain the taint of corruption and the self-imposed limitations of decadence. Only the Revered Ancients possessed the purest sort of insight (see the **Mage 20** paradigm ***Bring Back the Golden Age***), and so only the mages who grasp such concepts may truly Ascend.

What sort of wisdom did those ancients possess? That really depends upon who you ask. Certain cultures, such as Atlantis, were renowned for advanced technology – tech that may appear "magical" to the uninitiated, and which might have caused the downfall of their civilization. Others, such as the "perfection" of Mount Meru, embraced metaphysical disciplines which brought fallible people closer to spiritual attunement. Psychic refinements, chemical compounds, achievements of musical harmony... all these tools are reputed to have been among the treasures of the ancient world. Some mages favor a single form of discipline (such as ***psionics*** – see **pp. 203-204**), while others employ a wide range of techniques and technologies that supposedly originate among the ancient culture of choice. The **Chronicles of Darkness** game **Mage: The Awakening** features a wide range of practices that are rooted in an ancient world, and although that magick system is not suited to the rules of **Mage: The Ascension**, a player who enjoys both games could adopt story elements from one to fit the rules of the other. (See the **Mage Translation Guide** for suggestions and details.) The **Revised Edition Sons of Ether Tradition Book** features Etherite scientists who favor ancient technologies, and the legendary Doc Eon included such secrets among his mental, physical, and technological arsenal. The Akashic Art of Do is reputed to preserve an unbroken legacy from the earliest days of human civilization, and the horrific Arts of certain Nephandi are said to employ the lore of demon-haunted cities and the implacable primal Void. The ancients, it seems, had a good *many* secrets... and if a modern mage can find wisdom among them, then that mage will light the shadows of the present with the fire of the past.

Associated Practices: Alchemy, animalism ("*the Oldest Ways are best!*"), bardism (Atlantean, Greek, and Chinese musicology), craftwork, crazy wisdom, dominion, elementalism, god-bonding, High Ritual Magick, invigoration, maleficia (those Old Gods could be pretty nasty...), medicine-work ("*Your 'modern medicine' is lies and profits!*"), mediumship, psionics ("*ancient secrets of the mind*"), shamanism, witchcraft, yoga

Consciousness is the Only True Reality

"Reality" is the construct of our perceptual experiences. Rather than an objective existence that appears more or less as we perceive it whether or not we're there to observe it (the old "*if a tree falls in the forest*" argument), the universe is actually an interplay of energies whose perceived forms come from the interplay of consciousness, perception, and interpretation. In plain English, we exist within a hallucination whose form is dictated by what we think it is, because "thought" is the only true measure of what is and is not "real."

A scientific variation on the ***Everything's an Illusion*** paradigm (**Mage 20**, **p. 570**), this model of reality asserts that everything we experience as "real" comes from our perception of what's going on. Because certain perceptions are commonly observed (rocks are hard, we walk on the ground, and so forth), our interactions within this mental construct are fairly constant, measurable, and communicable. Radical shifts in perception and experience, however, radically shift reality as well. I, for example, can say "*I have a headache*," and

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you can relate to that experience because you've had one too; neither headache, though, can be measured by an outside source – scans can track dilating blood vessels, brain synapses, and so on, but only I know what my headaches feels like, and only you know what your headache feels like. The reality of those headaches is "all in our heads," so to speak. So are the color red, the sound of eagle cries, and the sensation of skin on skin. Memories are even more ephemeral, immeasurable by any "objective" form of observation or quantification, and yet "real" enough to cause physiological changes that *are* measurable. Such phenomena are all indisputably "real," yet possess no material substance. Materialists assert that only the physical realm is "real," but that clearly is not true. The existence of the Digital Web and its mundane shadow, the Internet, prove as much.

Jeeze, no *wonder* we've got headaches!

Mages who assert this paradigm tend to be... well, "heady" *is* the right word for them! They speak in paradoxes, often employing terms that sound like a graduate student thesis on particle physics, as puked up by Carlos Castaneda during a midnight showing of *The Matrix*. Typically blending technological practices and instruments with brain-breaking mathematics and Asian metaphysics, these devotees of consciousness gravitate toward the Mercurial fringes of the Virtual Adepts, the more esoteric sorts of Etherites, and the tech-infused Ecstatic Cultists. That said, you'll find this paradigm being argued among visionary Technocratic operatives too, especially on the fringes of Iteration X, the NWO, and the Void Engineers – Conventions whose sciences depend upon the interplay of physical and experiential realities. Syndicate "magic men" have no problem accepting this paradigm either – money, after all, is a completely artificial reality structure whose entire value rests within a human comprehension of its worth. And so, despite the often confusing tenets of this paradigm, it's a fairly common one among mages in the twenty-first century. "Magick," according to such beliefs, is simply the Art and Science of adjusting one's circumstances with the power of one's consciousness, often by skewing one's perceptions (and thus, by extension, consciousness) with drugs, music, meditation, mind-games, perception-altering technology, and similar methods of changing preconceptions to forge a new reality. And isn't that more or less what Good Ol' Uncle Al was talking about all along...?

Associated Practices: Alchemy (especially among all types of Solificati), Art of Desire /hypereconimics ("*It's all about what you* ***think*** *it's worth...*"), chaos magick, crazy wisdom (obviously), dominion (ditto that), High Ritual Magick (which is often all about changing one's perceptions of "*What* ***is***" into "*What I* ***want*** *it to become*"), hypertech, invigoration, martial arts, psionics, reality hacking (for which this paradigm is kind of a foundation), yoga (going back to the roots of the idea in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy)

Embrace the Threshold

We're on the cusp of transformation. *That Which Is* is giving way to *That Which Will Be*, and folks who can't make the transition will be left behind. Power, then, belongs to those who embrace the threshold and ride the changes into a fast-coming dawn. The old will fall to the new, and all we think we know will become the lost fragments of a dying world. Generally, this paradigm fits into another broad model of belief – typically one based on gods, technology, or a "reality revision" enacted through changing consciousness or rediscovered wonders.

And because so many mages idealize a form of global Ascension, this threshold could be seen as impending Ascension on a grand scale.

A simultaneously ominous yet optimistic paradigm, this creed asserts that the world as it has been known is finished. Old magicks will be replaced by fresh miracles of faith or science. Apocalyptic monotheists view this as the End Times for a sinful world that will be purged of evil and set aside for the Chosen People. Futurists view it as the Singularity, wherein a buggy Reality 1.5 gets upgraded by a miraculous global paradigm shift. Transhuman visionaries see us shifting into an uplifted state and /or a significantly higher evolutionary stage, while oppressed peoples see their conquerors ground under the cosmic Wheel when the Ancestors return and everything is made right again. Hindu mystics look to the end of our Kali Yuga and the dawn of a rejuvenated Satya Yuga, when sublime truth and righteousness are reborn into our cosmos. Alien visitations, the unearthing of lost ancient secrets, psychic or physiological mutation – the threshold could be many different things. For mages who welcome the coming transformation, though, their Arts and Sciences tap into the coming shift and embody the new era.

Sadly, the current world first needs to perish – things need to get worse before they'll transform. In Western alchemical terms, this process involves the *dissolution* of the old world (wherein the old forms are broken down), the *separation* of unworthy elements (during which the flaws are burnt away), and the *conjunction* of purified elements into a refined, superior form. Small wonder, then, that this paradigm is popular among alchemists, especially ones from the Solificati branches of both the Order of Hermes and the Disparate Alliance. Perhaps, through this refinement, the fragmented bits of that venerable order can finally return to a unified, and much stronger, state of being... one that, perhaps, will lead the survivors of other magickal societies into the rising glory of a transformed age.

Associated Practices: Alchemy, chaos magick, crazy wisdom, cybernetics, gutter magick (for obvious reasons), faith, maleficia (working to bring about that ending), psionics, reality hacking, yoga

A Holographic Reality

"Matter" is energy, shaped by our perceptions into the illusion of solidity. What we perceive as reality is in fact a holographic illusion of a greater Reality that exists at the edge of human awareness. Every element of this illusion is preserved in every other one, resulting in an infinite replication from which nothing is truly lost or destroyed. Although we catch glimpses of the truth in fleeting phenomena (déjà vu, precognition, telepathic contact, synchronicity, and other related "impossibilities"), human existence as we know it demands limitations on what we can perceive. Awakening, however, removes the need for such binding and arbitrary limits. Ascension, then, involves opening one's self to the infinite truth and realizing that everything we "know" is ultimately without substance, for All is One.

A scientific perspective of the *Everything's an Illusion* and *Creation's Divine and Alive* paradigms, the holographic reality concept draws from quantum physics experiments within the last few decades. According to neurophysiologist Karl Pribram, the world as we know it is a "world of appearances," refined by human consciousness from a vast spectrum of interacting wave-forms. Although this world of appearances is "real" in most senses – inflicting boundaries upon what we can and cannot do within that world – it's essentially a projection of a boundless interplay of energies that we set into "form" through our consciousness. Within this paradigm, "magick" (by any name) involves a recognition of, and an ability to manipulate, our world of appearances. Such feats, of course, are not supernaturalism, but *science!* Sure, ancient mystics may have first conceived of the truth, but it took science to prove its validity.

Whether or not you consider this concept to be a paradigm in its own right, or simply a new spin on an old idea, is really up to the player and her Storyteller. Even so, the holographic reality concept – detailed in Michael Talbot's now-classic book *The Holographic Universe* – features a growing body of scientific research behind it. A character who embraces this paradigm (and who's familiar with that research) can spin dazzling webs of implacable techno-logic to support her work... and since the theory has at least one example of conclusive proof in the existence of the Digital Web, this paradigm enjoys surging popularity among twenty-first-century mages – mystic and technomancer alike!

Associated Practices: Chaos magick, crazy wisdom, cybernetics, hypertech, reality hacking, weird science, witchcraft (in its newest forms), yoga (likewise)

Transcend Your Limits

We are, according to this paradigm, beings of unfathomable power and potential. They more we believe we can do, the more we are capable of doing. Humanity's blessing is its ability to change the circumstances of our existence, and our curse is to remain blind to that ability... or worse yet, to fear it and allow ourselves to be shackled by that fear. Perhaps the most coherent expression of the Ecstatic creed, this paradigm asserts that the greatest – perhaps the only – boundaries on our potential are the limitations we place upon ourselves or have placed on us by others. Magick, then, is the realization of greater potential, the willingness (and *Will*-ingness) to expand our selves, and the results of doing so.

On a lot of levels, this creed is obviously true. Humanity has consistently transcended our circumstances by innovating tools, language, culture, technology, and other instruments of change. When trapped, we look for ways to escape; when unsatisfied, we seek new horizons. Even now, in a world transformed beyond the dreams and nightmares of previous generations, we're endlessly looking for new ways to hack our limitations and become even bigger and better than we believe is possible. Small wonder, then, that many mages accept this paradigm as a given whether they phrase their beliefs this way or not.

Ancestor Veneration

We are the beneficiaries of those who went before us. Having passed on to a greater state, our ancestors now watch over us from the spirit realm. When angered or neglected, they bring misfortune upon the living. But when venerated and revered, they bestow the gifts of their spiritual state upon respectful descendants, and act as intermediaries between the Great Mystery and their mortal relations.

A fundamental element of many cultural traditions, the veneration of ancestors is more of an honored observance than a magic(k)al paradigm per se. Still, the idea that a living mortal can gain insight and power from those who have passed beyond is one of the pillars of necromancy, certain forms of shamanism, and the Catholic (and Catholic-derived) practice of petitioning saints, Loa, and other revered predecessors for assistance. According to such beliefs, people who've gone before us possess a connection to Divinity that living human beings lack. If you take care of them – maintaining their shrines, respecting their legacies, assuring them that they haven't been forgotten, maybe even providing them with food and other refreshments – they'll take care of you. Under this assumption, the current age is built upon the presence of our ancestors. A strong link to the spirits of the past, therefore, provides a stronger position in the present.

In terms of **Mage** rules, ancestor veneration is kind of a cross between a paradigm and a practice: it's something you do because you believe it's how the world works. A character who venerates his ancestors sets up a shrine or other area of remembrance (a collection of photos, a tombstone, jars of ashes, etc.), spends a few minutes every day or so paying homage (possibly dedicating whole days to the honored dead on certain events like birthdays, remembrance days, or holidays like Halloween or Día de Muertos), and respects their memory through word and deed. Many cultures leave offerings of food and drink, throw parties, burn incense, pray to the ancestors, tend places that are important to those bygone folk, and protect their memories from the ravages of time and oblivion.

(Speaking of oblivion, such venerations may become *Fetters* to those ancestral ghosts, as described throughout the **Wraith: The Oblivion** series, and in **How Do You *DO* That?**, **p. 86**. Performing acts of necromancy upon your ancestors, however, is considered to be a very bad idea, as it's not terribly respectful to Those Who've Gone Before You.)

As a practice, ancestor veneration is especially common among Asian, African, and Central and South American cultures. That said, most cultures believe in honoring their dead, if only at certain times of the year. Even atheistic people (and mages) may observe a non-spiritual sort of remembrance for their forebears, and while such observations lack the metaphysical trappings of spiritual veneration, they can be just as heartfelt ("*Damn, Dad, I really miss you today...*") as any Day of the Dead offering.

Associated Practices: Bardism, faith, medicine-work, mediumship, shamanism, Voudoun, witchcraft

To live utterly without limits, however, is not just impractical – it is literally madness. The Marauders demonstrate that principle, and even *they* experience certain limitations even though the boundaries of the Mad are not the boundaries most mages understand. It's been said that human beings (and other living organisms too) perceive the world through limitations simply because we need to be able to function in it. If Creation is infinite – as it apparently seems to be – then by definition it can't be perceived as anything *less* than infinite unless you break it down into comprehensible – and thus, limited – divisions which can then be moved, held, stood upon, spoken of, apprehended and maneuvered in ways that we limited beings can understand... at which point, we've imposed boundaries on infinity again. The only way, it seems, to truly transcend our limitations is to stop being what we are and become something boundless and indefinable – that is, as far as many mages see it, to stop being human and Ascend to an infinite state.

On a far less grand scale, a life without limits is a life without laws, ethics, or concerns for anyone other than one's own self. And that makes one dangerous. Sure, the outlaw ideal looks glamorous until some dude who "believes in living without limits" has stolen your wallet, raped your dog, and shit on your carpet because "there *are* no limits, man!" A large part of a sociopath's charm is that she seems like such a rebel, and encourages you to be that way too... until you find yourself at the verge of becoming someone you don't ever want to be, and she's right there urging you to jump off that edge, no matter what it costs you or the people around you. (Yes, this author speaks from personal experience there.) A magick-using sociopath can be the most terrifying creature imaginable, because the only boundaries on such a mage's behavior are the ones she places on herself, and the ones other mages have the power to impose upon her. The Cult of Ecstasy recognized this fact long ago, and the Code of Ananda exists because a person without *any* limits may soon become a monster, and a mage without them, even worse, destroying everything and everyone around him simply because he *can*.

To adherents of certain Left-Hand Path practices – especially those connected to Qliphothic High Ritual Magick, esoteric Satanism, and the adherents of Aghori-style yoga and Tantra – expansion beyond moral, social, psychological, and physical limits is essential to the Path of self-godhood. In this paradigm, the practitioner deliberately smashes every taboo, including his own, as a way to shatter boundaries and attain the Absolute wherein, as Hassan bin Sabbah is reputed to have said, "nothing is forbidden, and everything is permitted." (That

saying often gets translated instead into *Nothing is real, everything is permitted*, which, if nothing else, shows how often the Beatles get drawn – justifiably so – into metaphysical discussions.) On many levels, this is simply a metaphysical extension of the *Might is Right* philosophy, taken to its cosmological extreme. By approaching all limits "without terror" (a rough translation of the Sanskrit word *aghora*), the devotee "breaks on through the other side" and experiences all Creation as a god. The Nephandi embrace this paradigm, of course, but they're not the only folks who do. Even certain Akashayana and Chakravanti practice this forbidden Path... *very* secretly... and the Gnostic/Hermetic doctrine of *antinomian praxis* (the practice of breaking the law in order understand one's self more fully) embraces it as well.

(Certain mystics who pursue a Kabbalistic approach to metaphysics point out that The One became the Many in a deliberate quest by Divinity to know Itself more thoroughly. Thus, to that line of thinking, even God breaks its own rules when seeking greater Truths – and so, by extension, must we. Saying such things aloud, however, is still a good way to get yourself into very hot water.)

For obvious reasons, this is a hard paradigm to pursue for long. Even so, the core principle – ironically, *within limits* – is a fundamental concept in many esoteric Paths. Living as if there are no limits other than the ones you decide to place upon yourself for safety and sanity's sake, then, is a common ideal among the wilder sorts of mages... anathema to the Technocracy, of course, but tolerated within the Traditions and Disparates to a certain (again, limited) extent, so long as the mage in question doesn't make a nuisance of herself. As Bob Dylan said, "to live outside the law, you must be honest," and so this paradigm demands a clear understanding of one's self, an acceptance of consequences, and the sort of compassion for others that will hopefully keep the mage from becoming an abomination to everything she reveres.

Associated Practices: The Art of Desire/hypereconomics, bardism, crazy wisdom, dominion, High Ritual Magick, invigoration, maleficia, psionics, reality hacking, Voudoun, witchcraft (shadow-work in particular), yoga (Left-Hand Path varieties)

Turning the Keys to Reality

Creation is full of wondrous keys, left by the Creator so that his favored children might unlock the secrets he has left for them to find. Rocks, plants, designs, calculations – such traces of the Great Equation become tools for the Awakened. Initiates into these sacred Mysteries may employ them to further the designs of God. Other mages, less aware and far less scrupulous, carve shortcuts or wrangle servants or enemies of God so as to steal those treasures and use them for selfish and unworthy ends.

Obviously an elitist paradigm, this creed assumes that a higher intelligence – sometimes known as the *Divine Watchmaker*, *the Architect*, or *the Maker* – created the cosmos and assigned certain human beings (other entities too, perhaps) to safeguard Creation and keep it running smoothly. This Creator probably has better things to do these days, hence the keys he gave his elect servants. Some mages regard themselves as chosen people, destined to serve the Creator through his specific command; others view themselves as seekers and finders of touchstones through which we were meant to guide the universe when we become wise enough to understand that inheritance. A variation on the *Mechanistic Cosmos* and *Everything is Data* paradigms, this mode of thinking assumes that the Spheres, practices, and instruments are deliberately crafted elements that a mage can use once she understands what they are and how they might be employed.

Most classical High Ritual Magick forms – especially those used by the Wu Lung and Hermetic Houses – assume a "keys to reality" approach, often merging it with other paradigms such as *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, *All Power Comes from God(s)*, and the two creeds mentioned above. Technomancers, too, work this paradigm into their belief-systems, often regarding the sublime interplay of chemicals and physics to be the reality-keys in question. Modern Western science, in fact, originated in this belief; Catholic monks, far from being enemies of science, devoted intense study to natural phenomena, regarding such studies as a path to better understanding their Lord and his works. Islamic imams and Jewish rabbis likewise viewed science as a form of spiritual devotion, and Taoist alchemists did so as well. The Hindu discipline of *Ayurveda*, "life-knowledge," is said to have been transmitted by the gods themselves. Thus, technology and spirituality become one within this paradigm.

Because the emphasis in this worldview is on the keys rather than the creator, this paradigm can be divorced from a spiritual context and employed in an atheistic or agnostic context too. In this case, the keys are objects, forces, and principles that contain power in and of themselves. A savvy person, then, can master these elements and unlock the deeper possibilities of the cosmos. Again, though, this essentially collapses the *Mechanistic Cosmos* and *Everything is Data* paradigms into a single model of reality.

In all variation of this creed, magick and /or hypertech comes from a proper understanding of the keys – the "turning" of them if you will. A mage then – by any label – is someone with a ring of keys that can unlock wonders the Masses will never comprehend. Paradox arises from a flawed understanding of those keys, or perhaps from trying to forces the locks and therefore breaking off the key in your hand. The practices and instruments of this paradigm access the keys... or even, in the case of certain instruments, are themselves the keys. Ascension, therefore, becomes a matter of comprehending on a soul-deep level that *you* are the ultimate key, and that all other keys are shadows of the power within yourself.

Associated Practices: Alchemy, the Art of Desire, craftwork, dominion, elementalism, god-bonding, High Ritual Magick, invigoration, medicine-work, psionics, reality hacking, yoga

We are Meant to be Wild

Civilization is a lie. Technology is a crutch whose employment makes us weak. We are animals, meant to live by our wits and our strength. The suffocating constraints of society and consumption are killing the human spirit and taking the rest of the world down with us. Only if and when we escape our man-made prison can we unlock our true potential. Until then, we're on that *One-Way Trip to Oblivion*, and only the fiercest and most purely primal among us will survive the coming implosion of the current age.

Embraced by the most extreme Verbenae, Dreamspeakers, and Kopa Loei (and certain anarcho-primitivist Ecstatics and Adepts), this paradigm casts a baleful eye on the works of the mighty; instead of despairing, however, the folk who follow this perspective favor their animal state, forsaking all but the most basic tools and conveniences. Language is okay, as are herbal medicines and a certain degree of personal hygiene. (When left to their own devices, most animals – as such people point out – keep themselves as clean as their environment permits. Serious filth, they insist, comes from human cages, farms, and overcrowding, not from the behavior animals conduct in the wild.) Clothing and other tools are kept to a literally bare minimum, and high-tech toys – cars, computers, and so forth – are anathema to the most radical of such mages. Plenty of other people (Awakened and Sleeper alike) honor this paradigm through rhetorical observance but not actual behavior; they might spend all their time in front of computers, reading books, and eating fast food, but by all the gods, they're ready (or so they claim) for civilization to fall so that they can return to an enlightened feral ideal.

Similar to the *Might is Right* paradigm, this creed stresses physical fitness, sensual awareness, connection to the natural world, and a renunciation of technological conveniences. In this case, though, the emphasis is on balance with Nature, rather than the conquest of everything in sight. This "romantic primitivism" often favors the most Pagan sorts of deities – Gaia, Pan, Ahsonnutli, and the like – but sometimes employs an atheistic "noble savage" ideal instead. (cf. Tarzan, Conan, Princess Mononoke, etc.) Magick, for devotees of this paradigm, comes from that connection to a primal birthright, and the potential of a human animal in her natural state.

Obviously, though, magick also comes from aberrations of that state – technological poisons contrived by upjumped apes who've been too clever for our own good. And so, while this perspective denies the Manichean dualism that drives many religious paradigms, it *does* have a sort of Good /Evil axis that exalts primitivism while spitting on technology and the folks who use it. Tech-based mages, then – especially those from the Technocracy and other hypertech sects – personify everything that's wrong with the world... and quite often wind up painted as the devils wrecking a primal paradise. At their very best, technomancers are considered lazy bastards tromping through Eden; more often, they're considered a potentially lethal disease whose cure involves either renunciation or annihilation. Obviously, mages who subscribe to this paradigm avoid tech-based practices or instruments. Their Arts hail from the Old Ways – and the older, the better! At its most extreme levels, this creed demands a purely physical form of magick: meditation, ordeals, bodywork, sex, natural drugs, and many forms of sacrifice. Nature, ideally, asserts a balance, and the more you would demand from Her, the more you must be willing to give up to attain it.

Associated Practices: Animalism, crazy wisdom, dominion, elementalism, invigoration, shamanism, witchcraft, yoga

We Are *NOT* Men!

Maybe we're not human. Perhaps the Awakened are either the inheritors of a superior form of humanity – a Coming Race, a divine bloodline, an advanced mutation, and so forth – or they're actually a separate race of people: aliens, maybe, or descendants of gods, or some other form of blessed exemplars who are inherently superhuman. Awakening, therefore, is not something that mundane people can attain, no matter how hard they try. Mages are members of entirely different human species or iteration, and are therefore better than the Masses by default.

According to this paradigm, the Avatar and its powers are proof that mages do not fit the standard definition of "human." Like vampires and other paranormal entities, they're some other form of being, and therefore are not bound by the usual limitations of ethics or mortality. It's both their duty and their birthright to lead, transform, and conquer the Masses, and while they might look and act like those lesser beings, mages should not deceive themselves into thinking that they're "just like everybody else." They're *not* human, and so they shouldn't feel obligated to pretend otherwise.

A cornerstone belief for Übermensch types, "master race" adherents, transhumanism advocates, superhero fans, and alien-uplift theoreticians, this paradigm insists that a mage (or at least the mage who holds this belief in himself) is inherently superhuman, and is thus unbound by human concerns. Though related to the *Might is Right* paradigm, it's less defined by one's personal power than by the idea that the Awakened are innately elevated about mortal humanity by virtue of *who they are*, not *what they do*. Nevertheless, an innately superior being should act the part, right? Thus, many folks who assert this paradigm behave as if they're elevated above the common herd – which, given the labels that many mages apply to the "Sleepers" and "Masses," doesn't make them nearly as unusual as you might initially assume.

An apparently "nicer" (though it really isn't especially nice in practice) variation on this idea asserts that mages are the inheritors of "true humanity" – the heirs of a grander era of human accomplishment that was swept away by barbarism. Helena Blavatsky's concept of ***Ascended Masters*** (see p. 289) reaches toward this approach, though the Akashayana doctrine of Mount Meru and that group's assertion that they're the true descendants of that "first humanity" epitomizes it. On a more

ominous note, the proto-Nazi Thule-Gesellschaft embraced that idea emphatically... and we all know where *that* led. Throughout history, people who assert racial superiority and /or caste systems have maintained that they (of course!) belong to an elite strain of humanity that should not be subject to conventional limitations any more than human beings should be leashed like dogs. And while such elite people usually claim they've got humanity's best interests at heart, those interests always seem to benefit those people more than they benefit the rest of us.

At the other end of the evolutionary scale, this paradigm also includes the transhumanists and mutant-theorists who assert – perhaps correctly – that humanity is evolving past its animal beginnings toward an increasingly advanced state. Plenty of Technocrats and other tech-based mages hold this paradigm, crediting their ability to perform paranormal acts to the fact that they have evolved (or have been upgraded by technology) to a new evolutionary state. Many Progenitors and Virtual Adepts – especially those Adepts who favor the Mercurial Elite identity – embrace this evolutionary paradigm, and view it as the source of their Enlightened abilities. The transhumanist label itself refers to this belief, and so although the idea might not make a mage popular among "mere" humans... many of whom might be her Awakened colleagues... it's a paradigm with both primordial and futuristic appeal.

Folks with this sort of belief system tend to be elitist by default – after all, they literally *do* believe they're better than everybody else. Phrases like *herd*, *sheeple* and *monkeymass* are among the kinder things they'll say about humanity in general. Even the more apparently altruistic individuals look down upon the Masses with pity, not identification. As a result, such mages really are rather "alienated," and they don't tend to be especially popular with most people unless they're extraordinarily charismatic and well-versed in people-skills. Even then, those traits come from a position of assumed separation – perhaps compassionate, often contemptuous, and never truly connecting with most other human beings. Add to that attitude the idea that they could actually be *right*, and you've got a paradigm that explains a great deal about Awakened powers and yet puts a mage forever outside the mundane human realm.

Associated Practices: The Art of Desire /hypereconomics, cybernetics, dominion, High Ritual Magick, hypertech, invigoration, martial arts, psionics, reality hacking, weird science

We're All God(s) in Disguise

Separation is an illusion. Behind that façade, we are all One, and that One is Divine. Magick is the acceptance of our divinity, and Awakening is the realization of that state. While the Sleeping Masses remain unaware of this sublime truth, we are able to recognize our innate godliness. Although imperfect understanding still limits our perceptions of inherent divinity (resulting in Paradox and other restrictions on our divine inheritance), we have begun to grasp our essential nature – one Spirit, one Enlightenment, one Ascension.

Shared by many members of the Celestial Chorus, Akashayana, Chakravanti, Verbena, and Sahajyia... even a handful of Solificati, and other members of the original Council... this paradigm provided the initial foundation for the Traditions as a whole. It was this recognition of shared godhood that allowed such a diverse collection of magical folk to join together in unity. Although similar paradigms – *Creation is Innately Alive and Divine*, and *Everything is an Illusion* – derive from this creed, the essential recognition that we are all part of the same Divine Essence provides a core of spiritual faith that the other paradigms often lack. Commonly expressed these days as "*Remember, thou art God*," this sentiment reflects a faith in *immanence* (divine essence embodied in, and permeating, the physical realm), as opposed to *transcendence* (divine essence that is separate from a flawed physical realm). As a result, it's often considered blasphemy by people whose beliefs involve a distinct and separate godhead. *We might all be children of God*, such folks insist, *but to call ourselves God is an insult to the Most High*. Folks with this paradigm beg to differ.

According to some interpretations of the Kabbalah, that Most High God once comprised all things into a single unity. Perhaps wishing to know itself better, this One split itself into many, and now inhabits the cosmos in an infinite self-aware form, of which we're all a part. Certain interpretations of Buddhist philosophy dispense with the divine source and simply view the cosmos as a sort of god unto itself – again, a god of which we're all a part. Some strains of neopagan pantheism draw from Robert Heinlein's assertion "Thou art God," adopting a declaration from *Stranger in a Strange Land* into a real-life spiritual belief; modern Verbena insist they had that idea long before Heinlein was born, but who's to say? Today's Pagans (Verbena and otherwise) draw inspiration from all sorts of artistic sources, and to certain postmodernist chaos mystics, pop culture is every bit as vital a wellspring as any hoary ancient creed.

As a reflection of one of **Mage**'s primary themes, this paradigm is among the most "true" in meta terms. A character with this insight looks past the artificial divisions of **Mage**'s setting and views the fundamental unity expressed by the sentiment that "We're *all* mages." As expressions of the shared gaming group and its players, mages with this perspective *are* seeing some of the truth of their situation. How true it is within the gaming world itself is for the Storyteller to decide, but this creed certainly rings true for mystics and philosophers throughout history who've chosen to ignore our mortal separations in favor of the living miracle of Creation itself.

Associated Practices: Alchemy, crazy wisdom, faith, High Ritual Magick, invigoration, martial arts, psionics, witchcraft, yoga

Expanded Practices

Although **Mage 20** features a wide array of common practices, humanity's approach to metaphysical disciplines is almost as broad as our approach to life in general. And so,

the following practices can be added to, and combined with, the practices described in the ***Focus and the Arts*** section of that book.

Animalism

There's something magical about our animal kin. The glow of eyes in the dark. The uncanny grace of a cat or stag. The rough power of bears and elephants. Flight, fangs, venom, speed – despite our many human gifts, animals possess abilities that naked humans can't hope to match without technology, magick, or both. And so, from our earliest origins, human mystics and inventors have cultivated arts that allow us to access such birthrights and use them as our own. (Greedy fuckers, aren't we?)

Technically, the term *animalism* refers to a philosophical paradigm that says that human beings are just highly advanced animals. (See the paradigm ***We are Meant to be Wild***.) As a catch-all term for an array of related metaphysical practices, animalism connects the essence of the human animal self with the essential selves of non-human animals. Among the earliest forms of magick, this practice includes several different, though related, forms:

- **Requesting Aid:** A common element of primal magick, this form of animalism calls upon animal spirits and /or totems in order to get aid from the animal in question. Such aid could include allowing the animal to be hunted and caught so as to feed the magician's tribe (as with the ancestral rites of people who depend on hunting for survival), gifting a person with the animal's characteristics (as with the berserkers of Nordic lore), bonding with the animal in question (as is often done with animal companions and totem spirits), communicating with animals in ways most humans no longer can (as depicted in various legends and media), or a combination of them all. In such rituals, a mage contacts an animal spirit and offers to strike a bargain in return for the animal's aid. In short-term situations, these deals become spells that use the focus instruments to get short-term results; long-term deals become the Backgrounds: ***Allies***, ***Totem***, and /or ***Familiar***.

- **Invoking the Beast-Self:** Recognizing the animal heritage within humanity, this approach taps into a human being's submerged animal nature and then brings it to the surface. Tarzan and Conan are kind of the poster-boys for this technique, which calls forth "the beast within" and sets it loose – a dangerous but potentially rewarding technique, especially during fights, escape attempts, and even sex. On a more refined level, many "otherkin" people embrace an animalistic identity as well. A mage using this approach doesn't bother trying to bargain with external beasts or spirits because she knows that the animal is part of her whether she brings it out or not. Even so, certain devotees of this approach (again, the Norse berserkers, among others) can achieve dramatic physical transformations – even outright metamorphosis – if they're deeply connected to the animal in question and acutely aware of their "beast-self."

- **Invoking the Essence:** Sort of a cross between the previous approaches, this form of animalism invokes the essence of a certain sort of animal through spirit-magicks that embody that essence in the person of the mage. African animal-spirit medicine employs this approach, as do shamanic traditions from across the globe. Instead of making a direct pact with a given animal spirit, this technique draws in the essence of the animal through sympathetic magic(k) that links the shaman in question with the archetypal existence of the animal as a whole. Whether or not this actually *is* a separate form of animalism is something theorists and practitioners could argue about for ages. In any case, it's based upon generalized connection instead of agreements between individuals. (To see how essence can affect magickal Effects, see the sidebar ***A Touch of Spirit?*** In **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 16.**)

- **Taking the Essence:** Some folks just take whatever they want. Not bothering to make deals with animals and spirits, they simply kill a beast and then pull its power out through enchanted remains. A traditional tactic among the "skinwalkers" of Southwest Native American lore, certain forms of European shapechangers, and mystics of other hunting /warrior cultures (none of whom, it's worth noting, are the Changing Breeds who are born with innate powers, though certain skinwalkers steal those powers through similar rites – see **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** for details), this rough and bloody form of animalism has ancient roots but a shady reputation. European *loup-garou* and *werwolves* are said to use wolf-skin garments to change their shape, and although most mages know that the "Greater Werewolves" are far removed from such pretty trickery, several ancestral animalism practices employ enchanted clothing made of animal remains.

- **Radical Mutation:** A technological spin on animalism employs scientific theories and instruments (regression therapy, genetic mutation, extensive surgery, hybrid clones, shapechanging serums, brain-switching, grafted implants, cybernetic enhancements, and other tools of science run amuck) in order to "bring out the beast" in human beings or change non-human animals into humanoid forms. Progenitors and Etherites are probably the most notorious techno-animalists, but any technomancer with more audacity than scruples can employ such practices.



Any or all of these variations can be combined into a single practice; a mad scientist could employ bestial regression drugs to invoke the essence of animalistic humanity, while a technoshaman might invoke animal spirits by way of metaphysical computing techniques. Such odd mixes are rare but possible with a paradigm that supports that sort of weirdness. (See *A Mechanistic Cosmos, Everything is Data, Everything's an Illusion, Might is Right, Tech Holds All the Answers*, and *We are Meant to be Wild*.) An all-inclusive practice would be difficult, if not near-impossible, to pursue – especially given the ethical hurdles involved in connecting to, bargaining with, and yet also exploiting animals. In a world where a researcher could adore his pet cat and yet vivisect the same sorts of cats at his job, however, all sorts of justifications can work for the human mage; the spirits and beasts, however, probably won't be nearly as flexible about such things.

In any form, animalism depends upon the connection between a human mage and her animal kin. The different approaches define the techniques involved, but the core idea is the same. To that end, an animalist mage could employ a wide array of instruments to forge that connection: *armor* (made of animal remains like leather, bone, fur, or even feathers), *artwork* (representing animals, perhaps including animal blood, bones, fur, and so forth), *blood and fluids* (from obvious sources), *bones and remains* (again, from obvious sources, and often worn as clothing, jewelry, and other decorations), *brews and concoctions* (to "bring out the beast" through mystic sympathy or scientific theory), *circles and designs* (often inscribed to confine a bestial spirit or shapechanged human animal), *cups and vessels* (containing potions and bodily fluids), *dances and movement* (a common and ancient tool which a dancer, yogi or martial artist mimics the beast in question), *drugs and potions* (shamanic or medicinal tools for regressing a person's mind, sharpening her senses, and possibly even transforming her body), *eye contact* (the "eye of the beast" technique in which a mage either hypnotizes a person into assuming bestial guise, or else glares like an animal while evoking the beast within herself), *fashion* (once again, clothing made of, or at least suggesting, animal skins and features – serpent fangs and contact lenses, bone or metal claws, wolf-skin cloaks, rabbit-fur bikinis, and the like... often worn with body paint and styled hair which evokes the beast in question), *food and drink* (through which the mage literally consumes the animal in an effort to feed herself with its power), *herbs and plants* (which, according to lore, pass the essence of the animal to whoever consumes them), *languages*, *voice and vocalizations* (the legendary "beast tongues" that reputedly allow a human to speak with animals, as Tarzan and Dr. Doolittle can do), *meditation* (to attain a "beast-mind" – a common technique in certain martial arts and shamanic practices), music (which, as

with dance, evokes the desired animal), *offerings and sacrifices*, *prayers and invocations* (to the bestial spirits in return for their aid), *ordeals and exertions* (shredding sweat and blood on behalf of the animal the mage wishes to petition or emulate), *sex and sensuality* ("fuck you like an animal" indeed!), *social domination* (which is often known as "Alphaing someone" – that is, to dominate them like an Alpha wolf or bull ape dominates lesser animals), *symbols* (of the appropriate beasts – a common feature in heraldry, which connects the family with its favored animal), *thought-forms* (through which the mage envisions herself as an animal, or envisions a beast that she wishes to invoke, both of which are common elements in "otherkin" identity), and *weapons* (made of animal remains: shark-toothed clubs, jaguar or tiger claws, bone-handled blades and clubs, and so forth). Tech-based animalism could also employ *devices and machines*, *gadgets and inventions* (hypertech methods for transferring consciousness and /or reshaping bodies), *body modification and cybernetics* (animal-like mods and implants *snickt*), *genetic manipulation* (splicing, mutation, and other inside-out modifications), *medical procedures* (like the horrific surgeries of Dr. Moreau), and possibly even *computer gear* (which harnesses computing technology to employ data, hack reality's code, access previously inaccessible information, and so forth). No single mage will use every instrument, of course, and most of those tools are vital elements of other practices too. All these tools, however, hold close ties to the various forms of animalism.

A practitioner of animalism typically combines this practice with others; you could almost consider this to be a sub-practice that shapes your mage's approach to larger, less-specific practices. Most forms of shamanism feature at least a touch of animalism, while whole martial-arts forms (mantis style, tiger style, drunken monkey, and so forth) draw inspiration from bestial fighting and animal legends. Ancestral medicine practices – especially those from Central Africa and the American North- and Southwest – often feature appeals to animal figures and spirits, while Voudoun practices often evoke animal allies (roosters, gators, black cats and dogs, etc.), although they rarely include animal transformations except in the most forbidden sorts of voodoo. Weird science has a long history of turning men into beasts and beasts into men, while dominion actively encourages human beings to tap into their "primal selves" in order to command people and animals more effectively. Witchcraft and certain "witchy" forms of infernalism have perhaps the most (in)famous connection to animalism, though; changing into animals, turning other folks into beasts, and surrounding one's self with animal companions are all acts that have been associated with "witches" of all stripes for centuries. Skin cloaks, dismembered paws, beast-masks, bone trinkets, animal blood, bat wings, beastly make-up... from Africa to Europe to both of the Americas, such things are all parts of a witch's traditional bag of tricks. And so, although a mage could be an animalist through and through (again, see Tarzan as an example of a person who performs inhuman activities through a mystical connection to the beasts), chances are good that she's combining this practice with other ones that share its tie to the wild world.

(Is Tarzan a mage? Maybe not in the traditional sense, although an argument could be made that he's an Awakened animalist who believes *We are Meant to be Wild*, and so employs *language* [beast-speech], *vocalizations* [that famous yell], *social domination* [obviously], *ordeals and exertions* [living wild and battling like a beast], *dance and movement* [primal revels and monkey-like tree-travel], *animal remains* [his loincloth], *sex and sensuality* [his raw connection to the sensual realm], and *thought-forms* [viewing himself as more beast than man] in order to command the Spheres of Life, Entropy, Mind, Spirit, and perhaps Correspondence as part of his inhuman prowess. As described below, he's probably practicing ***Invigoration*** too. Although that's a strange example of a so-called "mage," it shows just how flexible the gifts of Awakening, and the rules of **Mage**, can be.)

Associated Paradigms: *We are Meant to be Wild*, and others mentioned above.

Associated Abilities: Athletics, Awareness, Brawl, Crafts, Esoterica (herbalism, weird science, yoga, etc.), Hunting, Martial Arts (animal forms), Stealth, Survival

Common Instruments: See above.

Bardism

Oh, *fiddle-dee-dee* and *hey nonny-nonny!* I mean, no one takes a bard seriously these days, do they? Bards are those poufy-shirted sleazebags who hit on wenches while composing odes to screaming trees or something, right?

Wrong. Oh, so *very* wrong.

It's been said that the secret of Atlantean technology involved a mastery of sound. Orpheus tamed godlings and charmed Death with the power of his songs. Celtic bards, Nordic *skalds*, African *griots*, *jali*, *guewel*, and *iggawen*, Sufi poets, Hebrew cantors, Chinese *yin yueh jia*, even popular music stars of today's postmodern mystic soundscape – such people can command music on metaphysical levels, altering reality through the influence of song. Music, according to Hindu lore and Pythagorean theory, is the foundation of the universe. From the Big Bang to the cosmic OM, vibration is said to be the origin of all things as we know them, and musical magick involves the mastery of such vibrations.

True enough, a bard in the metaphysical sense understands that performance and charisma are part of the process. An audience, after all, is most receptive when you've engaged their attention, and artists (magickal and otherwise) to tend be fascinating by default. To a sincere practitioner of sonic magick, though, the key to one's practice involves connection – connection to the audience, to the material, between intention and execution, flesh and instrument, will and effect, passion and performance. A true bard channels his intentions

through vibrations that *include* sound and yet transcend *mere* sound. Such a bard understands how to weave poetry, music, passion, the audience's attention, and the pool of energy that courses through all things. He does not *use an* instrument; he *becomes the* instrument, and so his music is an inextricable part of who he is.

Traditional bards tend to be historians, lorekeepers, storytellers, satirists, agents of news, and founts of inspiration. In the days before literacy, mass media, and recording technology, bards (in all their many names) were the primary sources of art and information. Most performed music, but others told tales, acted out plays, and otherwise engaged their audiences with performances that tapped into something deeper than mere craft. And so, even in our age of pervasive media, a metaphysical bard stands out from the Masses because he works toward a greater, deeper purpose than simple entertainment. He can be a healer, a killer, a lover, and a destroyer, shaping his Arts with mortal skill and metaphysical intent.

Although the Celestial Chorus and Cult of Ecstasy provide the most obvious examples of bardic magery (often by combining the practices of *faith* and *crazy wisdom*, respectively, with their bardism), musical mages can be found among almost any sect. Even the Technocracy employs specialists who explore musical technology, especially among the media-based divisions of the Syndicate and NWO. Traditionally, bardism tends to influence Minds, rouse Spirits, enrich or diminish Life, shift Time, and guide energetic Forces and solidified Matter. That said, it can alter Entropic flow and flaws, connect apparently disconnected things (Correspondence), and guide the flow of Primal energy. And while a traditional bard slings acoustic instruments and his own voice, a twenty-first-century one could employ electrified instruments, recording technology, massive audiences, and other tools that were impossible to imagine a century ago. He must, of course, be *very* good at what he does; traditionally, bardic training included intensive memory-training, people-skills, political intrigue, and a wary eye for the tenor of an audience. Beyond such skills, however, he also needs to understand the principles of musical technique and their connection to metaphysical forces... in game terms, the Abilities of Art, Expression, and Esoterica (with specialties in musical instruments, singing, and musical metaphysics, at the very least), supplemented with an array of social skills and a keen sense of opportunities to move Creation forward with a song.

Associated Paradigms: *All Power Comes from God(s)*, *All the World's a Stage* (of course), *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Bring Back the Golden Age!*, *Creation is Divine and Alive*, *Embrace the Threshold*, *Everything is Chaos*, *Everything's an Illusion*, *It's All Good – Have Faith!*, *One-Way Trip to Oblivion*, *Transcend Your Limits*, *We Were Meant to be Wild*

Associated Abilities: Academia (history and politics), Art (several specialties), Awareness, Cosmology, Crafts (for traditional instruments), Empathy, Enigmas, Expression, Seduction, Technology (for modern instruments)

Common Instruments: Artwork, dances and movement, drugs and potions, food and drink (typically consumed by the bard), energy, eye contact, fashion, group rites (performances), mass media, meditation (trancing out while playing), music (duh...), ordeals and exertions, prayers and invocations (especially with sacred-music artists), sex and sensuality (damn musicians...), symbols (worn, or invoked in performance), tricks and illusions, True Names (which are, in many legends, the keys to bardic power), voice and vocalizations

Elementalism

More of an intuitive bond with material Reality than a practiced discipline of human craft, this connection to the raw stuff of Nature allows a practitioner to channel primal Entropy, Forces, Matter, and Life through the talented Will of a mage. Thus channeled, the elements can be shaped, guided, conjured, transmuted, weaponized, and apparently "destroyed" on a material, if not an energetic, level. Although it requires training and a close study of nature, this mystic vocation is less about theory and more about "practice" in the most active sense of that word.

Perhaps best epitomized by the "benders" of the series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, elemental affinity often gets confused with shamanism and witchcraft. All three practices share a lot of common aspects, and there's no clear line where one ends and the others begin. (As with ***Animalism***, above, it could be considered a sub-practice when combined with other, more expansive practices.) This affinity, though, is less about relationships with spirits and gods than it is about the interplay between natural forces, human and animal consciousness, and the brute realities of flesh and bone. That said, it often involves a bond between the spirit of the mage and the spirit of the element in question, as described in the sidebar ***A Bit of Spirit?*** in **How Do You *DO* That? p. 16**. (The same book also has a section dedicated to element-based magickal Effects – see **pps. 26-41**.) Perhaps epitomized by the common image of Druidry – which, in fact, has several aspects and interpretations – an elemental practice is less *spiritual* than *practical*, with an eye toward immediate results like food, shelter, defense, and survival, in addition to the more sublime elements of spiritual observance and respect.

Although certain elementalists can bond with more than one element, a mage can spend lifetimes connecting to the deeper subtleties within a single element, and rarely go beyond the one that best suits their personality. In temperament, behavior, and often appearance, an elementalist personifies the element she favors. Mages with an affinity for fire will be hotheaded, flush in complexion, and often warm or outright hot to the touch; water-affiliated mages, in contrast, are cooler, mysterious, and often "deep." A rough-hewn woodworker and a rugged earthworker would favor the solidity of their elements, while a flighty air-mage flits from task to task, occasionally rousing a storm-like temper. ***Resonance and Synergy*** grow strong around such mages, too – stronger and more obviously

than those forces gather around mages with less "elemental" connections to their Arts. (See this book's entry of that name, pps. 128-138, for more details.)

As the name suggests, elementalism favors a primeval approach to those Arts. Long before wizards used complex diagrams and long-winded chants to bend the spirits to their Will, initiates to the wild Arts used simple tools – blood, sex, bodily remains, effigies and paintings, hand-made weapons, bits of plant and stone, seeds and ashes, and the most primitive sorts of technology – to reshape their environments. In time, these practices inspired the more complicated Arts. Element-slinging "superheroes" can be seen as modern elementalists too, especially when they claim such evocative names as Storm or the Human Torch, and believe that "***We are NOT Men!***" Occasionally, mad scientists employ strange devices in order to channel elemental powers. Most elementalists, however, prefer the oldest of Old Ways, using their bodies as vessels for powers beyond human comprehension. And in a way, those Arts may be the purest practices of all.

Associated Paradigms: *All Power Comes From God(s)*, *Creation's Divine and Alive*, *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, *Might is Right*, *We Are* ***Not*** *Men!*

Associated Abilities: Art, Athletics, Awareness, Crafts (involving the elements in question), Empathy, Esoterica (elemental correspondences, elemental spirit lore, lore of the associated element), Meditation, Survival

Common Instruments: Armor (formed from the element in question), Artwork (likewise), bones and remains, blood and fluids, brews and potions, dance and movement, drugs, elements, energy (for fire, air, and water), herbs and plants, household tools (used to work the element), knots and ropes (traditionally used to bind up winds), meditation (with and concerning the elements), music (to conjure the elements or call up elemental spirits), prayers and invocations, offerings and sacrifice (to elemental lords), ordeals (generally involving the element in question), symbols, weapons (formed from the favored element), writing (runes inscribed on or with the element)

God-Bonding

Some folks embrace Divinity not as an abstract to be worshipped but as a force within themselves. Tapping into a greater sense of power, these mystics use a god-bond to enact their patron's Will on Earth. Such people might be priests or saints, devotees of a higher calling... or they might view themselves as children of their gods, avatars of unearthly powers, "cousins" to those greater beings, or perhaps deities in human form. Whatever bond they claim, however, these mystics seem tied to something far beyond humanity.

Holy people share a god-bond; so do crazy ones. Marauders, in fact, seem to favor this "practice" of magick over most other ones. Essentially, the god-bonded mage employs a ***Wild Talent*** **(Mage 20, p. 527-528)** or some very basic Arts, and then views his actions as extensions of his relationship to the divinity in question. This "god" may or may not exist outside the mage's head – it might, in fact, be the Avatar as seen through the eyes of the mage's spiritual devotion. Mythological "demigods" – Herakles, Atalanta, White Buffalo Woman – who share kinship with Divinity could be considered god-bonded mystics; so could priests who invoke the power of their patrons. A Catholic priest, a Nordic rune-worker, a Loa-ridden conjure-man... they all share a mystic bond with their gods. Celestial Choristers tend to see themselves as Voices of the One – more like a spiritual vessel than a Will-full "mage."

Like elemental affinity, god-bonding is an intuitive, results-based practice. The devotee *could* spend lots of time and effort on research, but he's more likely to dedicate his energy to prayer, meditation, and the preferred acts of his patron god. Note that this doesn't immediately make him a nice guy; there *are* war-gods, after all, and gods of pain, disease, and corruption. (Hell, even "peaceful" gods rack up impressive body counts...) It's likely, though, that'll he'll minster to the faithful, protect the innocent, receive visions, speak prophecies, and follow the wishes of his god even if they conflict with established religious authorities. Our mystic may have True Faith as well as magick, and in any case does not view his powers as Will-based Arts. No, the god-bonded mystic simply acts on his deity's behalf, forming a bridge between the spirit and the flesh... which raises an interesting question: Will he lose his powers if he doubts his faith, or might he discover something greater within himself that came from inside him all along?

Associated Paradigms: *All Things Come from God(s)*, *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Bring Back the Golden Age!*, *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, *Everything's an Illusion* (except perhaps for the gods), *It's All Good – Have Faith!*, *We're All God(s) in Disguise*

Associated Abilities: Awareness, Belief Systems, Cosmology, Empathy, Enigmas, Esoterica (appropriate theology and lore), Expression, Lucid Dreaming, Medicine, Meditation

Common Instruments: Blessings and curses, blood, elements, group rites, music, offerings and sacrifice, ordeals, prayers and invocations, sacred iconography, voice (songs, speaking in tongues), weapons (often symbolic, sometimes wielded on behalf of the god)

Invigoration

The human mind and body (and perhaps spirit as well, if you believe in that sort of thing... which most, but not all, mages do) are capable of feats far beyond what we believe we can do. Through vigorous training, however – perhaps helped along by an accident, procedure, or chemical that somehow manages to not kill us in the process – we can unlock that capability, essentially becoming superhuman when we do so. Ancient techniques supposedly allow us to do such things by accessing our forgotten potential; the Akashic Art of Do claims to be one such method, and obscure forms of yoga, Tantra, Taoism, and related disciplines make the same assertion. It is science, though, that provides the most commonly imagined forms of *invigoration*: a metaphysical practice that unlocks the vast capacity of the human being. The Etherite hero Doc Eon

is the reigning poster boy for this approach, which he supplements with weird science, martial arts, and other disciplines. By pursuing such rigorous discipline, however, you too can "be all that you can be."

Mages who pursue this practice endure intense regimens of physical and mental exercises that drive them beyond average human capacity, often supplementing such disciplines with strange diets, herbal concoctions, surgical modifications, gene therapy, alien technology, baths in odd chemicals or cosmic rays, and other things that test Nietzsche's dictum about things that make you stronger. Meditation, too, is essential to such techniques, unblocking the mental barriers to ultimate capability. *Invigoration* means "to fill with life and energy," and so practitioners of this approach channel astounding energies into legendary lives.

On a metaphysical level, many practitioners (not all of them, of course) view these disciplines as a way to break through the illusions of physical limitation. All existence, it has been argued, is energy, and so a mastery of that energy, combined with adept manipulation of physicality's illusions, allows a skillful person to do apparently "impossible" things. All things, of course, are "possible" if you understand how to break down the walls of imposed self-delusion. And because certain quantum physics theories concur with ancient mystic observations about "reality's" illusions and the capacity of consciously guided energy, invigoration can be considered a technological practice as well as a mystical one. If supposed "magic" is explainable as mutation, enhanced capability, and other forms of perfectly explainable (if unusual) human perfectionism, then there's no reason a technomancer or Technocrat can't employ such disciplines too; in fact, many of them do just that.

As a practice, invigoration is rarely considered to be "magic." Nevertheless, it allows a practitioner to accomplish miraculous feats. Strength, endurance, healing, telepathy, mastery of other living things, adaptation to environments and situations that would kill a lesser human... whether or not such things are "magical" depends on who you ask. Aleister Crowley, who regularly performed superhuman feats in his youth, and who managed to survive copious amounts of drugs and other forms of abuse well into his old age, would assert that such discipline is indeed magick. Batman, of course, would consider that idea to be nonsense... but seriously, wouldn't "magick" explain volumes about the Dark Knight's capabilities? (Grant Morrison seems to think so... and on that note, this practice could be considered a source of power for King Mob, Boy, and – most obviously – Flex Mentallo, Man of Muscle Mystery.)

Clearly, this practice best facilitates workings of Life, Mind, Prime, and Spirit. That said, an advanced "invigorationist" may command energies both physical (Forces, Matter) and otherwise (Entropy, Time). On its own, it's not well-suited for Correspondence-based Arts beyond the first Rank – it's pretty hard to argue that intense exercise can help you teleport or fold space, although the "all matter is really energy" argument might work for someone who's achieved a truly exalted state of invigorated understanding. Certain instruments, like hypertech grappling lines, smoke bombs or teleportation bracelets, could be incorporated into a superhero-like invigoration practice; even then, a machine that helps someone break the laws of physics is generally considered a technomagickal Device unless the mage in question also pursues a practice like hypertech or weird science, as Doc Eon has done. Minus the intense physical discipline, a regimen of especially potent psychotropics could allow an invigorationist mage to expand her awareness, consciousness, and influential capabilities like the title character of the film *Lucy*. That's a short-term Path, though, as Lucy is essentially a Marauder who burns out in a matter of days. A mage who wants to pursue invigoration as a practice must also hone the ability to perform miracles without destroying the all-too-fragile human illusions in which she exists... and that sort of ability requires dedicated exercise.

Associated Paradigms: *Aliens Make Us What We Are*, *Ancient Wisdom is the Key*, *Consciousness is the Only True Reality*, *Embrace the Threshold*, *Everything's an Illusion*, *Might is Right* (of course), *Tech Holds All the Answers*, *Transcend Your Limits* (again, of course), *We are Meant to be Wild*, *We Are* ***Not*** *Men!*, *We're All God(s) in Disguise*

Associated Abilities: Athletics, Biotech, Brawl, Esoterica (bodywork, yoga, Tantra, Taoist alchemy, energy-work, etc.), Lucid Dreaming, Martial Arts, Medicine, Meditation, Science

Common Instruments: Blood and fluids, bodywork, brain/computer interface, brews and concoctions, dances and movement (katas and other exercise forms), devices and machines, gadgets and inventions (employed to enhance the mage's capabilities), drugs and poisons, energy, eye contact, fashion ("dressing the part of a superior human being"), food and drink, herbs and plants, labs and gear, meditation, money and wealth (which buys all kinds of training...), nanotech (again, as enhancement of human potential), ordeals and exertions (as described above), sex and sensuality, social domination, thought-forms (envisioning one's perfect self), voice and vocalizations (which channel energy toward greater potency)

Mediumship

For certain people, "magick" means the ability to focus outside spirit-powers. It's less a matter of Will than it is the distinctly mixed blessing of being an "open channel" for Otherworldly forces. Several mystic practices – most obviously the Spiritualism of the late 1800s and early 1900s; "voodoo" (more accurately described in **Mage 20, p. 583**); and the popular, though insulting, "gypsy fortune-teller" approach – focus upon opening one's self to the Spirit World and then employing its powers for your gain. In such practices, the "mage" is actually a *medium*, acting as a passage between flesh and spirit. And although such people can be quite accomplished, a medium credits the *spirits*, not himself, for the power he commands.

Like god-bonding, shamanism, Voudoun, and faith, mediumship views "magick" as a collaboration between the mage and her external powers. As a practice, it concentrates

on attaining a trance-state and then directing spiritual energies through physical bodies and conscious intentions. Certain mediums simply open themselves to the spirits and then surrender to the experience; others choose *who* they'll interact with, *how* they'll interact, and *what* they'll get out of the bargain personally. Mages, generally, fall into that second category, while unAwakened "spirit-horses" let themselves be driven by the spirits within. (For examples of such dealings from a rules point of view, see the entries for ***Necromancy***, ***Summoning, Bargaining, Binding, and Warding***, and ***Uncanny Influence*** in the sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That?)**

Although mediumship tends to be spiritually oriented by default, certain "alternative" approaches to science consider this to be an advanced form of mental and/or alien technology instead. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's brand of Theosophy is often considered an esoteric technology, and many New Age "channelers" claim to be telepathically communicating with alien intelligences, not "spirits" as such. Of course, the lines between such things tend to blur into nonexistence in **Mage**'s world. Still, certain mediums vehemently resist the idea that they practice "magic" in any form, even as the things they do fit that definition far more than they resemble conventional scientific applications.

While Spirit is the obvious Sphere for medium-based Arts, the Spheres of Correspondence (clairsentience), Entropy (necromancy), Forces (elemental phenomena and telekinetic command), Life (physical distortion, and transformation), Mind (uncanny influence), Prime (energy-work) and Time (prophecy) share traditional bonds with mediumship as well. Those spirits don't have to be *human* spirits either; many shape-changing practices involve channeling the essence of an animal, like the owl-witch who transforms through her affinity with the Owl totem. Mediumship has a postmodernist element too: the channeling of "departed souls," "past lives," "alien intelligences," "Ascended Masters," and even "demons," all of whom offer advice, power, and inspiration of a potentially dubious nature.

The problem with mediumship is that you don't really know who and what you're dealing with. A smart medium studies cosmology and his preferred class of patron, but there's still a chance that someone else is using him as a pawn for their own agenda. The Atlantean scribe who speaks through a medium might actually be a trickster or infernal entity; "Dear Aunt Sophie" could be a different ghost entirely, and that wise philosopher from the Crab Nebula is more likely to be an Otherworldly prankster... possibly even another mage. Even so, the Art of channeling aliens and angels has dedicated practitioners all over the world, many of whom demonstrate obvious powers beyond scientific paradigms.

Associated Paradigms: *Aliens Make Us What We Are*, *All Power Comes from God(s)*, *Ancient Wisdom is the Key*, *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Consciousness is the Only True Reality*, *Everything's an Illusion*, *It's All good – Have Faith!*, *We're All God(s) in Disguise*

Associated Abilities: Awareness, Belief Systems, Cosmology, Empathy, Enigmas, Esoterica (channeling, Theosophy, spiritualism, etc.), Expression, Intimidation, Investigation (things no living human should know), Linguistics, Lucid Dreaming, Meditation, Occult, Research, and other Abilities – especially Knowledges – the character doesn't usually know (see the Background: ***Dream***).

Common Instruments: Artwork (masks, drawings, "channeled writing"), blood and fluids, bodywork, bones and remains, brews and concoctions, dance and movement, drugs and poisons, eye contact, fashion (ritual garb, often made from the remains of dead animals or people), gems (crystal balls, geodes, focus-stones), herbs and plants, languages (speaking in tongues, foreign, alien or "dead" languages), meditation, ordeals and exertions (mediumship tends to involve physically demanding feats), sex and sensuality, social domination, voice and vocalizations (radically different voices than the character's own), writing (automatic writing, alien transcriptions)

Psionics

"*Also? I can kill you with my brain.*" (River Tam, *Firefly*)

It really *is* all in our heads, you know. Every element of "reality" as we understand it comes through the psyche – that "sense of self" composed of consciousness, through which we process and influence our existence. And so, it stands to reason (which, again, suggests that it is true because we think it should be true) that the psyche is the ultimate wellspring of reality, at least as far as we humans understand what's "real." By extension, then, the ultimate form of magick should be that which flows from, and is focused through, the practice of psychic disciplines – a practice commonly known as psionics.

(Technically, the proper term for such disciplines is *psychotronics*: "pertaining to the movement of energy through and with the psyche." Thanks, however, to the popularity of "psychotronic cinema" – that is, weird-ass movies – most folks use *psionics*, a term that means "moving electricity with the mind," which is just one of a collection of reputed psychic abilities.)

Both ancient lore and horizon-edge science posit that consciousness (human or otherwise) is either the most potent force in Reality as we know it, or may even be the *entirety* of Reality as we know it. Thus, psionic disciplines cultivate that consciousness and expand its awareness of, and effects upon, a practitioner's reality. Essentially, the practitioner – who may not consider themself to be any sort of "mage" at all – applies consciousness as the ultimate tool. Depending upon that practitioner's paradigm, their psychic talents could range from subtle psi-power manifestations (telepathy, pre- and postcognition, psychic influence and perception, astral projection, telekinesis, mind-based illusions, and so forth) to staggering displays of apparently impossible power (elemental psychomanifestations, mass levitation, psimutation, psychic healing or annihilation, manipulation of time and space, and other miraculous feats). Theoretically, the limits of psychic power are set only by what the practitioner *believes* they can do. And if "reality" is indeed

an illusion or projection that consciousness can control, such belief could potentially move mountains and fold supposedly solid objects into dazzling puzzles of nothingness.

(Incidentally, we're using the gender-neutral singular *they* because gender is based more in consciousness, self-image, and social constructs than on metaphysical realities. Because a psionic practitioner tends to disassociate from such delusions, and to make deliberate choices about things like self-image and external perception, it's appropriate here to step outside of imposed genders and take the individual as they wish to be seen.)

As a practice, psionics combines rigorous mental and often physical discipline with a handful of external tools that help the practitioner focus that person's concentration. Mantras, songs, dances, chants, prayers, and movement-based forms (gestures, head-clasping, mudra hand-postures, dervish-style spinning, martial-arts katas, t'ai chi and yoga postures, and the like) are traditional tools for mental discipline, along with geometric designs either complex (yantras, sigils, Hermetic seals, etc.) or simple. Drugs, both legal and otherwise, open Huxley's "doors of perception," and symbol-laden props like Tarot cards, dice, and even toys help the practitioner overcome mental blocks and nagging distractions. Meditation, though, is the key to all psyche-based operations. Only by spending long periods cultivating internal focus and disassociation can a devotee of the psychic Arts transcend delusions and expand into a greater sense of consciousness.

In game terms, a mage who employs psionics as a practice is using exactly the same rules as any other Sphere-using Awakened character. The extensive psychic power rules given in certain World of Darkness sourcebooks apply to non-mage psychics, not to characters who channel Awakened Sphere-abilities through this practice. To the mage themself, however, a psychic focus is simply a highly developed psychic discipline. In plain English, *it's still magick* even though the character views that "magick" as psychic ability. As with every other magickal focus, it works because they believe that it works. Hell, even Uncle Al himself considered his pretentious-k *magick* to be an innately psychic "Art and Science" – not somehow "supernatural," merely super*normal*, and guided by supremely expansive consciousness.

By any name and definition, the psionics practice focuses belief through the mage's mind. The various instruments described above serve as mental tools and techniques, but the power comes from within the mage. Considering that the root *psyche* refers to "breath," "self," "soul," and – by extension – "mind," this practice comes closest to the core of **Mage**'s magickal system: the idea that magick is an extension of the mage who employs it. Even so, an Awakened psychic still needs to rely upon certain instruments – meditation, eye contact, social domination, and other self-contained tools – until that mage can transcend the need for an external focus – in game terms, until the player can buy off the need for instruments.

Although psionics is considered a discredited science by the conventional scientific community, many technomancers both within and outside the Technocratic Union find psychic discipline to be an exceedingly useful tool... especially since the tech-world Consensus is more inclined to accept psychic phenomena than so-called "magic." From a rules standpoint, a technomancer character who employs the psionics practice can discard the need for instruments (as described in **Mage 20, pps. 329 and 567**) as if that mage was a mystic, not a technomancer or Technocrat. This benefit, though, applies *ONLY to the instruments that mage uses as part of their psionic practice*, not instruments that are extension of a different practice. A computer-slinging psychic, for example, could discard their psychic tools but not their computer tools. And even then, meditation remains a required instrument, as it's the foundation of such mental discipline in the first place.

Working from that foundation, a psionic mage could pursue intensive physical exercise as well (see ***Invigoration***, above, plus the Akashic Art of Do and other forms of the ***Martial Arts*** practice), enhance their psychic faculties with mind-expanding drugs (as many Progenitors and Ecstatic Cultists do), combine psychic powers with ***Chaos Magick***, ***Cybernetics***, ***Dominion***, ***High Ritual Magick***, ***Hypertech***, ***Reality Hacking***, ***Weird Science***, ***Witchcraft*** , and /or ***Yoga*** (as in the practices of those names), or simply act as a psychic powerhouse, transforming reality through consciousness alone. Psychic discipline is an important element of ritual magick, after all, and essential to true mastery of yoga and the martial arts. And while its feats can range from invisible forms of ***Uncanny Influence*** (detailed in ***How Do You DO That?***) to vulgar feats of ***Elemental Mastery*** (likewise), the practice of psionics combines ancient wisdom with quantum science while revealing that the apparent differences between them are as illusory as Reality itself.

Associated Paradigms: *Ancient Wisdom is the Key*, *Consciousness is the Only True Reality*, *Everything is Data*, *Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake*, *It's All Good – Have Faith!*, *Might is Right*, *Transcend Your Limits*, *We Are* ***Not*** *Men!*

Associated Abilities: Alertness, Awareness, Empathy, Enigmas, Esoterica (psychic phenomena, Thelema, Theosophy, yoga), Intimidation, Lucid Dreaming, Martial Arts, Meditation

Common Instruments: Bodywork, brain /computer interface, devices and machines, and nanotech (all of which can enhance psychic potential), cards and instruments of chance, dances and movement (as described above), drugs (again, as per the film *Lucy*), energy, eye contact, fashion ("*dress how you wish to feel*"), formulae and math, numbers and numerology (which can all be used to focus the mind), group rites, and music (likewise), languages (especially modes of "mental rewiring" speech, such as neuro-linguistic programming, non-violent communication, and glossolalia), management and HR (which combine mental influence with social activity), meditation, sex and sensuality (used in Tantra and some forms of High Ritual as a tool to expand consciousness and bond with other souls), social domination, symbols (employed for concentration), thought-forms, and True Names (to "set one's intentions into form"), voice and vocalizations (chants and

Theosophy

Based in the union of the words *theos* (god) and *sophia* (wisdom), theosophy attempts to explain the nature of the cosmos through a deeper knowledge of its Creator and the structures He has used to guide the universe. Arising from Greek philosophies around the turn of the Common Era, theosophy has guided certain strains of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Gnostic, and Pagan thought, inspiring – among other things – Western alchemy, European medieval High Magick, Gnostic "heresies," the Kabbalah, and the surge of mysticism and metaphysical sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that resulted in the New Age movement and almost every form of modern Western occultism. Ironically, it also informed the Catholic and Protestant explorations into natural phenomena that – shorn of their religious elements – birthed modern Western science.

Although the term has been in play since at least the third century CE, the word *theosophy* is most closely associated these days with the Russian mystic, psychic, and political reformer Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who co-formed her Theosophical Society in 1875. Blavatsky and her collaborators traveled widely, lectured frequently, published voluminously, and – through word and deed – ushered in the modern occultist era. Whether or not Blavastky would be considered a mage in the White Wolf sense is a matter of personal opinion; her influence on real-life metaphysical societies and philosophies, though, cannot be overstated.

Blavatsky's assertions can't be distilled into a sidebar, and aren't especially vital to a **Mage** chronicle in any case. (To give the old girl her due, though, her work inspired Crowley, Spare, Regarde, Fortune, Pirsig, and other sources of **Mage**'s metaphysical conceits.) But although her approach to cosmic mysteries was essentially mystical, Blavatsky argued that theosophical knowledge was, in her words, "the synthesis of science, religion and philosophy," employing systematic research and disciplines to find the invisible pillars of truth within our world. She claimed that humanity was guided by *Secret Masters* (see the related essay, **p. 289**) who employed psychic disciplines in order to influence mortal affairs. And while her brand of theosophy featured a lot of Victorian-era Orientalism, it was responsible for the growing and enduring popularity of "Eastern wisdom" as a source of grand occult knowledge. Through an odd mix of elitism and egalitarianism, Blavatsky resisted the concepts of racial and gender superiority in favor of an "all humanity" approach to wisdom and prosperity. That said, Blavatsky lived a very privileged life, and the Theosophical Society asserted the wisdom of certain elites even as the group upheld the idea of universal brotherhood.

mantras), writings, inscriptions, and runes (again, to focus intentions and set them into form)

Expanded Instruments

Mage 20's collection of instruments is extensive but not comprehensive. Considering that *anything* could be used as a tool for magick, it's damned near impossible to list and describe each imaginable instrument. That said, a handful of additional instruments can be found below, and in the ***Uncanny Influence*** section of the **How Do You *DO* That?** sourcebook (**pp. 118-119**). And because several of these entries get pretty extensive, we've used a slightly different format header than the ones used in **Mage 20** to define each tool and its potential use.

Body Modification

Tattoos. Piercings. Scarification. Implants. Bifurcation. Branding. Constrictions. Suspensions. A body can be subjected to many sorts of modification, from the relative simplicity of modern tattooing to the squick-inducing extremities of genital torture and consensual amputation. To non-practitioners, certain types of modification appear positively demented: *Why would someone **do** that to themselves?* Folks who understand the disciplines involved, however, recognize that the combination of endorphin rush, exquisite pain, radical artistry, and enduring results can focus concentration and awareness to a preternatural degree.

Body modification has a rich pedigree among mystic societies. Tattoos, piercings, brands, and selective mutilations are among the oldest forms of initiation, especially when they're performed as part of a ritual surrounding puberty, entrance into a secret society, important events, the sealing of agreements, or acceptance within a special caste. Traditionally, such modifications become part of an initiatory ordeal (see the instrument ***Ordeals and Exertions*** in **Mage 20, p. 597**)... and because endurance is part of the experience, such modifications tend to be done in prolonged, excruciating ways. Of course, such traditions also tended to result in infections, decay, and death too, so modern practitioners usually employ sterile conditions and equipment, specialized training, and other precautions. (Old-school shamans, witches, and Ecstatics turn up their noses at such refinements, though.) Once created, the results of such initiations can be used as instruments of focus as well as marks of initiation; a bard could tug each of her seven earrings while chanting a song-spell, and a fire-eater might close his eyes and rub his tattooed belly before invoking a gout of fire and spiting it in an enemy's face.

More radical forms of modification – amputation, implanted hardware, extensive tattooing, bifurcation of tongue or genitals, and so forth – are time-consuming and labor-intensive. Often employed during rituals, such feats combine the instrument of modification with the instrument of ordeal. Rules-wise, those operations demand extended rolls on the part of both the subject of the modification and the person

"Prepped and Ready" Instrumental Operations

Although most focus-instruments are items or activities, a handful of them involve prolonged activities that demand time, a dedicated space, and typically a collection of objects through which a mage prepares to work his Arts and Science. Employed during ***downtime*** (see **Mage 20**, **p. 385**), these prepped-and-ready "operations" get used before the mage casts his Effects, and that preparation grants him the ability to perform the magick after the operation has taken place.

Such operations, from a rule-systems standpoint, are simply story elements; the player says "*I'm doing such-and-such,*" and the Storyteller says "*Okay, now you're prepped and ready.*" It's not so much a different *sort* of instrument as it is a way of using that instrument. In the **Mage 20** rulebook, the options for ***Management and Human Resources*** and ***Vision Quests*** (**Mage 20**, **pps. 595** and **600**) involve such preparations; you can't go vision questing, for example, in the middle of a firefight, but can call upon things you learned during a vision quest when you need to use such insights in a firefight. Among the instruments presented nearby, most of them – especially ***Body Modification***, ***Internet Activity***, and ***Medical Procedures*** – typically demand preparation before the Effect can be cast.

That said, you can also use instrumental operations as part of an extended ritual, and then re-use the results of that operation as an instrument later on. Spider Chase, for instance, could turn her newest tattoo session into a magickal ritual which employs ***Body Modification*** and ***Ordeals and Exertions*** as the instruments for the Effect she casts. That new tattoo could be used again later as the "prepped and ready" instrument for an Effect that has been based on the design of the inked image, and so the operation paves the way for future Effects that are linked to the activity and its results; Painted Horse, as another example, thinks back to the talking crow he heard advising him during his vision quest whenever he needs to use Entropy and Time to gauge a situation that has yet to occur.

who's performing the operation. (Stamina-based rolls from the subject, Dexterity or Intelligence + Art or Medicine rolls from the artists... and don't botch. Really...) Even the simpler forms of modification – tattoos, minor piercings, and the like – often involve extended actions and a certain amount of endurance unless the modification happens too fast to process (as with a shopping-mall ear-piercing), in which case it's essentially worthless as a tool of focus.

Story-wise, modification ordeals produce an altered state of consciousness as the body and mind struggle to process what's being done to them. The resulting state of ecstasy has become an integral part of many postmodern mystic practices, and quite a few technomagickal ones as well. The extent of the modification really depends on how extreme the character is willing to be... although considering the possibilities involved in Life-Sphere magick, even the most extreme forms of consensual mutilation can be healed with relatively simple Effects, so long as there's something left to work with once the modification is performed. (Castration and limb-removal tend to be one-way streets unless a mage is very, very good at her job.)

Cannibalism

We are, as they say, what we eat. And certain practitioners consume the essence, or even the material form, of the thing they wish to become. Warriors eat the hearts of their prey; psychic vampires feast on vital energies; monks within certain Buddhist, Hindu, and even heretical Christian sects eat the bodies of their departed brothers, while a devotee partaking of the Catholic Eucharist consumes a supernatural sample of the body and blood of Christ. Such ritual cannibalism (which may not, strictly speaking be actually cannibalistic) signifies a sympathetic tie between the eater and the chow. The first takes the second into her body and attains, at least in theory, the qualities that exalt the meal.

Based in Spanish folklore about the Carib people – lore which may have been fact, slander, or a sign of desperation – the word *cannibal* specifically refers to eating human flesh. As a general term, however, *cannibalize* has come to mean "to eat something in order to gain something else from it." Drinking the blood of a slaughtered deer, glomming vitality off your boyfriend, hacking apart a device in order to use its parts for something else... those deeds aren't technically cannibalism, but we often use that word to describe them. And so, some mages – traditionally shamans, priests, witches, medicine-folk, Infernalists, Left-Hand Path yogis, and social dominators, among others – ritually consume the essence and /or physical forms of things they wish to absorb. Sometimes that involves subtle "bites" of energy or symbolic proxies; other times, it involves munching someone's brain.

As an instrument, cannibalism could be symbolic, energetic, or literal. Symbolic cannibalism involves eating something that signifies the consumed party but isn't actually composed of that party's physical being; communal bread and wine, for example, is symbolic cannibalism. (Just don't tell that to certain Catholics...) Energetic cannibalism involves drawing non-physical essence from the meal and then taking that essence to sustain yourself. (See the instrument ***Energy*** in **Mage 20**, **p. 591**, and the ***Energy Vampirism*** and ***Sacrifice*** entries in **How Do You *DO* That?**, **pp. 49-51.**) And literal cannibalism is just that: physically consuming the object of your intentions. (See the Flaw: ***Bizarre Hunger*** in **Chapter One**, p. 87.) It's not rocket science to realize that certain forms of cannibalism are more socially and legally acceptable than others. Cultural practices

and traditions, though, can get pretty gory, and although it's rarely acceptable to devour your own kind, it's perfectly okay within certain groups to eat "those people over there" because they're not like you... and a few outré forms of cannibalism *do* allow a practitioner to eat her fellow beings as a gesture of respect, victorious contempt, or even love.

The amount of time and concentration involved in cannibalism depends a lot on the nature of the feast. Sipping some consecrated wine takes but a second once the wine is ready to drink; eating the heart of a dying enemy takes a lot of time, literally bone-cracking effort, and a really messy chow-down process and aftermath. As a result, mages who employ some form of cannibalism either prepare their meals in advance (*Yum-yum – blood pudding!*), or else set time and space aside for a dedicated feast which... depending on its nature... could have serious moral and legal consequences. Then again, for certain types of cannibals, the taboo nature of the consumption provides part of its metaphysical weight – see the entry for ***Transgression***, below.

Cybernetic Implants

Modern medical technology allows for new sorts of useful body modifications. And although certain primitive "cybernetics" – hook-hands, peg legs, golden arms, and other real and legendary replacement parts – have been around for centuries or millennia, the current state of the art allows for marvelous physical enhancements even among the Masses. Technomancers, of course, have employed such enhancements (and ***Enhancements***, as in that Background Trait of that name) since at least medieval times. In the twenty-first century, though, you don't need to bust the Consensus in order to employ useful cybernetic implants. All you need is the proper installation process.

From a story standpoint, a cybernetic implant can be anything that helps the character access feats that a human body either cannot perform on its own (like interfacing with a computer or hearing radio transmissions), or cannot perform because of an individual's limitations (visual implants, for example, that let a blind person see). Implanted claws, embedded radio transmitters, artificial limbs and organs... technically, they're all cybernetic implants. And although implants that could potentially violate the Consensus, and which have been designed to perform functions beyond the capabilities of Sleepertech (firing bolts of plasma, for example) are still counted as the Background: ***Enhancement*** **(Mage 20, pp. 312-313)**, a subtle implant could be defined as an instrument so long as it's not obviously jumping the techno-shark in plain sight. (See the entry for ***Brain/Computer Interface*** in **Mage 20, p. 589**.) And considering that real-world cybernetics are rapidly approaching the level of old-school cyberpunk SF, the level of said proverbial



shark-jump is really up to the Storyteller's judgment these days. (Poppable claws, *da!* Plasma-cannon arms, *nyet!)*

A twenty-first-century mage, then, could focus unobvious Effects through cybernetic implants like the aforementioned BCI or claws, internal transmitters or sensory arrays. Regeneration cybernetics might function as self-repairing "healing spells," and physical-boosting chemical implants may focus Attribute-raising Life Effects. Most Effects, actually, that could be considered instruments rather than Enhancements would fall under Rank 1 perception-based Effects, and certain Life Effects at Ranks 2 or maybe 3. These days, subtle cybernetics could provide cosmetic shape-changing abilities (changing eye-, skin-, or hair-colors), protect against minor injuries (as in a Life 3 resistance to lethal damage), let a person see in the dark or breathe underwater, and command other acts of allowable "coincidence" that could be explained by the wonders of current technology. That said, wings, jump-jets, car-tossing strength, laser-blast eyes, and other sorts of heroic enhancement are still the purview of the Enhancement Background. Although popular culture is rapidly catching up to that sort of epic hypertech, we're not quite there just yet... though we probably will be soon, hence the wiggle-room Storyteller judgment-call.

Naturally, cybernetic implants require extensive surgical implementation – an elaborate form of ***Body Modification***, as described above. Once they're implanted, however, such instruments can function with little or no time and effort on the character's part. Severe injuries may impair or destroy those implants, though, especially if an attack has been targeted at, say, a surgically implanted set of claws. In that case, the character needs to go back under the knife... hopefully in the care of someone who knows what she's doing with regards to those cybernetics! Hence, characters from the Technocratic Union have a distinct advantage over folks whose implants were designed by that whacko Etherite or the Mercurial Adept with a fondness for scavenged spare parts.

Genetic Manipulation

We live in a wondrous time, wherein miracles of medicine provide seemingly impossible feats: cloning, quick healing, resistance to disease and poisons, physical mutability, environmental adaptability, mutant powers out of a comic-book movie... the endless wonders of genetic manipulation make such things possible... don't they?

Not really, no. Not with current technology, anyhow. Enlightened biotechnicians, however, are not working with mundane Sleepertech. And so, as an instrument of hypermedical practices, genetic manipulation can focus a wide range of Life-based Effects through the wonders of advanced medicine.

Such wonders don't come fast or cheap. Used as a focus instrument, genetic manipulation demands sterile lab facilities, specially prepared medicines and gear, and sufficient time through which the procedures can alter the genetic structure of the subject's body. (See the instrument entries for ***Devices and Machines***, ***Drugs and Poisons***, and ***Labs and Gear*** in **Mage 20**, plus ***Medical Procedures***, below.) Once such treatments have been completed, however, the subject of the operation can manifest those Life-based Effects by way of the "instrument" of his modified genetic capabilities. Alternately, the biotechnician can create mutated critters – clones, hybrids, modified agents, Enhanced personnel – through the application of the appropriate Effects focused through genetic manipulation and other related instruments. (For examples of the rule systems involved in creating and modifying organisms, see ***Body Modifications*** and ***Cloning, Creating, and Impersonating a Living Creature*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 21-25**.)

Genetic miracles can do only so much. Not even the most advanced hypermedicine could, for example, bend a cityscape or open a portal to another world. As a general rule, assume that this instrument works only for Life-based Effects that modify or create a living organism. Other Spheres may be involved, of course – and usually need to be – but the core of a genetic Effect must be the Life Sphere and an organism who's being suitably mutated. And although radical feats of fast-acting Enlightened Science remain vulgar even in tech-based cultures, the popular (mis)conceptions about genetic manipulation can let a lot of crazy shit slide in under the radar if the person involved with such manipulation manages to spin a believable web of scientific justifications. (See the sidebar ***SCIENCE!!!*** in **Mage 20, p. 290**.)

Internet Activity

Even without the metaphysical playground of the Digital Web, the Internet has become perhaps the largest instrument of magick in the history of human existence. The fact that its effects are almost always coincidental unless a user does something amazingly stupid, like trying to teleport his physical form from screen to screen (possible with enough dots in Correspondence, but seriously vulgar) makes it that much more useful. Hell, even a Sleeper can drive a person on the other end of the globe to commit suicide, give him all their money, or both with a clever application of Internet potential, so a mage can do oh so *very* much more...

Generally, Internet activity demands a computer, a connection, the proper knowledge, and time. With those materials, however, a savvy user can cast influence-based Effects through posts (see ***Uncanny Influence*** in **How Do You *DO* That?**, especially **pp. 114-123**), hack into remote locations and alter or access data (see ***Computers as Instruments of Focus*** in **Chapter Three**, p. 121), disseminate some elemental chaos (again, see **How Do You *DO* That?**, and that book's ***Elemental Mastery*** section, **pp. 26-41**), and possibly – if he's willing to dare some vulgarity – employ a properly prepared computer as the instrument for some time-and-space-bending technomagicks (as per that book's ***Mystic Travel*** section, **pp. 70-83**). Again, this sort of thing takes time and typing, and it won't work if you're trying to access and influence places where the Internet can't reach. But although Sleepertech computers aren't capable of half the things that films and TV shows give them credit for, a skillful mage can bend those limitations around

his little finger and take the world by storm. In our weird and wired world, that's nowhere near as difficult as it used to be.

Medical Procedures

There's always been something magical about the healing arts. The ability of an uncannily skillful person who can mend wounds, dispel sickness, and discern the hidden mysteries of a human body can seem positively supernatural. Thus, practitioners of medicine – any sort of medicine – occupy a reverent and sometimes fearsome role in human societies. And so, medical procedures form a vital sort of instrument when healers work their Arts.

Depending upon the practitioner and her specialties, this "instrument" (which is actually a collection of tools and activities related to that person's healing methods) could range from prayer and a "laying on of hands," to consecrated spirit-masks, hypnotic music, and prescribed dances and invocations, to hypnotherapy, energy-work, psychic surgery, conventional Western medicine, Taoist chi-balancing, acupuncture, hyper-tech regeneration processes, sports or battlefield medicine, and so on. Other instruments find their way into these practices too: drugs, herbs, meditation, bodywork, dancing, prayer, etc. etc. etc. As an instrument unto itself, however, a medical procedure involves the process of treating the patient – a time-and-effort-consuming process that demands whatever sorts of attention, expertise, and specialized equipment the healer's practice requires. (See the ***Suggested Resources*** at the end of **Chapter Five** (p. 295) for a handful of books that deal with traditional healing practices.)

As noted above under ***Body Modification***, a medical procedure will involve extended rolls in all but the simplest of healing tasks. Most medicine-worker players would be rolling Intelligence + Medicine, although delicate surgery might involve Dexterity + Medicine instead. Psychic and psychology-based healing would be more likely to employ Charisma, Perception or Wits + Medicine, while a prolonged medicinal rite would use Stamina + Medicine instead. The patient might need to make Stamina-based rolls as well, especially if there's an especially grueling and /or excruciating treatment involved. In-depth healing demands a ritual, as described in **Mage 20**, **538-543**, during which the medical procedure itself becomes an instrument in collaboration with other instruments described above.

In many RPGs, the "healer" simply lays on hands, exerts some magical doodah, and restores lost Hit Points. **Mage** isn't most RPGs. Sure, a Life-schooled healer could simply let loose with the glowy-hands thing... but that wouldn't be in keeping with **Mage**'s emphasis on paradigm and practice. A Lakota medicine-worker versed in pre-European healing traditions won't be using the same sort of medical procedure as an Ayurvedic physician, a Baptist faith-healer, a Frankenstinian surgeon or a Progenitor medic would. From a roleplaying standpoint, it's a good idea to do some research into the type of medicine your healer would practice, and then base the specifics of her medical procedures and associated tools on what you find. A quick Wikipedia search can net you the basic information about a given type of medicine; after all, it's not like you're gonna need to heal someone for *real* with what you learn there, right?

Transgression

Breaking rules is a powerful thing, especially when it's done with ritual intent. A specialty of chaos magicians, crazy-wisdom practitioners, reality-hackers, Left-Hand yogis, and even certain clerics and High Ritual Magi, the instrument of transgression involves intentionally shattering taboos in order to move past internal and external limitations.

Known in occult and theological circles as *antinomianism* (from the Greek: "without law"), ritual transgression discards the strictures by which one is expected to abide. Instead, the practitioner places his faith in his ability to endure whatever the penalties for such disobedience may be. In Christian theology, antinomianism is an accusation of heresy; among magical societies, it's a disreputable path to potential wisdom. Aleister Crowley was the twentieth-century poster boy for such practices, but the concept is at least as old as the Vedas, and might be as timeless as magick itself.

Transgression, as you might expect, has various degrees of severity. Simple transgression is relatively easy to survive: acting like a fool in front of people you respect, dressing like a member of a different gender or class, assuming an identity that's drastically different from your own (say, an Ecstatic stripper becoming a celibate nun, or vice versa), using drugs if you're straight-edge, or going straight-edge of you use drugs... that sort of thing. Dedicated transgression violates the laws and expectations of your society: stealing, attacking innocent people, undergoing torture, performing deeds that would normally disgust you (digging up graves and fucking the corpses, to use a Left-Hand Tantric example), and similar outlaw acts. Catastrophic transgression is the sort of thing you can't come back from once you've gone there, and so it's a rare and perilous course to take; rape, murder, blasphemy to the gods to whom you've been sworn... such transgressions change the person who performs them, and that radical transformation is the point of the exercise. It's worth noting that other folks won't appreciate being part of that sort of "exercise," and tend to use all available methods to punish such transgressors.

As an instrument of focus, transgression demands a willful, deliberate, and often openly declared intention to forsake taboos in order to achieve a greater end. It's not simply partying hardy and hoping to avoid a hangover, but an intense and painful discipline by way of *in*discipline. Breaking someone else's laws are easy; transgressing your own ethical codes is far more dangerous... and thus, more powerful. Transgression may have not only legal, moral, and physical consequences, but psychological and spiritual ones as well. A person who has thrown a rock through the figurative stained-glass windows of his own cathedral has to look at himself in the mirror, and then assess what he has seen there afterward.



Chapter Four: Justice and Influence

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.

- Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*

"That won't work here." The witch's face holds a grimace of contempt.

Fuck that superstitionist nonsense. I touch the iPad screen and...

Nothing. Totally dark.

Try again. Nada.

"Told you."

Great.

"Hell," I snarl back. "We're not ***that*** *far from civilization. There's satellites in orbit all over the world. We've just got terrible reception here, that's all."*

"No," she says with an annoying little grin. "Your gear ***WON'T WORK HERE****. We're in what you might call a "gray zone."*

"As in no reception?"

"As in no technology." Gesturing with contempt at my pad, she adds, "Not ***that*** *kind, anyway."*

"So now what?"

"Now," she says, "we do things ***my*** *way."*

"Reverse cowgirl?"

Jen shakes her head. "The Old Ways, dumbass. The Old Ways..."

Behind the Scenes at an Ascension War

The many faces of **Mage**'s Awakened factions have remained an essential, though not mandatory, element of **Mage** for nearly 25 years. Even so, questions remain, especially in the twenty-first century: *How do the Traditions influence the Sleepers? What happens if an Ecstasy Cultist steals a Hermetic's ritual robes? Does the Technocratic Union punish every misstep among its agents with torture and death?* And so, the following sections – originally written as part of **Mage 20**, **Chapter Five** – address various questions regarding the Ascension-War factions, their sense of internal justice, and their general influence within the world at large.

Among the Traditions



Dedicated to the apparently noble goal of returning magick and wonder to an apathetic Sleeping humanity, the Council of Nine Mystick Traditions holds the default "good guys" position in the realm of **Mage**. I mean, who could possibly argue with such ideals, right? Yet, in all the best and worst aspects, the Traditions are composed of fallible people whose command of power often outstrips their grasp of consequences, their empathy toward others, and their sense of accountability toward the "Sleepers" that all too many of these mages distain. Although the Technocratic designation of such people as Reality Deviants is obviously simplistic and authoritarian, Tradition mages *can* be frighteningly loose cannons. How, then, does a secret organization whose existence spans continents, dimensions, and unspeakable power maintain coherence and assert its ideals in spite of the all-too-human people in its ranks? Through an elaborate and often inconsistently-applied set of protocols and punishments which, ideally, emphasize the Council's best intentions while reining in the worst excesses of its people.

Tradition-Style Justice: The Tribunal

For the most part, the Traditions govern their own people. If a Verbena witch gets out of hand, it's Verbena elders, not the Council as a whole, who'll determine what to do with her. For serious matters, though, members of the Traditions may call a *Hearing Tribunal*, a *Council Tribunal*, or a *Bloc Tribunal*.

- A *Hearing Tribunal* handles internal cabal, Chantry or Tradition matters – that witch's trial, for example. In that case, the parties involved all come from the Tradition involved, unless there's a compelling reason to include an outside witness, expert, judge or advocate. Resolution, in this case, follows the customs of that Tradition; Verbena justice, for instance, is liable to be rather harsh, rooted in Nature and the Old Ways, while Virtual Adept justice probably involves mockery, shunning, and a Brand of *LAME* on the offender's virtual icon. (See below.)
- A *Council Tribunal* addresses matters that affect the Traditions as a whole. If a member of one Tradition harms someone from a different Tradition who comes from

Roleplaying a Tradition Mage

As the original "default setting" for a **Mage** chronicle, Tradition mages are the ones most folks think of playing. They're certainly the most familiar types – the wizards, clerics, shamans, witches, and so forth. For the most part, a Tradition character pursues "magick" as a mystic Art, although certain technomancers – especially the Etherites and Virtual Adepts – consider it an advanced science instead. And, unlike Technocrats or the mages of many Disparate sects, Tradition mages tend to be flexible in their practices, dedicated to their beliefs, of course, but more willing to see another side of things.

From a roleplaying perspective, then, the Tradition mages are idealistic survivors, fighting to preserve and perpetrate a worldview based on wonder and potential. Despite internal and external cataclysms, these groups consider themselves the last great hope for humanity's future. They seek hopeful rebels for their ranks, and nurture a sense of courageous rightness. Especially in the Rogue Council era, these are the mystic punks spitting in the face of oppressive conformity. In their own minds, the Traditions are perpetual underdogs. Even in their mythic past, they were the few, the proud, the geniuses struggling against a Sleeping humanity. And so, when you play a Tradition mage, keep that sense of scrappy idealism. More than any power or protocol, that's the thing that keeps the Traditions intact.

On the whole, Tradition mages also strive for compassion. The difference between the Council's term for unAwakened people – the Sleepers – as opposed to the Technocracy's term for them – the Masses – reveals this compassion. For most tradition mages, people just need to wake up and see what they're capable of doing; for most Technocrats, people are monolithic blocks to be guarded, shaped, and shepherded out of the way. When you play a Tradition character, then, keep that sense of waking people up as a vital motivation. It's perhaps the most redeeming feature of an otherwise self-involved group.

Above all other things, Tradition mages have faith. If and when that faith cracks, they crack too. The greatest weapon the Fallen and Technocracy share when dealing with Tradition mages is the apparently hopeless position of a Council mystic. To persevere in the face of godlike rivals, clueless humanity, and Reality itself, a Tradition character must maintain a stubborn conviction that he or she is *right* – that in the end, the mage's beliefs will triumph. That faith will either elevate the mage personally or else raise all humanity to a greater state of being. And so, whomever you play and whatever group you choose, hold firm to your character's beliefs. On many levels, those beliefs make him who he is.

a different cabal or Chantry, then representatives from various groups gather to decide what to do about it.

Composed of representatives from whichever Traditions can attend, this meeting uses every tool at its disposal to get the information necessary to render a fair and informed judgment. In the old days, a Council Tribunal involved at least one representative from each Tradition. The attrition involved in the *Reckoning metaplot option* may have made this protocol somewhat impractical (assuming that those events occurred in your chronicle), although some respected member of each Tradition will at least *try* to make a remote appearance via astral projection, clairsentience, or a simple yet reliable technology: phones, IMs, webchat, and so forth.

- A *Bloc Tribunal* requires the presence of at least three members of every Tradition. Essentially a large and *very* formal Council Tribunal, such gatherings are staged for only the most important reasons – high crimes in all cases, and typically ones where the potential repercussions involve the Council as a whole.

In whichever form they take, Tribunals reflect an essential principle in Council justice: judgment by one's peers. A mage, in theory, should be judged by other mages – not by Sleepers or other entities, but by people like him who understand, for better and worse, what it is to be Awakened. Tribunals epitomize this sense of justice, for while a careless or amoral Tradition mage may indeed suffer punishment from cosmic forces like Paradox, from rival factions, or from angry Sleepers, the Council's idea form of justice involves other mages deciding the rightness or wrongness of his actions... and, when necessary, deciding his punishment as well.

Given their literally medieval foundations, Tribunals are solemn affairs. Whenever possible, the judges are Master-rank magi with strong reputations for wisdom and fairness. The presentation of evidence typically involves magick, but *tampering* with that evidence (or with the judges, witnesses or testimonies), *especially* with magick, is a grave offence whose punishment is often worse than the one for the original crime.

Crimes

Mages, being extraordinary, cannot held to "typical mortal" standards of behavior. The nature of who they are and what they do puts them on another level with regards to morality and crime. Some groups take the "with great power comes great responsibility" approach, while others figure that "mages will be mages" in all but the most grievous crimes. (Whether or not this defense is morally *right* is a subject of great debate among Tradition mages, especially in the social atmosphere of the twenty-first century.)

No society, however, survives long without rules. Even the anarchistic Virtual Adepts and Ecstatics have been forced to



realize that truth behind their ideals. Especially when you've got a group as diverse and willful as the Nine Traditions, certain boundaries must be observed... and when those boundaries get violated, then certain consequences – like those detailed below – must be applied.

Current Council justice is both simpler and more complex now than it has been in its previous forms. The product of modern ideals and logistics, it's no longer ruled by the whims and memories of ancient Archmasters. Times change, and the Traditions changed as well. And so, although many terms and sentences are based in medieval (and usually Hermetic) foundations, the applications of justice reflect modern circumstances, not medieval ones.

The majority of minor offenses get more or less ignored by the Council at large. Individual cabals, Chantries, and Traditions tend to punish things like theft, cowardice, laziness, and so forth on their own terms. Depending on the offender and the parties harmed by her actions, those crimes might be ignored completely. Realistically, the Traditions have neither the resources nor the desire to prosecute every crime a mage commits; after all, if they actually *did* prosecute them, every mage alive would wind up guilty... and where would the world be *then?*

Low Crimes

Under Tradition law, the following offenses are typically considered "low crimes" unless the scope of a particular infraction – or the parties offended by that activity – make a certain incident more notorious than usual:

- *Cowardice* (when such fear leads to a greater problem, such as a comrade being captured by enemies because the accused was too scared to prevent that capture);
- *Deceit* (fraud, lies, misrepresentation, etc.);
- *Disrespect* (acting poorly toward a higher-ranking mage);
- *Lameness* (online misbehavior, which is obviously open to very subjective interpretation);
- *Laziness* (refusing to pull one's weight around the cabal, Chantry, Tradition, or other sort of group... which is also a rather subjective charge that's rarely filed unless the accused has caused significant problems through such behavior);
- *Lechery* (without actual violation of a person's body, mind or spirit);
- ...and minor acts of *Assault*, *Cruelty*, *Recklessness*, *Theft*, or *Vandalism*.

For the most part, a low crime merits minor punishment: ***Censure/Redemption***, ***Reparations*** or ***Talion***, a minor ***Brand*** or ***Service***, rarely more than that unless the specific offense has caused larger repercussions.

Certain groups punish minor infractions lightly, if at all, although other apparently small offenses might merit fairly harsh penalties from a group that despises such activity. A Norse Verbena, for example, might be punished horribly for cowardice but slapped on the wrist for disrespect; her Etherite counterpart, on the other hand, might be forgiven that first offense but suffer ***Reproof*** for the second.

High Crimes

Some crimes cannot be ignored, especially not when they're committed by supposedly "enlightened" beings. Where low crimes harm only the mage and her victim (if even that), high crimes endanger large numbers of people – possibly a whole Chantry, a Tradition, or the Council itself. These offenses typically merit a Council Tribunal, if only because of the scope of the crime.

The Council's high crimes are:

- *Betrayal* (of one's cabal, Tradition, or the Council as a whole;
- *Endangerment* (as per ***Betrayal***, although endangering large numbers of Sleepers is also a high crime);
- *Diabolism /Infernalism* (bargaining with demons or Nephandi, treating such parties as allies or friends rather than as enemies of the most pernicious kind; Hermetic law has longstanding provisions for using demons as *servants*, but such exceptions are not highly regarded by members of other Traditions);
- *Oathbreaking* (breaking a formal sworn oath to one's sect, allies, patrons or companions);
- *Murder* (willful and unlawful killing of a fellow mage or an innocent Sleeper);
- *Violation* (rape or other severe sexual, mental or spiritual molestation and abuse);
- ...and major acts of *Assault*, *Cruelty*, *Recklessness*, *Theft*, or *Vandalism* (that is, offenses with severe personal, material, and /or political repercussions).

For high crimes, the penalties are harsh – ***Reparations***, ***Indenture***, and ***Branding*** at the very least, more often ***Ostracism***, ***Imprisonment***, ***Interdiction***, ***Death***, and in very severe instances perhaps even ***Gilgul*** topped off with a death-sentence too.

Naturally, a Tribunal takes circumstances into account – especially the "battlefield mentality" involved in a secret war with dangerous enemies. Any mage can wind up with several high crimes on her head after a single altercation with Technocrats or the Fallen, and so the Traditions take a pragmatic view of such situations. Still, the days when a Council magus could set up a personal fiefdom and rule over it like a tyrant are officially over. Between the implosion of Doissetep, the uprising against

Hierarchy, Anarchy, or Something in Between?

The **Mage Revised** metaplot assumes near-anarchy as a default setting. Each cabal or Chantry handles its own affairs, and many of those groups go to war with one another. Some hang on to the official hierarchies, while others pitch them out entirely. By 2017, this might still be the situation... at which point, many of the old structures have fallen apart. **Mage 20** assumes that the Council stumbled in the late '90s, but picked itself back up again, asserting the old methods with a few new refinements. Perhaps none of those things occurred, though; in that case, the old top-down organization still applies, with Horizon, the Primi, and the larger Chantry leaderships dominating Tradition society as a whole, and all of the older titles and protocols fully in place. Once again, the truth behind this section is what you choose to make of it.

Horizon, the atrocities of Voormas, and so forth, the Council can't afford to overlook such extremities again.

Punishments

Where there's crime, there's punishment. In the old days, such penalties could be literally medieval, with symbolic or literal mutilation and death being fairly common. Given the potential threat of a rogue mage, of course, harsh punishments make sense. These days, however, the Council can neither afford to lose more members than it already has, nor to let its folks run roughshod over everything just because they *can*. Thus, the Traditions no longer Brand someone just because he pissed off the wrong Master... but if punishment *is* required, it's swift and often permanent.

The Council's official punishments include:

Censure /Redemption

The lightest penalty puts a mage "on parole" until some conditions have been met. Those conditions usually involve formal apologies; reparations to the wronged party; service to the wronged party, his Tradition, or the Council as a whole; or a specific errand that will lift the Censure. (See entries below.) Until that point, the Censured mage suffers restrictions on magick, travel and association. Ignoring those restrictions invokes a harsher penalty.

A common penalty in the current age, **Redemption** essentially Censures the mage and then gives her a chance to redeem herself. Generally, this involves therapy (something old-time mages hadn't even thought of, but a familiar practice now), followed by chances to atone for the damage done. More severe punishments are held in reserve. If the offender can't or won't change her ways, or fails to honor her promises, then stricter measures are enforced.

Typically associated with quests or services, Censure and Redemption sentences combine ideals with practicality. Beyond the obvious compassion and trust involved, such punishments also turn otherwise disruptive mages into assets. The offender's more dubious talents often play a role in her Redemption duties; a thief might be turned loose to steal things from the Technocracy, a deceiver may be employed as a spy, an aggressive troublemaker could be essentially weaponized against dangerous opponents, and a reckless one might be sent into spots where her carelessness might work to the Council's advantage.

Like medieval chivalry, Redemption turns hot-blooded outlaws into defenders of the realm by aiming their faults at the enemy. Meanwhile, the modern therapeutic element helps them deal with the issues that inspired those faults in the first place. This way, ideally, the Traditions heal their wounded warriors while aiming their most destructive tendencies in the most productive direction.

Talion

An ancient judgment that has fallen out of favor with most Traditions (except those most devoted to the Old Ways), Talion is the proverbial "eye for an eye" sentence: You trash a rival's sanctum, he gets to trash yours; you kill her familiar, she kills yours, and so forth. This bloody-minded sentence strikes many people as unjust; your familiar, for example, may have had nothing to do with your crime, so why should *it* be punished? Still, a few hardcore Traditionalists keep this sentence around, if only because of its frightening potential.

Reparations

A.K.A. "blood money," the Reparations sentence forces the offender to pay compensation – usually seven times the cost of the crime – to the injured party. Obviously, this has limited utility if the offender doesn't have the means with which to pay those reparations. Still, this is a popular sentence in the modern world. Most mages these days understand lawsuits, and the Awakened have effective ways of making lawsuit judgments stick.

Imprisonment

"Jail time" means little to the Awakened. Any half-decent mage can walk right out of most mortal prisons. Unless the Tribunal has easy access to a Horizon Realm, the extraordinary measures involved in holding a wizard captive often involve crippling that mage with drugs, magick, or injuries. Although such penalties were common in older days (Doissetep and Horizon had some ugly dungeons), twenty-first-century Traditionalists avoid Imprisonment whenever possible, both because of the potential escalation of cruelty and because of the massive resources involved in keeping a mage prisoner.

Groups who can afford to do it have been known to strand prisoners in distant Realms (often with nothing but the clothes on their backs, if even that much!); lock them away in

Ordeal

An ancient but unofficial punishment, Ordeal has another, less palatable name: *torture*. And although the Council has never used torture as a prescribed sentence, many groups within the Traditions still do. It's a dubious practice, of course – the mages carrying out such sentences risk being charged with Cruelty themselves. In a world where "*You get what you deserve*" is a defining principle, though, old-school sects occasionally use mental, emotional, physical, and magickal torture as an especially rough form of justice.

Verbena, Dreamspeaker, and Thanatoic groups typically employ physical ordeals – scarification, sun-dances, exposure to the elements, tying criminals over anthills, and so on – either as purifications of the offender, or as traditional methods of cultural punishment. Akashics tend to enforce torturous training methods: standing one-legged on a high pillar in the sun for hours or days, punching wood or stone, holding a single mouthful of water throughout hours of stress without swallowing it, etc. Hermetics have infamous trials of elemental and spiritual assault, while Etherites and Virtual Adepts employ electrical shock, mental feedback, or simple yet excruciating mockery. The Celestial Chorus denies the use of torture, but its rivals claim that fire, wheel, and rack still occasionally make "unofficial" appearances in that group's justice. And while Ecstatics employ physical excruciations too, their most infamous punishment involves feeding an offender a time-suspended loop of the pain his deeds have caused. This mystic penalty doesn't leave a single lasting mark, but might be the cruelest ordeal of them all, and it's certainly the most just. See this book's ***Prelude*** for an example of such rough justice in action.

As a sentence, Ordeal is almost always used on members of the group in question. Handled that way, it's usually considered "an internal matter" by other Traditions. If Professor Helbore straps a thieving apprentice into his Psychoplasm Extremis Machine, other mages may well close their eyes to that punishment, so long as the offender survives more or less intact. If Helbore does the same thing to Lee Ann Milner, though, he'll be up on charges before he can flip the switch.

prison-Realms; or hand them over to Umbral entities, Paradox spirits, or perhaps even (on *very* rare occasions) the Technocracy. Such punishments are pretty rare, but they *do* happen. Seldom, however, do to the Traditions allow their members to remain prisoners of vampires, mortal authorities, or the Fallen. Beyond the obvious indignities involved, it's risky letting such jailers hold onto a Tradition mage for long. Who knows what those captors might learn from him if they got the chance?

Indenture /Service

A time-honored punishment, Indenture binds the offender to serve the injured party. Spells prevent the criminal from harming his "master." Typically, this punishment lasts either a given length of time (seven years' service being an old favorite), or else mandates between one and three tasks that must be completed before the sentence gets lifted. Especially for offenders with very little cash, Indenture provides an alternate form of Reparations.

That said, this sentence is *extremely* unpopular outside the Order of Hermes, the Akashayana, Thanatoic sects, and the Verbenae... and it's acceptable only if it's declared *against* one of their own, *by* one of their own. For obvious reasons, the Dreamspeaker Tradition refuses to acknowledge Indenture as a legal option. The mere possibility of it being declared against one of their members has, on several occasions, almost caused the entire Tradition to leave the Council. For equally obvious reasons, female mages oppose the idea of Indenture binding a female offender to a male "master." These days, then, the only socially acceptable method of Indenture binds a more-powerful defendant to a less-powerful plaintiff within his or her own Tradition. That's not to say that the judgment doesn't exist in the current era (several Etherite "collaborations" involve Indentured "lab assistants"), but when it *is* declared, the sentence is carefully monitored for abuse.

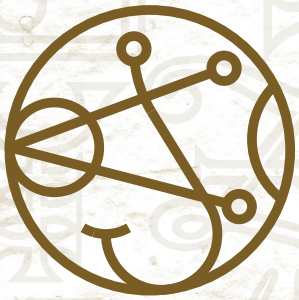
Branding /Reproof

In perhaps the most common Council punishment, a mystic mark is "burnt" into the offender's Avatar; depending on the infraction and its severity, the mark might last for a month, three months, a year, nine years, or longer. A variety of symbols reflect the charge: *Recklessness*, *Violence*, *Cowardice*, *Disrespect*, *Laziness*, *Deceit*, *Endangerment*, *Lechery*, *Oathbreaking*, *Theft*, *Treachery*, *Violation*. The Virtual Adepts have their own infamous brand – *LAME* – which gets applied to people who behave obnoxiously in the Digital Web but remain more or less innocent of the other crimes.

Although the Etherites disdain such metaphysical excesses, their form of Branding – **Reproof** – effectively "brands" a mage by detailing his crimes in the various journals used by Ether Scientists to publicize their experiments and triumphs. A mage of any group who gets "branded" this way will find no friends or favors among the Etherite Tradition!

In game terms, any Branded mage suffers penalties to his Social rolls, Background Traits, and related Merits or Flaws. Depending on the charge, the length of the brand, and the people viewing it, that penalty could range from -1 to -5. An Etherite with a short-lived Recklessness brand won't be *persona non grata* for long... after all, everyone expects mad scientists to be a bit careless. A Violation brand, however, could mark the offender for death in the eyes of certain mages – particularly Ecstatics, Thanatoics, and Verbenae – who are not known for their kind views of rapists.

Tradition Punishment Brands



Recklessness



Violence



Cowardice



Disrespect



Laziness



Deceit/Sloth



Endangerment



Lechery



Oathbreaking



Theft



Treachery



Violation



Lame

Trial-by-Combat, Duels, and Certámen

Tradition mages who wish to resolve a personal dispute can call for a *trial-by-combat*: a duel in which the disputing parties hash out their differences with fists, swords, riddles, endurance, or perhaps the theatrical dueling method called *certámen*. Typically waged between the aggrieved parties, though sometimes fought by surrogate champions if one or both parties are unwilling or unable to perform the duel themselves, these duels settle accounts the old-fashioned way; the winner prevails, and the loser does not.

Such duels can also be staged for fun, sport, and public entertainment; in such cases, of course, the contestants don't generally go for blood, and precautions are taken so that a friendly match doesn't turn into a murder trial. For details about such duels – friendly and otherwise – see the ***Magickal Duels*** section in **Mage 20**, **pp. 430-434**. Expanded game options for old-style certámen rules can be found in this book's **Chapter Two**, **pp. 112-115**.

Shunning /Ostracism

The next level of punishment marks the offender as an outcast among Tradition personnel. For a given time, perhaps even for life, that criminal gets excluded from the company of his former friends and allies. A gigantic "cold shoulder" greets him whenever he shows up at a Chantry, requests aid or shelter, tries to make friends, or requires allies in a bad situation. In most cases, he's on his own. For the sentence's duration, any Tradition member who aids or shelters that fugitive risks being Censured or Ostracized herself.

The shunned party becomes an outlaw – literally "outside the laws" that protect members of that society – and may be ignored, attacked, captured or even murdered by anyone (or any *thing*...) that wants to take him. In the old days, shunning was pretty much a death sentence for both mages and the unAwakened; without friends, shelter or protection, an exiled individual had little chance of survival. These days, though, that's a rare punishment. An Ostracized exile has greater access to the world at large than an outlaw in the old days had enjoyed, and so the punishment isn't likely to harm him on anything more than an emotional level. And because shunning *does* hurt a person deeply on that emotional level, he's much more likely to join an enemy group if he's ostracized. Thus, although this penalty's still on the books, its most severe extremes rarely appear in the modern era.

Interdiction

In the most extreme form of Ostracism – *Interdiction* – the outlawed mage also receives an *in absentia* death sentence. Anyone who catches him is advised to kill him. Typically declared against rogue and Fallen Tradition mages, Interdiction turns the offender into legal prey for Tradition enforcers – usually members of the outlaw's own group who've sworn to redeem their sect's honor. Voormas and his rogue cabal, for example, were Interdicted, hunted down, and destroyed by their fellow Euthanatoi. The same fate meets other mages who shame their group's ideals.

Death /Requital

A crude but effective way of dealing with offenders, the death sentence removes the problem by removing the criminal. Though it's often considered an appalling practice among "modernistic" mages, a death sentence remains – for old-school magi – a perfectly natural, time-honored way of solving the issue. It's even written into the oaths sworn within many mystic sects that the member who violates the trust of that sect agrees to suffer death for his transgression.

Though harsh, death remains a pragmatic solution. After all, each Awakened mage is essentially a force of nature. It's hard to imprison such people effectively for very long, at least without resorting to cruelty and a vast expenditure of resources. And so, the most efficient way of handling a dangerous outlaw is to kill him.

Once arrived upon by a Tribunal, a death-sentence (formally known, in Hermetic jargon, as **Requital**) is carried out as quickly and mercifully as possible. While Renaissance wizards tended to employ baroque tortures, that sort of thing is unfashionable in the current age. Now, such executions get handled through a combination of physical murder and spiritual banishment: The body gets destroyed and the soul gets sent away. For obvious reasons, Thanatoic mages were often used for such duties in the past – a service that rendered them even more fearsome than they had already been. Since the grotesque dilemma of Voormas' corruption, though, the other Traditions have displayed an understandable reluctance to let the "good death" people handle executions. In the new millennium, executioners tend to come from the Akashayana, Dreamspeakers, and Verbenae: groups renowned for both their integrity and their grasp of necessary violence.

Gilgul

The most severe penalty possible, Gilgul shatters the Avatar, robbing a mage of her ability to use magick while also essentially scattering her soul. Generally combined with the death penalty, this annihilates an offender's place among the Awakened, theoretically destroying her future among them as well.

An intentionally ironic term, *gilgul* in its original Hebrew form means "metamorphosis," and refers to "rolling over" or "revolving" one existence for another. It usually refers either to a dead soul that takes up residence in a living body in order to atone for past sins, or to a "lesser" soul

transmigrating to a higher state. In a way, both interpretations are literally true of a Gilguled mage; her Awakened soul is "transformed" into slivers of what it once was, giving each sliver an opportunity to try again with better results. In another fashion, it's a cruel irony; the individual mage becomes "a dead man walking," atoning for her crimes by ceasing to exist in her current incarnation. Even if she continues living in the organic sense, her Awakening ends forever. In many ways, then, death is the most merciful conclusion to a magickal Gilgul. Remembering what you once were, and can no longer even hope to be, must be one of the most depressing fates imaginable.

The Ascension Warrior fiasco has many Tradition mages debating the finality of Gilgul. For although the Ecstatic Archmaster Akrites Salonikas declared the Ascension Warrior an imposter, he may have been mistaken... or worse still, he may have *lied*. In either case, that means Gilguled souls can come back together in the same body... possibly more powerful than they'd been before, and very probably with a grudge. Considering the level of destruction one previously Gilguled mage was able to produce, what damage might a *number* of them do? That question has Council mages pondering. Cruelty aside, Gilgul, in the long run, might be a profoundly *stupid* punishment. The issue has yet to be resolved...

Tradition Influence Among the Sleepers

Mass Ascension remains a contested topic among the Council's personnel. Especially in the twenty-first century, plenty of Tradition mages feel they have no right to determine the fate of humanity, much less the right to influence Sleepers beyond the good examples such mages can set. And yet, the hard truth of the reality wars suggests that the metaphysical "territory" must belong to *someone*, and if it's not in the collective hands of the Council, then the other options are unthinkable. And so, for good and ill, the nine Traditions exert a certain degree of influence upon Sleeper society. At times, such influence is used to guide the shape of Reality Zones, and to deny such influence to rival factions. More often, though, this influence provides a network of allies, contacts, resources, and friends who can, and do, help their Awakened buddies whenever possible.

By necessity, the Council's influence must remain unobvious. Even before the mass-media age, the Order of Reason had spies and allies everywhere. Apparent "witches" and "sorcerers" were herded off to gallows and bonfires throughout the European Renaissance and so-called "Age of Reason" whether or not they actually had any connection to magical culture at all. Even in cultures that did not persecute "witches" in large numbers, the Awakened and their ways often frightened the common people... and they still do today. People revere heroes in theory, but in practice they tear such people apart. Any supermarket tabloid rag-rack will show you that much. And so, the Traditions work carefully. Their influence, though increasingly pervasive, remains subtle in the unAwakened world.

For the most part, the Traditions' primary spheres of influence among the Sleeper concentrate upon encouraging ***wonder***, ***imagination***, ***diversity***, ***cooperation*** and, to a lesser but growing extent, ***revolution***. Regardless of the activities of a given cabal or Tradition, the Council promotes a collaborative reality filled with options, faith, and creativity. Especially these days, this influence flows through a scattered network of small groups, not a single monolithic effort. Even so, the Council's influence has run far deeper than anyone, Awakened or otherwise, suspects. Although assertions like "*The Cult of Ecstasy created rock 'n' roll*" are almost certainly untrue, that Tradition's influence has certainly spread through that musical revolt.

The Council's primary areas of influence within the unAwakened world include:

The Branding Rote

(••• Life/ ••• Prime/ ••• Spirit/ •• Mind; often with •••• Time, •••• Spirit, ••• Forces, or a combination of the three)

When a mage steps over the line, this Council punishment ensures that other mages will know about it. Although most versions of this Brand remain invisible to normal sight, characters who can sense paranormal phenomena can also read the marks that have been burnt into the recipient's metaphysical form. Severe offenders may be marked with a visible Brand instead – a glowing sigil of disconcerting aspect. Even people who can't read the specific meaning of the mark can tell that it doesn't say good things about the person wearing it.

System: The simple form of this mark uses Prime and Spirit to burn the mark into the recipient's aura. Life invests that burn into the receiver's organic Pattern too, and Mind sends off a disquieting emotional pulse which warns people that the person wearing the Brand is not to be trusted. Performed as a ritual, the Branding process – in game terms – involves rolling six successes or more – enough to earn a Storyteller's option result on the ***Base Damage or Duration chart*** in **Mage 20** (**p. 504**). That Duration is the time-period invested into the Brand.

More complex variations include Time 4 (to make the Brand last until a given circumstance has occurred); Spirit 4 (to make that Brand an essentially permanent fixture of the offender's Avatar and aura; and Forces 3 (to make the Brand glow visibly on the offender's skin). All variations of the Brand involve casting vulgar magick, and so should be administered in a Chantry or Realm whenever possible.

Faith and Religion

As champions of mystic practices, the individual creeds within the Traditions have influenced mortal society for millennia. From the distant temples of the Akashayana to the soaring cathedrals of the Celestial Chorus, the groves of the proto-Verbenae, and the shamanic guidance of the pre-Council Speakers, various Traditions guided the religious life of their people long before the Council itself existed. Even now, when their influence has waned, these mages have friends among the faithful, especially now that neopaganism and various ancestral creeds enjoy a resurgence in this supposedly "faithless" age.

For the most part, this influence remains more concentrated on older religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church, Hindu and Buddhist temples, Black American Baptist congregations, and ancestral religious societies within indigenous cultures and other ethnic Diaspora movements. The newer Evangelical congregations are often too suspicious of Satanic corruption, too prejudiced against outsiders, and too skeptical about "miracles" that come from anyone except certain Evangelical figures, to accept much guidance from well-intentioned mages. And yet, street-based ministries that work with at-risk populations and extend a welcoming hand to cultural outsiders (homeless people, queer youth, runaways, outlaw subcultures, and so forth) have string ties with certain Tradition mages – often (though not always) members of the Chorus. Unlike the uglier fringes of American Protestantism, these street ministries uphold radical acceptance and practical

Gilgul Rite

(••••• Entropy / ••••• Mind / ••••• Prime / ••••• Spirit; often with ••••• or ••• Life, ••• Forces, ••••• Correspondence)

The Council's ultimate punishment involves the dispersal of the offender's Avatar, generally wedded to the death and dispersal of her physical body, consciousness, and life-force too. Such things are never done lightly; a Tradition mage who began ripping people's Avatars apart for little cause, or for none at all, would quickly be annihilated himself. Nephandi and Marauders have no such scruples, though, and other mages lack the established protocols involved in a formal Gilgul Rite, though not the raw ability to do similar things if they wish.

Formally, this sentence demands the presence of a Tribunal and at least one witness per Tradition. Given the difficulty of the procedure, the sentence tends to be executed by three to five Masters working together. The offender is generally sealed within a Major Ward which combines the ***Ban***, a ***Binding***, and a ***Gauntlet Cage*** (see **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 99-100**) that's been set to trap the offender's physical and spiritual essence in the place of punishment. From that point onward, the executioners tear the condemned mage's soul from her body, often dispersing every element of that offender's self, theoretically forever.

System: Spirit 5 alone can tear a person's soul apart... at least for a little while. A Spirit 5 attack which inflicts enough damage to kill the physical character (see the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***, **Mage 20, p. 504**) will disperse an unAwakened Avatar. An Awakened one, however, is much harder to destroy, and may reform within seven days and nights unless it has been treated with the additional precautions of the Gilgul Rite. (If the body has been killed in the meantime, that Avatar finds a new "host" and begins the process of incarnation over again.)

To annihilate the Avatar, the executioners must combine Spirit 5 with Entropy 5, Mind 5, and Prime 5 as well; Spirit 5 shreds the Avatar, Entropy scatters it, Mind 5 dissolves its connection to the offender's consciousness, and Prime 5 dispels the associated life-force back into the cosmos. An additional Effect of Life 5 or 3 demolishes the offender's physical form too, either by transmuting it to dust or by inflicting aggravated damage until the victim dies. An associated Forces 3 Effect (employing the energy from the Prime 5 Effect) conjures winds to scatter the physical remains so badly that they cannot be reconstituted, while Correspondence 5 dispels every element of the victim throughout the physical and metaphysical realms.

Annihilating an Awakened Avatar is far more difficult than merely shredding a mortal soul. To destroy a mage's Avatar, the executioner(s) must roll one success for every dot in the victim's Avatar + Arete + Willpower Traits. Destroying the Avatar of a mage with Avatar 4, Arete 3, and Willpower 7, therefore, would demand at least 14 successes.

The base difficulty for that roll is 10, even in Horizon Realms, and it cannot be reduced below 7 by modifiers. This Rite is *always* vulgar, and gathers Paradox as if there were *Sleeper witnesses* even if none are present at the time.

To dispel the physical form as well, the executioner(s) must also roll enough successes to either transform the body into dust (10 successes – see **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 21**) or to kill the character (see **Mage 20**'s ***Damage or Duration chart***, cited above).

Even if the verdict was fair and the execution was carried out properly, a mage with any form of conscience (that is, not a Nephandus or an especially mad Marauder) must make a difficulty 10 Willpower roll or else fall into an existential depression for a week or more. After all, what that executioner has done cannot be undone, and it could just as easily be done *to* him as well.

The Gilgul Rite does not work on other supernatural critters; otherwise, Master mages would have wiped out vampirism, and their other Night-Folk rivals, a long time ago. A basic Spirit 5 attack can temporarily disperse the spiritual essence of a supernatural creature for a night or two (the aftereffects are the Storyteller's discretion); after that, however, said creature will be back at full strength, and looking to make a gruesome example out of the wiseass mage responsible...

aid over the adherence to Old Testament judgmentalism and "prosperity gospel" hucksterism so often seen among megachurches and "born-again" ministries.

Meanwhile, the influence of Ecstatic, Hermetic, and Verbenae groups can be found among Pagan and occultist circles. Contrary to the stereotypically (and often accurately) selfish image of such groups, certain alternative-spiritual sects and subcultures are extremely active in humanitarian causes like Burners Without Borders, transhumanist and futurian spiritual sects, web-based crowd-funding charities, and the aforementioned street-level salvation societies. Faith, after all, is not something limited to cranky old Christians and their associated institutions!

Academia, Business, and Government

On a secular level, the Chorus, Hermetic mages, and renegade scientists of various denominations (especially the Etherite and Virtual Adept variety) maintain a small but entrenched hold in academia, industry, and the old-money elite. Guiding various secret societies, occult sects, and "initiated orders" (especially since the 1700s), these groups have exerted subtle influence throughout schools, government, and various industries that would never openly admit their mystic ties. That such groups played major roles in English and Scandinavian /Germanic politics – as well as (often paradoxically) the American and French Revolutions – is no secret among the Awakened... nor, to their shame, is their involvement within the Nazi and Fascist movements. Less obvious is their role throughout Russian history where – even after the ostensibly atheistic Communist government took power – Eastern Choristers, Hermetics, Etherites, and Verbenae command covert influence to this day. That influence has suffered since the early 1900s (especially after the mysterious "Iron Curtain affair" involving the Hag Baba Yaga, described in the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** sourcebook **Rage Across Russia**), but more recently it has flourished since the turn of the millennium.

Meanwhile, the Chakravanti have maintained a subtle yet stubborn presence in the many governments and societies of India since the Classical Age, expanding into the Middle East and the Mediterranean (where the Hermetics and Choristers have been influential for over 2000 years), and North and Central Africa by way of the Madzimbabwe – a sect they absorbed during the Grand Convocation. Though never powerful in any of those regions, their influence in the underworld has been eerily profound. Meanwhile, their old Akashic rivals once held great influence in the courts of China, Tibet, Japan, and India, but slipped from official power in those regions long ago.

Popular Culture

The quest for art, passion, and rebellion has given the Ecstatic Tradition a strong hold in the lives of "common people." Especially since the Romantic and Decadent art movements of the early 1800s – when artists and their audiences rebelled against encroaching industrialism and modernity – the Cult has emerged as one of the Council's most influential Traditions. In the age of mass media and its attendant rebel subcultures, the Cult's message of transgressive liberation spread to the point where many folks credit (and blame) the Cult of Ecstasy for the wild 1960s. That's a simplistic assumption, but there's truth to the idea; certainly, the Cult enjoyed a profound role during the Woodstock Generation, and continues to influence the various descendants of that era ever since.

A similar inspiration guides the hand of the Dreamspeakers, whose marginalized role in the so-called "modern" age has made them rather powerful among the people who've been likewise marginalized. Now, as cultural genocide becomes unfashionable (though not eliminated), the Speakers and their people have forced Euro-American society to acknowledge them as equal members of the various nations that had ground cultures between their gears. Throughout Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, the Americas, Oceana, parts of Africa and Western Europe, and a globe-spanning network of urban and traditional medicine-workers and their allies, the Kha'vadi have asserted unprecedented influence in the twenty-first century cultural landscape. Though they don't hold the reins of power like the Hermetics and Choristers do, the Speakers reach a much larger and more enthusiastic audience these days than they ever had back during the Bad Old Days.

On a similar note, the growing interest in "eastern spirituality" and martial arts has given the Chakravanti and Akashayana a potent and growing influence throughout western popular culture. Combined with the Cultists' pop-culture ties and the "new age" influence and sustainable-living ethics of the Verbenae and Dreamspeakers, backed by the spiritual compassion of the Chorus and the occult pedigrees of the Hermetic Order, the Traditions hold a steady influence among people who want more than the cold embrace of technological comforts.

Activism and Subcultures

And then there's the growing sphere of political activism, which is where the Traditions truly excel. Between the Cult's old influence, the Dreamspeakers' growing power, and the vibrant anger of the Virtual Adepts, the twenty-first century political underground has become the Council's stronghold. Backed with neospiritual, sustainable-living, and urban-tribal movements, all nine Traditions – even, by way of alternate technologies, the Society of Ether – occupy a secure, if often embattled, place in global counterculture and political revolt.

Social media, and the Internet in general, have both made the Virtual Adepts one of the most powerful factions in the Ascension War. *No one* understands the Information Age better than the people who helped build it. Compared to the VAs, even the most accomplished Syndicate and NWO

ops are rank amateurs in the field of global activism. Flash-mobs, mass protests, culture-jamming, whistle-blowing, social networking, online video exposés, developing-nation technologies, DIY-culture, neoanarchism, Internet propagation, and all other forms of undermining the dominant paradigm have given the Virtual Adepts a level of influence envied even by the aristocratic Order of Hermes. This influence, in turn, has brought the "Virtual" Adepts further into the physical realm. Although their digital paradise still sounds promising in theory, many new Adepts prefer global reality-hacking over metaphysical transcendence.

Most recently, as of this writing, the real-world Standing Rock protests in North Dakota have inspired the largest and most comprehensive alliance of Indigenous peoples in history. That network, gathered in both physical and virtual space, reaches across the world, and includes people from cultures on every human-inhabited continent. For obvious reasons, the fictional Dreamspeakers, Ecstatics, Verbena, and Virtual Adepts play key roles within this expanding activist network – a network, that, in **Mage**, also extends into...

Cyberculture

Although the term *cyber* is hopelessly dated by the twenty-first century, the cultures of transhumanism, futurism, digital potential, cross-space connection, alternative media, recontextualized reality, and Internet telepresence are larger and more powerful now than anyone could have imagined them being back in the early 1990s. Even among the Sleepers, computers and the Internet are as ubiquitous in 2017 as cars were in 1993. Cell phones and wireless access place the world in your pocket, and although the deeper realities of the Digital Web remain exclusive to Awakened folks, the effects of online culture (and its related effects on culture at large) are almost universal. And again, no faction navigates these strange frontiers better than the Virtual Adepts.

On many levels, the results have been astoundingly successful. In perhaps the greatest single victory of the Ascension War, IT technology has destroyed the idea of a single dominant paradigm. In its place, we have a theoretically infinite "wikireality": a pool of possibilities in which anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can change the lives of millions of people worldwide. Alternative media sources subvert big-box dominance. Digital media and manipulation software allow clever Sleepers to recontextualize reality and then beam their visions to the world at large. The entire concept of controlled monoculture has shattered. On this front, at least, the Technocracy has lost.

As usual, however, the Sleepers have transformed something precious into shit. The Internet allows folks to vent their worst impulses on faceless worldwide forums. Social veneers of respect and recognition get chucked in favor of viciousness. Insane conspiracy theories and deliberate trolling subvert even the most essential concepts of reality, and keep people jumping at shadows and tearing one another apart. Doxing, cyber-bullying, and other forms of online harassment have become part of everyday existence across the globe, and an asshole with a keyboard can kill people without the use of magick. The downside of a democratic reality is that assholes outweigh visionaries... especially in the World of Darkness. The Technocracy may have ceded this field to the Fallen (see ***Nephandic Influence Upon the Cattle***, p. 242), and that's a war even the Adepts will be hard-pressed to win.

The Underworld

It's not a popular topic for discussion, but the outlaw nature of many Tradition groups binds them to the extralegal underworld. Once again, the Ecstatics hold an obvious advantage here, given their history with illegal practices and substances, combined with their defiance of law and order. Though the Euthanatos are not the careless killers that their reputations suggest, their fatal tendencies certainly mark them as murderers and assassins, with all the connections those professions demand. The Speakers' influence within hip-hop culture often has those mages rubbing elbows with gangsters, while the epithet *witch* brands a person as an outlaw even in the modern world, especially when the accusation is *true*. Choristers work as street saviors while Virtual Adepts ply the hacker underground. Akashics can land on either side of the law, and Etherite scientists may pursue forbidden experiments and shady adventures in the name of wild science.

Fandom

And then there's fandom: the swelling contingent of pop-culture's misfit toys. The twenty-first century has been called "the Golden Age of Geekdom," and that's not wrong. From the streets of Tokyo to the clubs of Goa, from Seattle game companies to Brazilian campuses, fantasy and SF fans hold a surging influence within IT and entertainment culture. For obvious reasons, the Etherites, VAs, Verbenae, and Hermetics hold pride of purpose in fandom subcultures – steampunk and high fantasy in particular. And if anyone can bring on a new age of magic, it'll be the folks who not only accept magical realities but who also strive to make their own lives magical.

Within the Technocratic Union



Directly opposed to the freewheeling and chaotic Traditions, the Technocratic Union strives toward a collective goal: *order and control*. Only by purging the demented extremities of Reality Deviation can humanity survive, much less prosper in, a world full of monsters. And despite its ominous reputation, the Union also encourages its personnel to advance the state of human knowledge and accomplishment. Outsiders often forget that part, and such advancements are an essential element of the Technocracy's *raison d'être*. Although the Union must often employ harsh methods to defend the Masses, its ideals *are* fundamentally benevolent even when the methods employed in their name are not. To bring prosperity to our world, however, and to defend that prosperity from unreasoning forces of metaphysical barbarity, the Union's operatives are ready and able to punish infractions with all necessary severity. Such justice is not merely just – it's all too often necessary. Even within its own ranks, the risks of vacillation in such matters can have catastrophic consequences for everyone involved.

Offenses, Evaluation, and Judgment

At its best, the Technocracy is an enlightened meritocracy. Operatives who demonstrate the highest rate of success, and the greatest degree of acumen and insight, are rewarded. For the sake of survival in an uncertain world, the Technocracy's also a collective: the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. These two themes – merit and mutuality – pervade the Union's systems of rewards and punishment. If one deviant or rebellious element endangers the collective, then it must be either amended or sacrificed for the sake of the greater good. If this idea seems harsh, consider the alternatives. The fate of humanity hangs in the balance, and forces both inside and outside the world we know threaten humanity's survival. And occasionally, this fact leads to a third theme in the Technocracy's system of punishments: *The ends often justify the means*.

Every Technocratic operative has an upper-level supervisor. Each supervisor has other supervisors above them. Only the Inner Circle is immune to higher-level oversight, and that body is theoretically overseen by the Union as a whole and the many agents and safeguards it has in place to detect high-level Deviance. The strict yet flexible hierarchy within the Technocratic Union allows for quick action when necessary but maintains a stable core of accountability and supervision for the organization and its multitudes.

Every supervisor has resources. He or she bestows them on successful teams or agents, and withdraws them from failed, suspected or disloyal ones. At the end of a mission, the supervisor evaluates the performance of her agents and amalgams based on their mission goals. Sometimes the reward for success may be nothing more than the chance to live to fight another day. And when, as one might expect, an agent fails, the degree of punishment is directly proportional to the degree and consequences of failure.

Roleplaying a Technocratic Operative

Agents of the Technocracy work in a collective that bestows privilege but demands responsibility. Once you're recruited as a citizen of the Union, an alliance of peers, supervisors, and unseen specialists in surveillance watches over you. The Union trains you and teaches you. You're given resources to use, tasked with missions to perform, and assigned to a superior who will judge your performance. It's not just a job: it's a series of jobs and a lifestyle that lasts for the rest of your life. And that essence of *team* is essential to any Technocratic character. Loose cannons tend to get battened down or tossed overboard.

While it's important to work closely with your allies as part of a team, each agent also makes personal choices, balancing his personal interpretation of what's right or wrong against the dictates of the rest of the Union. Agents control incredible technology, but the Technocracy asserts its control over *them*. The higher echelons of the organization manufacture idealistic tirades about working for the greater good, but any agent on the Front Lines of the war for reality must decide how to put those theories into practice. Winning control of the world is a hollow victory if you lose your soul in the process.

So this is the Technocracy, the ghost in the machine. What does it have to offer? Mirrorshades and limousines. Vast expense accounts. Secret agents and hypertech gadgets. Cyborg violence. Bioengineered brilliance. Black helicopters. Covert spacecraft. Endless mind games. Shadow-conspiracies. And, of course, betrayal, bloodlust and raw, naked power. The world is yours... but only if you have the ammunition to take it and the soul to retain your innate decency in the process.

Think you can handle it? Then welcome to the Technocratic Union. The reality you save may be your own.

Infractions: Crimes Against the Union

Technocratic law refers to crimes as *infractions*: the "breaking of an agreement" that reflects a weakening of Technocratic integrity. An agent who commits an infraction is seen as weakening the Union as a whole, and as an unmutual individual who has broken the trust of his or her comrades and superiors. Infractions, therefore, must be dealt with decisively.

Evaluation Hearings

Unless circumstances dictate a break from protocol, a Technocratic offender receives an *evaluation hearing* (an *EH*) if and when she's charged with an infraction. Depending upon that offender's rank with the system, the severity of the infraction, and the sympathy (or lack thereof) that operative has among her peers, that hearing may be a private affair with a supervisor, a locked-doors tribunal involving three upper-level Managers and the offender, or a large-scale hearing that is as "public" as an internal affair within the Union can be.

Due to the significant amount of supervision, monitoring, and oversight that the Union exerts over its operatives, Technocratic agents are essentially considered guilty if and when they are charged with an infraction. The intent of an infraction evaluation, then, is more concerned with determining whether or not the offender *meant* to commit a crime than with determining whether or not that offender committed the offense. Records can be faked, of course, and that factor is taken into account during the evaluation hearing. Even so, the level of justice that an accused Technocrat receives depends largely on the fairness and honesty of the supervisor(s) involved in the hearing. Officially, this reflects the attitude that high-ranking Technocrats are enlightened enough to be trustworthy. In practice, of course, it reflects the innate unfairness of an autocratic hierarchy.

Low-ranking Technocrats, and extraordinary citizens who get involved in official Technocracy affairs, receive one-on-one hearings with their immediate supervisor, and are punished or granted leniency at that supervisor's discretion. From the median ranks upward, hearings are supposed to become larger and more official, reflecting the importance of those operatives within the Union. In reality, of course, a high-ranking Technocrat can still find herself called on the carpet and dispensed with privately by a single supervisor. Technically, these private hearings are breaches of protocol. Still, they happen. And so, among cynical Technocrats, evaluation hearings are quietly referred to as *ehs*, as in "*Eh, I have a hearing tomorrow – and we all know how much* ***that's*** *worth around here!*" In most cases, actual Technocratic "justice" is determined behind closed doors, and its results tend to stay that way.

The Offender Advocate

Protocol dictates that an accused offender receives representation through a theoretically sympathetic *Offender Advocate*, or OA. The OA position reflects the Union's commitment to fairness among its members, but although the Advocate offers advice to the accused, this position is not a "lawyer" in the general sense of legal representation. An OA serves the Union, and offenders are well-advised to keep that fact in mind. An Advocate who's committed to his job may uncover evidence of error or neglect on the Union's part, and then pursue that evidence on behalf of his client. Such OAs are rare, though. As far as an accused Technocrat is concerned, that position is more symbolic than practical. And in closed-door hearings – especially in the case of low-ranking offenders – OAs are not present at all.

Degrees of Infraction

Each of the following infractions has three degrees. The higher the degree, the more severe the crime and its consequences in the eyes of the Technocracy:

- **Degree One – Neglect:** The offender was being careless. While he should have been more aware and informed, the infraction was not intentional, and came more from a lack of judgment than from deliberate wrongdoing. Punishment, then, will be of a corrective nature, meant to emphasize better planning in the future.

- **Degree Two – Error:** The offender chose poorly. His intentions may have been good, but his actions revealed an unacceptable level of foresight and consequence. Clearly, he is not ready for the level of trust invested in his current position, so punishment will reflect a demotion in status and liberty. Further corrections may be enforced if those measures are incommensurate with the nature of the crime.

- **Degree Three – Intent:** The offender knew what he was doing, and chose to break Union protocol with willful disobedience. Punishment will be harsh – possibly terminal, depending upon the infraction. At the very least, he will be subject to demotion, discomfort, and – most likely – a session of Social Processing. Clearly, he is not to be trusted, and may need to be removed from service permanently.

Regardless of the infraction and degree, the episode will be noted in the operative's file. Repeated episodes of Neglect and Error will be taken into account the next time that operative comes before an evaluation supervisor or committee, affecting that operative's security clearances, favor (or lack thereof), and status in the case of future infractions.

Technocratic Infractions

The following infractions are considered crimes under Technocratic Union law – the law that applies to its operatives, anyway. Outsiders, of course, are judged by different standards, and are considered guilty unless proven innocent – a conclusion that, of course, is rarely applied at all.

Each infraction is viewed through the lens of the three degrees, with the offender's culpability and punishment dependent on the amount of (perceived) intent behind the crime. An accused operative can be accused of multiple charges, of course. Referred to as *primary*, *secondary*, and *tertiary* infractions, multiple charges are ranked by the supervisors during a hearing, with the primary charge being the one weighed most heavily when determining intent and punishment.

- *Abuse of Office, or "Abe"* (misapplication of the authority invested in each Enlightened Technocrat, either through mishandling of lower-ranking members, exploitation of the Union's trust, endangerment of the Masses, careless application of hypertech among the Masses, or other forms of mismanagement that result in damage to the Technocracy's best interests. Typically, this infraction is charged against high-ranking operatives who wind up on the receiving end of bad politics, reckless agents who endanger innocent citizens, or supervisors who throw their weight around too freely and at the expense of their responsibilities and underlings.)

- *Collaboration* (intimate and unsanctioned relationships with Reality Deviants – mystic mages and the Night-Folk – which results in potential ***Subversion*** of the agent, his associates, and potentially the Masses and /or the Technocracy at large. A certain degree of communication with rival parties is expected under Union protocol, if only for practicality's sake. Even so, such relationships, in theory, must first receive official sanction from upper-level supervisors, and are supposed to remain limited in terms of contact and intimacy. One may be allies, even friends, with certain RDs who are determined to pose minimal threat to the Consensus; love affairs, however, family ties, prolonged association, and most especially the passing of secrets and technology between Technocracy agents and known Deviants are strictly forbidden and severely punished. Collaborations that result in damage to the Union's facilities, gear, personnel, and overall integrity may be punished with immediate application of the ***Degree Absolute*** – most especially if the RD in question is a Marauder or Nephandus.)

- *Collateral Impact, or CI* (reckless use of Technocracy equipment and personal power among the Masses, and a related failure to clean up the ensuring mess, resulting in excessive loss of life, property, and secrecy. "Reckless" and "excessive," of course, are arbitrary distinctions, weighed against the nature of the operatives and the circumstances of situation in question. Ideally, the Union seeks to address problems by achieving the greatest degree of resolution with the lowest incidence of CI. Using a heavily armed cyborg detachment to take out a remote outpost of powerful RDs is considered to be an appropriate response to a high-level threat; sending that same team into a crowded convention center to chase a perceived malcontent, on the other hand, results in significant CI, and such excesses should be avoided if the operative wishes to avoid this infraction.)

- *Dereliction of Duty, or DoD, sometimes called "dood"* (leaving one's post, neglecting one's assignment, allowing someone to do something that you should have prevented, or otherwise failing to act in a manner befitting an operative who takes her responsibilities to the Union seriously. An infraction often leveled at low-ranking Technocrats who've somehow fucked up through neglect, it's also a charge applied against high-ranking operatives who've let something important slip through their fingers... and in the latter case, it's a fairly serious charge.)

- *Dissent* (refusing to concede to the greater wisdom of the Union as a whole; a more severe form of ***Insubordination*** and ***Unmutuality***. For obvious reasons, this can be a rather Kafkaesque accusation – essentially impossible to refute, and potentially applied against any operative, regardless of their sincere devotion to the Technocratic cause.)

- *Insubordination* (refusal to obey orders from a superior operative, or to follow established Union protocol. This accusation often gets leveled against operatives with a supposedly defiant attitude toward authority, although this charge is generally added to a primary charge of ***Unmutuality***.)

- *Misuse of Resources, or MRS* (losing, damaging, stealing, lending without authorization, or otherwise mishandling Technocratic property. Typically leveled against agents who get careless with gear, people, money, and other resources, MRS charges remind Technocracy members that they are, in fact, members of a *UNION*, and thus remain responsible for their conduct with regards to those resources. In short, MRS reminds operatives that everything they have, they owe to that Union, and so that Union will hold you accountable for what you do with that level of trust.)

- *Reality Deviance, or RD* (damage to the Consensus, inflicted by the accused operative's embrace of superstitionism – that is, magick – excessive ***Collaboration*** with known RDs, or other forms of behavior unbefitting of a Technocratic defender of Consensus Integrity. This crime is considered to be a fairly serious charge even in the first degree, and it's often a fatal one in the third.)

- *Subversion* (corrupting and /or destroying the Union, its personnel, its missions, its property, its goals, and

its overall integrity. Of all infractions, this is by far the most severe, with harsh penalties administered against even the most apparently innocent first-degree offenders. Often combined with ***Collaboration***, this charge tends to be a death-sentence. Operatives who even *seem* to be involved with activities that could be construed as Subversion must step *very* lightly, and watch their backs under even the best of conditions. Naturally, this charge is the best way to eliminate Technocratic rivals... most especially when they're about to discover that you yourself are guilty of Subversion. In a Nephandic victory metaplot option, this infraction and its resulting punishments represent the largest obstacle to Fallen operatives – and so, in the grand Nephandic tradition, it's the tactic they employ most often, and most efficiently, to dispose of agents who would otherwise dispose of them.)

- *Unmutuality* (undermining the integrity of the Union by discriminating against operatives of differing sexes /genders /ethnicities /social classes /etc. Also used as a catch-all term for demonstrated hostility – real or perceived – against one's fellow Technocrats, for assaults and harassment against fellow Technocrats, and for otherwise taking advantage of other Technocratic representatives. A fairly serious infraction, this charge reflects that saying about the needs of the many verses the needs of the few.)

The list of Technocratic infractions more or less mirrors the crimes recognized by the Traditions, but with far more stringent boundaries and much more serious punishment. The Union does *not* prize fluffy ideals like "diversity" or "freedom," and so the casual attitude often found among the Traditions is almost entirely absent among the Conventions. Disrespect is a serious infraction, and chronic disobedience becomes a grave matter in more ways than one. A functioning Union demands order, and uncooperative agents are reprimanded with appropriate severity unless they have something profoundly useful to offer in exchange for greater flexibility.

That flexibility reflects an unspoken rule within the Union: *The more useful you are, the less expendable you become.* Despite its strictness (and its potentially Nephandic corruption), the Technocracy is not stupid. A valuable team or operative may be punished, but they won't be eliminated unless no better option exists. Each agent and amalgam provides a certain amount of benefit to the Union. A valuable team can exercise more independence, and enjoy a greater latitude of infractions, than a typical or substandard group can expect to deserve... up to a point, anyway. Beyond that point, their excesses become a liability – and worse still, an inspiration for future rebellions. At that juncture, the gloves come off, and the dissidents – no matter how useful they might be – tend to disappear.

Agents can be punished either as individuals or as a team, depending on the outcome of their missions. Some supervisors are very formal about such judgments, with debriefing sessions wherein agents hear the results of their performance. Other supervisors are so heavily burdened with responsibility that they intervene only when their patience has been exhausted or when some external force, like a rival supervisor, compels them to act.

Flaws in the System

Given the strictness of Union protocol and the degree of supervision that the Technocracy exerts over its operatives, how do Technocrats ever get away with committing infractions?

Carefully.

Disobedient Technocrats clearly exist. The Friends of Courage and other dissident groups could not survive their first brush with infraction if they were careless, and many dissidents don't survive it to begin with. John Courage himself has been Socially Processed so many times that even he's unsure about his past, and Courage is the rare individual who manages to survive his exploits through a combination of luck, fortune, connections, and personal excellence. To be blunt, he's too damned useful to retire, and so he has gotten away with a lot more than most agents would get away with if they were in his position. Other useful and connected operatives, of course, can walk away from an evaluation hearing more or less intact, so long as their record of good service reflects their usefulness within the Union and their chain of connections is strong enough to pull them through tight spots.

A greater flaw, however, exists within the Technocratic system: a willful blindness to its own fallibility. In many cases, the Union and its operatives cannot afford to admit doubt or error. And so, even when this violates Technocracy protocol, records get altered, lost, or erased. Favors get called in. Evaluations and penalties are rescinded or superseded. The wonders of Enlightened hypertech still depend upon Enlightened operation by flawed human beings, fallible machines, and the vagaries of a Reality that refuses to conform to predictable expectations. Essentially, the system which must – in theory – function without error is actually prone to errors that cannot be officially allowed to exist. That system, then, is constantly compensating for those unofficial fallibilities. As a result, a *lot* of things slip through the cracks.

If the Nephandi have indeed taken control of the Technocratic system, it's been a long-term process, cultivating the intrinsic weaknesses of that system and executed – at significant cost in lives and patience – over a period of *centuries*. That campaign, if it actually *has* succeeded, has been successful only because the Fallen excel at exploiting human weaknesses and turning those weaknesses against them. The Technocratic system, despite its efficiency, has significant flaws. And so whether or not the Fallen have wormed their way into its highest echelons, the Technocracy remains susceptible to infractions and the abuse of power.

Tearing Strips

Oh, big deal! My operative can take anything some pissy bureaucrat can dish out... right? Not so fast, citizen! Although it can be fun to unleash hell on offending players – and we highly encourage such roleplaying, so long as it doesn't violate the bonds of trust around your gaming table – the following suggestions can really make a reprimand sting:

- **Willpower Shredding:** In a hail of words, the angry supervisor feeds the offender's ego into a shredder. System-wise, this involves the Storyteller making several rolls of Charisma, Manipulation or Wits + Empathy, Intimidation, Leadership, or perhaps Torture on the supervisor's behalf. The difficulty is the offender's Willpower, and each success eliminates a temporary point of Willpower from the receiving character. The supervisor keeps shredding until the offender has no Willpower left, then orders him to get the hell out of her office.
- **Public Humiliation:** As above, but the supervisor does this in front of other Technocrats. Each success rolled removes *two* points of Willpower instead, and sets the offender up for even more shit later from his comrades.
- **Peer Pressure:** Although it's technically forbidden under Technocracy protocols, a furious supervisor may convince (either openly or by inference) other operatives to punish the offender once the reprimand is over. Beatings in the shower, social exclusion, pervasive teasing, unofficial demotion, and other forms of peer pressure can add considerably to the weight of a supervisor's displeasure.
- **Psychic Crush:** A Mind-Sphere savvy supervisor (that is, most of them) can tack the various forms of ***Psychic Assault*** (**How Do You *DO* That?**, **pp. 121-122**) onto a reprimand too. Although the supervisor probably won't go for ***Instant Madness*** or a ***Psychic Shatter***, the offending operative will certainly leave that meeting feeling much the worse for wear.
- **Drop and Give Me Twenty!:** A time-tested form of official displeasure adds grueling physical exertion to the reprimand. Refuse to do as you're told, and your punishment grows geometrically worse...

Supervisors don't reach that level unless they can handle their subordinates. Some are better at it than others are, obviously, but any supervisor worth her title can pass chastisement duties off to an associate who's better at it than she is. A reprimand, then, is something a smart operative dreads. It wouldn't be punishment, after all, if it didn't hurt a little... or a *lot*...

Technocratic Punishments

Despite gruesome rumors, the Technocracy doesn't punish its operatives on a whim. If for no reason other than the huge investments of time and training involved, extraordinary citizens and Enlightened personnel are not simply erased for minor failures or infractions. (Trainees and menial support-staff are another story, but the Technocracy hasn't invested much in such people.) Failure isn't an instant death-sentence, and a slap on the wrist is more common than a mind-wipe unless the agent has cost the Union something precious and expensive... like, for example, another agent. And for that reason, as well as for the sake of morale and mutual cooperation, personal vendettas and violence are handled more severely than general incompetence.

Unlike many Tradition mages, a good Technocrat takes punishment in stride. Ambitious agents tend to see punishment as a temporary setback – the sort of thing that gives you a good story to tell after the worst has passed. Still, a supervisor must be careful when dealing out punishment. A demoralized subordinate might lose her enthusiasm for the Union... may, in fact, even lash back at it if she feels she's been penalized unfairly. And so, the upper ranks strive to be fair whenever possible. Capricious cruelty is unmutual, after all, and a supervisor who abuses his subordinates may soon find the local Symposium punishing *him* in turn.

Typical punishments within the Union, in escalating order, include:

Reprimand

In the lightest level of consequences, an operative gets called on the carpet for a thorough chewing-out from her supervisor. If she protests, the punishment may escalate to something far worse, and so a wise agent simply stands there and takes the abuse. Enduring a harsh reprimand is a rite of passage within the Union.

Among the ranks, an official Reprimand is referred to as "taking the lashes," with the number of lashes based upon the strictness of the supervisor who gives it. That name refers to the old days, when corporal punishment was a common feature of martial discipline. In the modern era, the "lashes" are emotional and psychological, not physical. That said, any supervisor worth their title can peel an errant subordinate like an orange with the force of words and displeasure alone. (Curious **Mage** players



are recommended to the typhoon chew-outs delivered by R. Lee Ermey and Alec Baldwin, respectively, in the films *Full Metal Jacket* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*.) Both giving and taking a high-number Reprimand, therefore, becomes a mark of status, and so there's a certain degree of competition among supervisors to be known for Reprimands of 40 lashes or more.

Report

After the Reprimand, an errant agent will probably be put on Report. The incident receives an official file, noting the infraction, the parties involved, and the consequent punishment (usually ***Restriction***, ***Surveillance***, or both). In most cases, a Report puts the operative on probation; after a certain time, if she doesn't screw up again, the Report gets filed and forgotten until some other infraction brings her back for further consequences. For obvious reasons, a large number of Reports puts an operative on fairly thin ice.

Restriction

The offender loses certain privileges or freedoms. For a given time, the agent is essentially grounded to his Construct, usually with some extra (and unpleasant) duties tacked on for good measure. A Progenitor might get stuck cleaning cages or collating tedious data; a Black Suit may be given boring stakeouts or wind up confined behind a desk, while a Syndicate rep finds himself filing papers for the boss. Once the Restriction ends, the agent goes back to his usual life, with a new "black mark" on his file.

Surveillance

Agents receiving this punishment know they're being watched, especially when the amount of intimate surveillance footage shown in their debriefing sessions increases to embarrassing levels. An operative who's punished with surveillance clearly needs to be supervised more closely, and he receives that message in unmistakable terms. The penalty also encourages that operative to be paranoid; if he's *already* paranoid, then so much the better. Ideally, the realization that he's being monitored will decrease the operative's chances of acting in a disloyal fashion. If he still insists on being disloyal, then at least he'll soon be caught doing it, with harsher punishment to come once he *does* get caught.

Forfeiture

What the Union giveth, the Union taketh away. An operative under a Forfeiture sentence loses perks, gear, backup, assistance, and other resources for a certain period of time. Worse still, she might not even know that she's under this sentence – the resources could simply disappear

until the supervisor decides to give them back. The stick-end of unmutuality, Forfeiture reminds the agent that she's part of a larger whole, and that her privileges within that whole depend upon the Technocracy's goodwill.

(In game terms, a Forfeiture sentence reduces a character's Technocracy-based Background Traits by several dots; see **Mage 20, p. 303,** for further details.)

Demotion

The operative gets busted down to a lower rank. Regardless of her Enlightenment or personal skill, the offender loses one or more levels of status, respect, and autonomy within the Union. A fairly severe consequence, that punishment forces both the agent and her peers to reevaluate their relationship – and anyone who's heard that phrase knows that such things rarely go well or last much longer.

Amended Society

If the agent has a personal life outside the Union, his supervisor may choose to "amend" or ***Reprogram*** his friends or loved ones, either to motivate that agent with a hostage; monitor the agent with intimate surveillance; remind the agent how vulnerable he is and how much his newlife depends upon mutual cooperation; or some combination of those messages. Like Demotion, this consequence reflects a deteriorating relationship, with trust replaced by dominance.

Reassignment

With this punishment, a supervisor assigns one or more agents to another location. The offenders effectively lose their "home," including the contacts they've established, the personal lives they've built there, and the perks connected to their previous lives. Reassignment provides a firm and effective method for addressing potential disloyalty, since it strains or severs a questionable agent's contacts outside the Union. An especially unpleasant reassignment – say, to an embattled Construct, a boring post, a hazardous location, or some other unenviable assignment – can be an even more onerous punishment than usual... especially if it includes dangerous and potentially lethal duties at that post.

Extradimensional Reassignment

A supervisor may send offending agents away from their responsibilities on the Front Lines – usually to someplace more hazardous, oppressive or impersonal than their previous assignment. Iteration X cyborgs know that failure can mean a brutal post in Autochthonia. NWO agents get exiled to Horizon Constructs rife with rivalry, politics, and intra-Conventional conflict. An entire team may receive a suicidal mission on a Void Engineer ship, or a punishing tour of duty in an extradimensional war. This consequence depends upon both the supervisor and the offense; the stricter the supervisor, and the more severe the infraction, the more demeaning, hazardous, and distant the assignment.

Reprogramming /Social Conditioning

The Psych Ops division has Mind-based Social Conditioning Procedures designed to instill proper behavior in errant mages and disloyal agents. Reprogramming typically erases part or all of the offender's former personality, "recalibrating" her priorities and affections. An operative might ignore or forget her friends, betray old confidences, follow new loyalties, or otherwise seem like a different person... one who's more "desirable" to the Union and more amenable to her supervisor's commands. A severe penalty, Reprogramming leaves "blank spaces" where the old memories and thoughts used to be, and thus limits the agent's usefulness afterward. High-ranking Technocrats often receive different punishments, if only because the effects of Reprogramming render them unstable and unpredictable.

(For the game systems involved, see **Mage 20, pp. 605-607**. And for the potential effects of severe reprogramming, see the scrambled memories of John Courage in the **Mage 20 *Prelude***, and Lee Ann's reaction to reading the mental scar tissue involved.)

Duplication

Essentially, the original agent is erased. FAÇADE Engineers clone the disloyal agent, resulting in an unenlightened citizen who has a shorter lifespan (thanks to Paradox) but still possesses some of the same basic abilities without those troublesome outbursts of independence.

Degree Absolute / "The Seventh Degree"

The agent is permanently erased from active duty. He may be eliminated; recycled for cyborg or clone spare parts; or so thoroughly brainwashed that he's good for little more than unenlightened service at the lowest levels of Technocratic scutwork. Obviously, this is a method of last resort. If the rumors are to be believed, that final Degree may be unspeakably unpleasant for the agent involved. (See ***Room 101*** in **Mage 20, p. 182**.)

Except in the most temporary cases, imprisonment is rarely an option for Technocratic operatives. Prisons are incredibly inefficient from a resources standpoint, and they're beneath the dignity of a Technocratic operative. Cells are for Reality Deviants, not for respectable agents of Enlightened Science! Although certain Constructs employ forced labor as a punishment for their low-ranking staff, upper-level Technocrats are more often reprogrammed or erased than imprisoned.

Note that the most severe punishments tend to be enforced by a Symposium instead of a supervisor. Before an agent goes into exile into another dimension or receives a sentence of termination, he may have an opportunity to appear before a council of high-ranking supervisors. This sort of trial, though, is *exceedingly* generous on the Technocracy's part. It's neither expected by custom nor required by law. To merit

such investments of time, attention, and other resources, a valued Technocrat or team must be facing a dubious situation with substantial chance of error. Obvious lapses of loyalty or judgment carry obvious – and often drastic – punishments.

Technocratic Influence Upon the Masses

Rumor has it that the Technocracy controls everything in the modern world. That's nonsense, of course – even in the World of Darkness, no one has *that* level of influence. The top of the human-reality pyramid is also its apparent base: normal human beings. The Technocracy's think-tanks understand that much, and so their influence – though far more potent and pervasive than that of the Traditions – remains focused on the Masses. What the people believe, the world accepts as "real."

A large part of the Technocracy's power in this technological age comes from the vast reach of modern industries. For while many parts of the world still lack "essential services" like superstores and cell-phone reception, you'd be hard-pressed to find a human culture on Earth where *no one* reads, wears mass-produced clothes, or has heard of Mickey Mouse. In the twenty-first century, the Technocracy's influence extends to the most so-called "primitive" regions occupied by human beings. It's not true, of course, that "everyone" accepts industrial science as the be-all-end-all of reality; even in the most technological cultures, many folks retain their cultural superstitions and religious beliefs – see the essay ***Do You Believe in Magick?*** in this book, p. 287. That's okay. The Union isn't trying to own human consciousness... just shape it toward more-productive and less-chaotic ends.

Unlike the Traditions, the Technocratic Union concentrates on coordinated indoctrination projects. The overall focus of these projects involves ***control***, ***stability***, ***industry***, ***trust in technological solutions***, and the ***rejection of irrational superstitionism and destabilizing chaos***. Certain groups have their pet projects too – the space program for Void Engineers, endless indulgence for the Syndicate, fear of The Other for the NWO, biological potential for the Progenitors, and the reliable coolness of high technology for Iteration X. As a whole, though, the Union concentrates upon keeping the Masses controlled, comforted, and dependent upon technology for... well, everything. And in that regard, at least, they certainly *do* dominate the world.

The Technocracy's primary spheres of influence include (but are not limited to):

Science, Academia, and Industry

The most obvious Technocratic stronghold nurtures the most advanced and competitive realms of science. Not content to twitter around with theories (although theories have practical – and *profitable* – applications too), the various tech industries concern themselves primarily with commercial development and widespread implementation. On the theoretical end, science programs, think-tanks, tech universities, and research facilities occupy prime Union real-estate. The Technocracy's profound influence within these areas solidifies their grasp upon the technological age. The Virtual Adepts might know how to pick the locks, but the Technocracy owns the offices, the installations, and the monopoly on high-tech paradigms.

Banking and Big Business

The Union's all about profit, and so dominates the corporate sphere. The old commercial bonds that tied the world together in the Colonial Era remain clutched in the hands of the Syndicate and New World Order. No other faction holds nearly as much influence within the financial and mercantile realm, and no Convention holds nearly as much sway as the Syndicate. The World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the global supercorporations who command instant obedience from billions of employees worldwide – that's the Syndicate's beat. "Old money" mystics may have fortunes, but the Technocracy dominates the very *concept* of wealth.

Governments and Militaries

By guiding that wealth and also paying itself out of the pockets of the nations it helps to enrich, the Technocracy wields enormous influence through industrial-world governments and their associated militaries. That's not to say that a Man in Black stands behind the president's chair in the Oval Office ordering drone-strikes on some troublesome location; the Union isn't usually that overt, although under duress it *can* be. (How else could Technocrats get away with nuking parts of India?) Instead, the Technocratic Union holds purse-strings and puppet-strings alike, tugging them with subtle yet pervasive effect. Given the covert powers of Syndicate and NWO operatives, it's not necessary to send cyborgs into Town Hall. When they need to, though, they often *can* do that sort of thing... which makes the Technocracy scarier than hell.

The Union's influence within the world's armed forces is even more frightening... and more obvious. Where are all of humanity's amazing technological weapons coming from? Well, it's not fair to say they *all* come from Iteration X and the Progenitors, but most of the research and design programs at least originate in those Conventions, and Technocracy-governed factories run them off the assembly lines. Still, that alliance of hypertech equipment with mundane personnel involves a delicate balance. Beyond the obvious difficulties of implementation, the Technocracy as a whole recognizes that anything it puts into Consensus Reality can also be used against it... and a smart player always keeps his best cards to himself until the moment he needs them most.

As with most forms of Awakened influence, the Technocratic pull within governments and armed forces involves a lot of Sleepers who know little or nothing about their real masters; a handful who know who they're working for; and an even smaller number of Enlightened operatives who present marching orders and expect them to be obeyed. The average solider has no idea that something like the Technocracy exists; the general who commands her, though, knows several "influential friends," and has glimpsed portions of the greater picture. He might even be an extraordinary citizen, pledged to Union service, and in *very* rare cases might be Enlightened himself. In the hierarchies of military command, you don't need a *lot* of people on your side... just several of the *right* ones. And in that regard, the Technocracy's pull within governments and armed forces is second to none.

Covert Culture

The "hidden front" of governments and militaries concerns the global culture of espionage and other covert operations: spies, special forces, rapid-response teams, double agents, unorthodox surveillance, "wet work," cyberterrorism, and the many other forms of surgical destabilization. This has been the Union's specialty since the Renaissance, when High Guild agents and the dreaded Ksirafai cut their way through the shadows of late-medieval intrigue. When it's neither wise nor efficient to send in the army, a few well-trained operatives can bring down an empire without ever being seen. And because such blades cut both ways, a counterspy network is essential to any government that wants to stay in power for long. Except for perhaps the Nephandi, no other Awakened faction understands this game as well as the Technocracy does; they did, after all, help invent it.

Mass Media

The power of a camera trumps the power of a gun. Especially in the hands of media propagators, that camera can define reality. Contrary to popular belief, the Order of Reason probably did not invent the camera, printing press *or* gun. Since mass media dawned in the fifteenth century, however, Technocrats have understood its implications and then used them to their advantage. And since the mid-1800s – when affordable newspapers, mass-produced books, commercial magazines and early photography began shaping public opinion on a large scale – the Union has dominated mass media in the same ways it has dominated governments, science, and the modern military machine.

By the twenty-first century, a handful of corporations owns almost every major media outlet in Europe, the Americas, Oceana, and Japan. Most of Africa and India remain contested territory, with the majority of mass-media outlets in Asia and the Middle East under either government control or run by a handful of independent media companies. Because media shapes popular culture in ways that still aren't fully understood, these monumental media consolidations inform "reality" for vast portions of the industrialized world. And although the Technocracy's media influence in places like Iraq or Thailand remains negligible, its power in the United States, Western Europe, Japan, and Singapore is second to none. Alternative media have undercut this hold in recent years, but for the vast majority of consumers in these markets, "the truth" is carefully vetted, consolidated, packaged, and loaded for maximum profit and attention.

While the NWO provides the most obvious (ab)use of this media monopoly, the serious players come from the Syndicate. In contrast with the crude techniques of the Men in Black, the money men employ a simple yet effective formula: *1. Instill fear. 2. Promote doubt. 3. Undercut credibility. 4. Distract and seduce by all available methods. 5. Repeat and escalate.* And so, by the twenty-first century, the "news" comes by way of information overload with few facts but maximum bombast. Data – all of it ominous – scrolls by too fast for the eye to process. Bold colors (especially yellow, red, and blue) blast the viewer with nonstop barrages of "special reports" and "breaking news." Pundits howl about "gutters full of blood" and "worst people ever," drawing simple and predictable battle-lines. Panicky headlines, garish visuals, and alarming musical cues drive the viewer to a constant state of anxiety... and thus he keeps watching... and watching... and watching... growing more frightened and hostile with each passing hour. It's like goading a caged rat to shock himself until he forgets what "shock" means – until that state of anxiety feels normal, even pleasurable. Best of all, this requires no Mind-Sphere Procedures, special techniques or overt deceptions. And it remains very, *very* profitable.

Media critics used to claim that mass media anesthetizes society. By the new millennium, the reverse is true. This media machine keeps folks on edge, pounding them with a complex miasma of self-righteousness and self-loathing. In the name of freedom and luxury, it sells servitude and want. And so, the Masses remain pliable, frantic and afraid... which, in turn, makes the Technocratic order seem like the highest form of liberty.

The Digital Web and Virtual Finance

The Virtual Adepts might be masters of the Information Age, but the Technocracy's not far behind. Iteration X and Void Engineer netizens have been uploading themselves to the Digital Web since the late 1960s, with the occasional NWO operative scoping out this domain as well. Progenitors tend to be too oriented on Meatspace for such concerns, but the last decade has seen a large number of net-savvy Syndicate "magic men" join the party too. After all, if money is reality, and the preferred method of exchange these days is digital, then it stands to reason that the Syndicate would keep close tabs on the ups and downs of digital money too.

(It's often rumored, and perhaps even true, that the Syndicate's command over digital finances has made them even more dominant in new-millennium netspace than It X or the Engineers. If that's true, then the digital reality of global finance may be tied to the Syndicate in potentially nightmarish ways... especially if it's true that the Fallen have taken over the Technocracy these days.)

The Underworld

Like the Traditions, the Union has very bloody hands. Man has always craved what he knows he shouldn't have, and so the Union turns that craving into profitable control. Need to test a new drug? Take notes as addicts kill themselves with it. Want to seal an important deal? Take them to your personal whorehouse, where they'll be signing your contracts by dawn. Plan to take a few rivals out of action for good? The cops won't ask many questions about one more crazy mob hit. And so, the Technocracy's lower echelons work the underworld. It's not glamorous, but it's a killing.

Law Enforcement

On the other end of that beat, the guardians of order bust heads and take names. Here, the NWO dominates the game. Beyond the mysterious "maximum jurisdiction" of the Suits in Black, Gray, and White, the Order provides data-sifting, surveillance technology, cool gadgets, and fine-trained personnel to the governments under its influence. Every industrial power hosts headquarters, safe houses, and action teams, with connections that range from the mail room to the governor's office to the national intelligence agencies that seem, each year, to gather more and greater power – "for the common good," of course.

The "War on Terror" has been a godsend for the Technocracy... assuming, of course, that the average Technocrat believed in gods. Regardless of the truth behind the major acts of terror in the twenty-first century (and not even the Awakened themselves know who to blame for *that*), the NWO and Iteration X have played that situation to their full advantage. An age of terror begets an age of control; combined with the Syndicate's mass-media influence, the concepts of "freedom" and "security" have become whatever a spokesman wants to make of them. "Homeland protection" laws across the world have poured recruits and powers into Technocratic hands, while "corporate citizens" employ law-enforcement agencies as occasionally lethal goon squads in the name of "preserving order" and "protecting jobs." The idea of one dominant paradigm may be history, but worldwide law-enforcement – armed with military-grade hardware – is the order of the day.



Research, Development, and Exploration Programs

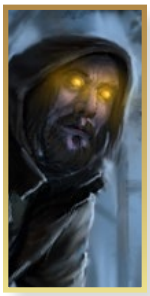
Despite black hats and hypertech control, the Technocracy's ideals live on. Their quest to build a better world is more than mere advertising; for the Union's most visionary members, it's still the most Enlightened goal imaginable. Amidst all the clones and weaponry, the Technocratic labs pursue clean energy, medicine, infinitely sustainable agriculture, communication technologies, utopian government philosophies, improved materials, engineering marvels, and other scientific treasures. Where the Traditions see monolithic evil, these Technocrats see humanity's best hope for tomorrow; for an example of this Technocracy in action, see the story "A Firm Place to Stand" in the **M20** anthology **Truth Beyond Paradox**.

The proof of Technocratic goodwill can be found all around us: electric lights, convenient energy, simple travel, ample food, reliable currency, stable governments... as recently as a century ago, few of these everyday marvels existed in any nation; now, they set the measure of civilization. On more abstract levels, social equality and legal protections come with those tech-driven benefits. After all, do the low-tech regions of the world have such luxuries? Not really, no. Sure, anarchy looks great on T-shirts, and "back to nature" arguments inspire lovely coffee-shop conversations. Without Technocratic guidance, though, there wouldn't be T-shirts *or* coffee-shops, much less the affluence to enjoy idle speculations. Comfort and stability have a price, and the lack of them breeds horrors that, even now, are far closer than they seem to be.

Meanwhile, the often-overlooked Void Engineers secure the pandimensional borders in preparation for that science-fiction dream: expansion to other realms and planets. The Earth, after all, is old and tired. Humanity and its attendant demons have used it up for millennia, and the flipside of prosperity – overpopulation – is a challenge no sane Technocrat ignores. The Masses need more space, new resources, more room to grow and thrive. Perhaps in the reaches of colonized space, we can shake off the vampires and werebeasts and superstitionist nonsense that have plagued the human animal. Sure, there'll be new monsters to tame and new challenges to meet. Without challenge, though, man becomes a slug, unworthy of the genius that drives him to the stars and beyond.

So yes – the Technocratic Union *does*, to some degree, mean well. Its extremities serve a greater purpose: The elevation of flawed beasts to secular godhood. That's the ultimate aim of Technocratic Mass Ascension: not slavery, but transcendence. First, however, the monsters must be slain, the sickness purged, the weakness driven out by the fire of scientific truth. In the blaze of that ideal, no price appears too great. So if securing the future means banishing "traditions," then the Technocracy's prepared to bring that future forward.

Among the Disparate Crafts



Apart from the others by definition, the mystic societies known as *Crafts* kept to themselves and handled their own business for centuries. For the most part, such mages have no real interest in abstract ideals of "ascension," and take a dim view of people trying to control their world. Only within the last few years have members of such groups come together and forged a shaky yet determined Alliance; that Alliance is very much a work-in-progress, and so its collective protocols are vague and changeable where they exist at all.

And yet, as they are learning, a code of common law is essential to any functioning society. If that society happens to include militaristic Christians, modern-day Amazons, mystic Muslims, Chinese aristocrats, Polynesian traditionalists, Gothic fashionistas, and the like – well then, that code of laws must be generalized yet strictly enforced. Without a shared foundation of legal discipline, such a collection of oddities wouldn't survive its first encounter with its own limitations.

Crimes Against the Alliance

In cases of offenses with a given Craft, the Craft in question handles its own business just as it has for centuries. A Templar who steals, for example, is disciplined by his fellow Knights of Christ, and may God have mercy on his soul. A Templar who steals from one of the Bata'a, however, will be taken before an *Adjudication Court* to determine his guilt or innocence; if he's found guilty, then his sentence is carried out by an *Executor General* from the offended group if the crime is committed against a fellow Ally, or by an Executor General who's chosen at random from within the Alliance if that crime was committed against an outside party.

Wise Hearts, Advocates, and the Adjudication Court

When the architects of the Alliance worked out the foundations for this awkward project, they realized that it would need a strict yet trusted body to resolve disputes and allocate justice. Given the rather justifiable tensions between groups such as the Templars, Hippolytoi, and Ahl-i-Batin, this body had to be a group of honored, stern yet compassionate "wise hearts" whose judgments would be accepted by the Alliance as

a whole. Through long discussion, those architects created the current system of Adjudication Courts: trusted but temporary councils that would determine guilt or innocence in a given case, and then assign an appropriate punishment thereof.

As the Allies came together, each group was asked to provide a collection of eight wise and trusted people. (Eight is considered to be an auspicious number under Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto, and Pagan Greek numerology, so that number makes sense from both practical and metaphysical perspectives.) These Wise Hearts are considered to be the finest representatives of their group; they're tested constantly, reviewed by peers, and held to high standards by everyone who knows of them. Contrary to what one might expect, these Wise Hearts are not all old or powerful; at least one Wise Heart per group, in fact, must be young, relatively weak, or both, in order to remind their peers that true justice cannot favor the strong.

When a member of the Alliance has been accused of a crime, three *Advocates* are chosen and assigned from among the Wise Hearts: One to represent the accused, one to represent the victim(s) of the crime, and one to make sure that the Alliance is represented and served as a whole. Generally, the Advocates for the accused and the injured party are chosen from groups other than the ones from which those parties came; if Penny Dreadful, for instance, was on trial, her Advocate would not be a Hollow One – and if she had supposedly harmed Sir Conrad Landsworth of the Knights Templar, Sir Conrad's Advocate would not be a Templar. Ideally, this system provides more objectivity, although it creates a fair amount of tension in practice. Finally, the representative for the Alliance itself is chosen at random from among the Wise Hearts of the Allies. For crimes performed by, or committed against, orphan individuals or groups smaller than the major Allies, Advocates are chosen at random from among those Allied Crafts.

When a given case is convened, those Wise Hearts are then vetted by the Advocates for the injured party, the accused, and the Alliance as a whole, until the eight most trusted Hearts from within the Alliance can be found. Eight representatives are chosen for each case, and those eight Wise Hearts become the Adjudication Court judges for the case in question. That Count examines evidence, hears testimony, makes its own inquires, and debates the case until at least five judges are agreed on guilt or innocence. Once that situation has been determined, the judges choose an appropriate punishment – again, by a majority of no less than five of the judges involved. Once the ruling has been made, no appeals process currently exists. An Adjudication Court's ruling is considered final.

As may be expected, this process can be time-consuming, contentious, and fraught with political implications for the Alliance as a whole. Still, it's considered to be a better solution than a standing court which could be corrupted, accused of favoritism, or otherwise distracted from as fair, wise, and impartial a trial as may be convened. The judges may – and do – use magick in determining their rulings, and although torture is prohibited during the inquiry process, the final punishments may be excruciating indeed.

Executor Generals

It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it. When a member of the Disparate Alliance is sentenced to a given punishment, the task of that punishment falls to an *Executor General*, often known as the *Sword of the Law* or its translation within the appropriate language (Latin, Arabic, Mandarin, Greek, and so forth). Powerful, trusted, and subject to constant scrutiny by both his compatriots and by members of other Crafts, this Executor is sworn to carry out any sentence handed down, expressing neither mercy nor cruelty in the process. Ideally, the Sword shows no favoritism or compassion for the sentenced individual. By mutual agreement, each Ally has three Swords at a given time; although an Ally may have more of them, no group within the Alliance should have less than three Swords who may be called upon.

Like the Wise Hearts, Swords are vetted, observed, and tested in order to maintain the level of trust and integrity their post demands. Although they're all mages of fearsome power and aspect, Alliance protocol demands that the Swords cannot be cold or sadistic people; justice must be administered by Executors who understand the gravity of their office and apply it only when a Court demands a given form of justice. Otherwise, the Swords are blooded in cruelty and oppression, and no one in the Alliance, especially not the folks who come from oppressed cultures, wants that sort of thing happening on their watch!

Disparate Protectorates

Ahl-i-Batin	Sufi Muslims
Bata'a	African-Americans who embrace "voodoo" creeds
Children of Knowledge	Alchemists
Hollow Ones	Artists
Kopa Loei	Polynesians
Ngoma	African children and their families
Sisters of Hippolyta	Female survivors of rape, trafficking, and domestic violence
Taftani	Zoroastrians and the Yizidi
Templar Knights	Christians in the Holy Land
Wu Lung	Chinese immigrants to other regions

Protectorates

A contentious element of Disparate law involves *protectorates*: groups of Sleepers who have been declared "under the protection" of a given Craft. This concept keeps the Allies from going at each other's throats over, say, Templar Knights slaughtering Muslims; unless a group of protected people has attacked members of a Craft first (thus forcing the mage to defend himself), or has otherwise removed themselves from the protection of a Craft (as in the case of Daesh and Al-Qaeda, whose actions have cost them the protection of the Batini and Taftani as a whole, even though certain members of those Crafts might belong to those groups), the unAwakened people under protection are considered to be off-limits to members of other Crafts. Harming such people, then, is considered to be a crime against the Alliance's integrity. Through this program, the Hippolytoi, Kopa Loei and Bata'a, among others, are able to keep their Allies from messing with their people. On the flipside, the protecting Craft is expected to police its protectorate – a situation that already has the Ahl-i-Batin, Taftani, and Templars reconsidering the long-term wisdom of this idea.

So far, the protectorate idea works better in theory than in practice. The Sisters' aspiration to place all women under their protectorate proved predictably impossible, but that attempt still keeps the other Allies – especially the notoriously misogynistic Templars and Wu Lung – on their best behavior regardless, if only because challenging the Hippolytoi on the subject is more trouble than it's worth. The Batini /Taftani attempt at putting all Muslims under their protection was likewise doomed, especially since so many Weavers are actually Zoroastrians, not Muslims. Still, the wary eye cast at anyone in the Crafts who messes with Middle Easterners has kept the Templars from diving wholeheartedly into a new Crusade... which, given the fatal effect such a Crusade would have on the Alliance, has been a very good thing. (Recently, many Weavers have been protecting the endangered Zoroastrian and Yizidi people from the Islamic State, which has proved to be a messy situation for all parties concerned.)

Currently, the observed (if not exactly official) protocol regarding Ally protectorates is, "*If an Ally has said 'hands-off' about a certain group of people, then leave those folks alone unless they harm you first.*" So far, this policy has come into play a mere handful of times, mostly regarding overzealous Templars and a few incidents of spouse-beating and racist assaults, which have led to the guilty parties being cut loose from their respective Crafts and turned over to the Sisters, Batini, and Bata's for justice... an example that keeps Disparate mages minding their Ps and Qs with regards to the protected people, at least for now.



Alliance Offenses

Given the cumbersome nature of the Alliance's judicial system, this faction addresses only the most severe crimes. Lesser crimes are handled within the Craft of the offender – and according to tradition, those tend to be addressed with fair severity, so as not to stain the honor of the Craft as a whole. Cross-Craft offenses, though, are considered to me major crimes by default; a crime against an Ally, after all, is a crime against the Alliance itself, and is punished accordingly.

The following offenses are considered to be crimes against the Disparate Alliance, especially when they're committed by members of that Alliance:

- Corruption (for obvious reasons, dealing with Nephandi in any way that doesn't involve killing them brings down the ultimate weight of Disparate law.)
- Rape or other forms of sexual violation (by insistence of the Hippolytoi and Templar Knights – in one of the very few agreements those Allies have ever shared – the rape of any gender, in any form, also carries the harshest penalties available under Disparate law.)
- Betrayal (of one's fellow Allies to a third party; this, too, carries nasty punishments.)
- Murder (of fellow Allies or their protected associates; the death of rival mages is not generally considered a crime; if the murdered mage is a Nephandus or a Technocrat, that's considered a good thing, not an offense.)
- Robbery (again, from a fellow Ally; the Alliance does not concern itself with stealing from rival mages or normal humans, although each Craft has its own laws regarding such things – many of which are quite strict.)
- Deception of Fellow Allies (a group this unstable demands trust, and so members who break faith with other Allies are punished for harming the Alliance as a whole.)
- Violation of Protectorate (that is, a crime committed against a group that an Ally has declared to be under their protection.)

Punishment

Given the long history with external oppression and interference many Allies recall, the Disparate Allies prefer to handle their own affairs internally whenever possible. The commission of a crime against a fellow Ally, though, endangers the framework of the entire Alliance, and so punishments, when they prove necessary, are uniformly harsh. On a related note, most Disparate groups also hail from cultures and subcultures where the default response to trouble is essentially "*Zero tolerance for bullshit.*" Chinese court sorcerers and Polynesian kahunas are not known for lenience, and frightful vengeance is a Bata'a specialty, if only because the group's history is so bloody harsh to begin with.

Reparations

In the mildest form of punishment under Disparate Alliance law, the offender must surrender two-thirds of all his material possessions to the wronged party. If he tries to hold something back, or to trick the Court about the true worth of those possessions, then the Court decrees that the offender surrenders *three-quarters* of all possessions and properties to the wronged party, with death as the penalty for any further nonsense.

Given the wide disparities in personal wealth among the Crafts, this punishment is both severe yet fair in the eyes of the Alliance. If nothing else, the threat of such reparations makes it unlikely that a wealthy "Ally" will abuse his so-called "inferiors" more than once, at any rate. Meanwhile, it also channels much-needed wealth to the Alliance's poorer members, which has made it popular with them, if not with their more aristocratic associates. Socially speaking, it's a rather blunt instrument... but then, the Alliance – for the moment, anyway – is dealing not with scalpels but with machetes.

Castration

The official punishment for sexual violence, regardless of the genders involved on either end of it, involves the painful removal of sexual organs by both blade and magick (to keep the rapist from growing anything back afterward). A psychic dump of the victim's pain is then blasted into the rapist's head – a trick the Sisters learned from the Cult of Ecstasy... or perhaps it was the other way around. Finally, the rapist is forehead-branded with a physical and metaphysical mark that lasts for the rest of that person's life. Oddly enough, the Alliance has had very, *very* few problems with sexual assault since this protocol began.

Because of the severity of the punishment, the Adjudication Courts use every possible resource – both mundane and magickal – to discern the truth behind a rape charge. Mentally ill offenders are absolved of this punishment, as are people who did not understand, at the time, that what they did was rape. Ambiguous circumstances are taken into account by the Court, and so (ideally) only deliberate acts of sexual violence are punished to such extremity.

Although the sentence has yet to be carried out in practice, this punishment is also the official sentence for people who accuse another Ally of sexual violence if that charge proves to be untrue. This, too, has cut down considerably on false reports of rape and molestation.

Torment

A rare but official punishment under Alliance law inflicts varying degrees of physical and spiritual torture upon the condemned party. Generally, these punishments aren't fatal, although the most extreme (and rarest) sentences involved

death *by* torment. So far, Alliance Courts have sentenced only four members to this level of extremity. The results, while horrific, have discouraged other Allies from dealing casually with the Fallen, or from committing sorcerous war-crimes involving sexually inflicted genocide.

In the few applications of this punishment, the Executor General typically draws from the darker corners of their ancestral tradition. Considering that those traditions include Legalist China, Renaissance Europe, Amazon enclaves and Voudoun culture, the corners in question can be pretty ominous. For the most part, even the *threat* of this punishment is enough to keep Ally mages in line.

Death

As observed earlier, death tends to be the most effective way of dealing with outlaw mages. Generally, the sentence gets carried out in as quick and painless a method as possible, if only because drawn-out executions of magick-wielding people often become rather chancy affairs. The Court and Sword, though, have the final say regarding a method of execution, and so it's not unknown to have errant Allies decapitated by enchanted blades, burnt alive by summoned dragons, bound in magickal chains and then eaten by sharks, or... in one memorable case... ripped to pieces by the reanimated corpses of the people the offender had killed.

Although the Alliance does not have a tradition of Gilgul-style soul-slaying, a penalty that's on the books but has not yet been used involves imprisoning a condemned offender's soul in a jar. No one has earned that punishment yet; knowing human nature, though, it'll probably get used eventually.

Disparate Influence Among the People

By definition, the Disparate influence upon the world at large has been scattered. Within small groups tied to a particular Craft, that influence might be considerable; with a few exceptions, though, those sects have very little pull in the greater scheme of things. The Disparate Alliance is a proposed step toward progress, but there's a *very* long way to go. Unlike the Traditions, Technocracy, and Nephandi, the Disparates haven't spent centuries expanding their influence as a whole. Their effect on the world and its Consensus, then, is essentially limited to their affiliated cultures.

That said, they have more influence than other parties believe. Especially since these groups appeal to marginalized people, sects like the Bata'a, Sisters, and Templars evoke deep loyalty from their allies. The Ngoma, meanwhile, may be the most powerful single group in Africa, if only because most other sects dismiss both the continent's importance and the group's continued existence. The Wu Lung, too, hold enormous influence in China even now, and anyone who discounts China's influence upon the world at large fails History 101.

Overall, the Disparates focus upon ***prosperity***, ***faith***, ***cultural tradition***, and ***the protection, restoration and elevation of their respective cultures***. The Alliance itself, being new, has yet to expand those goals to cultures outside those of a given Craft – the Hippolytoi, for instance, won't be embracing Crusader-brand Christianity anytime soon, nor will the Templars start supporting women's-health clinics. The larger groups, though, have begun looking beyond their

Roleplaying a Member of a Disparate Craft

As **Mage 20** points out (**pp. 200-201**), many Disparate mages come from cultures that have been shoved to the sidelines of the modern world. Aside from that commonality – which is about as much common ground as many Alliance mages share – they're a pretty diversified bunch, with tools and practices that suit each individual's culture and beliefs. From a player's perspective, then, select a Disparate mage from a group that appeals to you most, and then tailor that character's goals and focus to the culture that seems to suit him best.

As a general observation, Disparate people favor independence, survival, spiritual faith, personal or cultural agendas, and whatever it takes to protect and nurture their group of choice. For obvious reasons, this encourages them to be secretive, subtle, and elusive with regards to their existence and identity.

Deception, too, is a common trait among Disparate mages, if only for survival's sake. Your character might claim to be a Verbena or Virtual Adept rather than a Weaver or Templar. Survivors do whatever it takes to survive, and they don't live long unless they learn to lie well. Among repressed or enslaved cultures, that's especially true; if the authorities view you as a threat, then it's not a good idea to let the authorities know how powerful you truly are. Chances are good that your character has a fake story to back up her true affiliation, and an escape plan or three if her plans go sour.

If you play a mage from a culture that's not your own – say, you're a middle-class mainland American kid playing one of the Kopa Loei – then do whatever you can to learn about the culture in question. Not only will this give you a more authentic character, it'll also open the door to real-life knowledge about the appropriate subject. The more you know about different cultures and viewpoints, the more you enrich your life beyond the game as well. Whatever option you choose, avoid easy and insulting stereotypes. Sure, it'd be easy to make your Templar a ranting fundie, but that stereotype shortchanges the real issues of faith, devotion, and humanity involved in a sincere Templar portrayal. For more details and suggestions, see the sidebar ***Roleplaying the Other*** in **Mage 20, p. 258**.

differences and nurturing their common ground. The Ngoma, Bata'a, Ahl-i-Batin, and Kopa Loei, especially, have forged a powerful alliance based on their mutually oppressed cultures. If and when new groups from those cultures join them, the Traditions and Technocracy may find a titanic surprise right in the middle of the world they thought was theirs.

The primary areas of Disparate influence (though far from the only ones) include...

Faith and Religion

Aside from the determinedly secular Hollow Ones and the by-necessity diverse orphans, all the Disparate allies hold practices deeply rooted in the faiths of their respective cultures. And so, in an increasingly secular era, these groups receive strong devotion from their fellow believers. The Batini, Templars, Bata'a, Wu Lung, and Kopa Loei may be the most obviously religious Crafts, but even the Children of Knowledge convey a sense of faith through their practices... faith in transcendence rather than in divinity, perhaps, but faith nonetheless.

Among the faithful, the various allies enjoy prestige, loyalty, awe, and more than a little holy terror. After all, they're clearly favored by their associated gods, if only because of the Arts they command. As a result, those religious communities tend to offer whatever help they can provide – which, especially in the case of the Batini, Templars, Sisters, and Bata'a, can be considerable. Naturally, the faithful expect great things from the mages in return; given that so many Disparate groups have been inspired by sacred duties, though, the faithful tend to get what they expect.

If only because of that sacred duty, Disparate mages tend to associate with the more militant elements of their respective faiths. Again, the Templars provide the most obvious example, although the apparently mellow Solificati know a few folks who'd be willing to do *anything* in the service of their transformative creed. Most often, the Disparate call upon features things like shelter, healing, service, and other favors. When necessary, though, most Disparates can muster a few friends to beat the crap out of annoying trespassers, or make inconvenient bodies and evidence disappear. Especially among the Bata'a, Taftani, Batini, Wu Lung, and Kopa Loei, those groups have plenty of experience with that sort of thing.

Industry, Finance, and Enterprise

To outsiders, the Disparates look like poor stragglers on the fringe. No one expects them to command much wealth and influence. And of course, that's just what those groups want people to think. It's easier to slide under the wire, after all, when you don't seem fat. And yet, many of the Crafts are quite wealthy – and, by extension, influential. Far more so than people might believe.

The Ngoma – mystic kings who've been consolidating their influence for over 3000 years – hold the lion's share of fiscal and governmental influence throughout Africa, far more influence than even the Technocrats, who remain more or less blind to the prosperity of many African nations south of the Sahara Desert. Taking advantage of the common perception of "the Dark Continent" as one big chunk of jungles, huts, and grasslands, Ngoma executives direct fortunes toward infrastructure, agriculture, medical research, and investments across the continent. In the process, they ease the miseries for which that continent remains infamous, laying a foundation for a new era of post-conquest prosperity.

As advisors to the courts of China, the Wu Lung remain fabulously wealthy despite decades of Communist rule and foreign exploitation. In China's new era of industrial prosperity, when the old restrictions on wealth have loosened up, that wealth is beginning to swell toward the old-school levels of imperial Chinese opulence. Overseas, the Dragons have been building up their hordes for over a century; especially in their U.S. and U.K. enclaves, this group maintains extensive holdings among businesses and banks. And then there's the gold and jade – forms of wealth they never speak of to outsiders. If the Wu Lung chose to liquidate their fortunes, they could unbalance the entire world's economy... which, if things come to that, may be exactly what they'll do.

During the medieval era, the Templars were considered Christian Europe's bank. Their vows of individual poverty didn't keep them from assembling a vast communal wealth. King Philip of France tried to get his hands on it, and failed. The majority of that wealth disappeared into history, though not from the Craft's coffers. Like the Wu Lung, this group remains rich beyond their apparent means, concealing that wealth behind a thousand years of misdirection until the proper time arrives.

Despite their club-kid façade, the Children of Knowledge are alchemists. What's the oldest trick in the book for alchemists? Turning lead into gold? Yep. Add to that their earnings from various concoctions – some illegal, others not – and the income from the various clubs they control, and you've got a tidy sum; not king-breaker money, but far more than anyone suspects.

Meanwhile, the Taftani hide their survival behind opulent Middle Eastern wealth: imports, industries, the towering miracles they construct in plain sight, and the obvious riches from gold, oil, foreign trade, and global investiture. Most Weavers keep their fortunes to themselves, but have begun to toss a bit of it into a common pot for the group as a whole. The Taftani may be new at the whole "cooperation" thing, but they're far from stupid. If unity helps them master this dawning age, then old habits must make way for new traditions. As for those individual Weavers, a handful of them command multinational corporations... a level of influence that rivals many Syndicate honchos. Should they choose to use it, those Taftani could shake up the Middle East without raising a single gun or fist.

And then we have the Subtle Ones – a group so skilled in misdirection that they could be hiding *anything*... Especially considering that the Disparate Alliance appears to be a pet project for the Ahl-i-Batin, they probably know more far more than they're revealing about the fiscal power of the other sects, and may well have huge fortunes of their own. Certainly, they hold influence on a staggering scale. If the Disparate Alliance holds, it might just have enough resources to give the Technocracy a run for its money while undercutting the Traditions too...

Government

Like their wealth, the political influence of the various Disparate Crafts remains hidden. The Ngoma, Taftani, and Batini command respect and devotion throughout Africa and the Middle East, in ways the Technocracy could merely envy if they even knew that influence existed. (One of the reasons the Technocracy commands so little obedience in those regions may, in fact, come from the counter-influence of the opposing "Crafts.") As for the Templars, their few but devoted allies – particularly in Mediterranean and Central Europe as well as the Christian communities throughout the Middle East, most especially Jerusalem – give them an influence far greater than their numbers would suggest. The Bata'a, meanwhile, span Africa, Central America, the Caribbean islands, and many regions throughout the United States and Canada; though their allies might not command obvious political status, their numbers speak loudly when need be.

The traditional disenfranchisement of women across the world has robbed the Hippolytoi of obvious political strength. Yet, women have always held down the home-front while the men played at politics – and have manipulated "men of power" in covert yet potent ways outside the home as well. With the growth of women's-rights movements across the world, those women have stepped further into the halls of law and power within the last century, and while few of those female politicians will openly embrace a "radical Pagan sisterhood," many of them recall a kind voice and helping hand that was there when they needed it. The current global (and virtual) backlash against powerful women has, ironically, driven more women to the Sisters' cause. And so, to a growing extent, the Hippolytoi have achieved political influence both inside the governments and outside in the streets.

For now, the Wu Lung choose to play a very subtle hand at the power-tables of Asia. Without the backing of China's imperial courts, the group has few friends and plenty of enemies. Still, China's memory is long, and its cultural reverence for tradition grants the Dragon Wizards a hidden handhold in the region's politics – a hand they conceal very carefully, lest somebody chop it off at the wrist. Meanwhile, in the United States, the group enjoys more open status and influence... especially by way of its current allies, the Akashayana, and that group's pull throughout the mortal and Awakened communities.

"We grew here, you flew here" is a longstanding sentiment among Pacific islanders, most especially the folks in Hawaii, the Philippines, and the many islands of Oceana. Smoldering resentment against foreign *haoles* finds its way into the local, business and governmental politics of those areas, and while very few Polynesians follow the old ways religiously, the cultural authenticity of the Kopa Loei grants that small Craft an influential hold throughout those islands. As with most other Disparate sects, that influence is subtle yet pervasive. Outsiders have a long history of encountering logistical difficulties thanks to "those stupid backwards natives" who smile in their faces while undermining the *haoles*' every move.

Arts, Clubs, Streets, and the Global Subculture Scene

So where does all of this leave the Hollow Ones? They don't have senators on speed-dial, executive suites, or mountains of secret gold. Sure, a few of them own mansions or nightclubs; by and large, however, the "hollow tradition" is made up of cast-offs, refugees, and disaffected youth... or whatever disaffected youth turns into when the "youth" part shades into maturity. What influence do they have that makes the Hollow Ones players in – even architects of – the Disparate Alliance?

Art. Not just the snobby pretense of avant-garde attitude, but the vision and connections that link them deep into creative culture.

Especially in the grim World of Darkness, art plays a necessary role in making that world more bearable than it would be otherwise. Art, after all, expresses and communicates sentiments that people feel but rarely articulate. Ideally, art speaks for those who have no voice – sometimes with comfort, often with alarm, and often (when it's done right) with sudden recognition. People crave the "*I get it!*" moment in art – that kindred-spirit flash when the artist and audience glimpse one another through the work. And despite their effete anachronisms, the Hollow Ones speak for, and understand, a craving for assurance that you can laugh in Death's face and dance away while doing it.

This, in turn, earns them serious props from people who sense their feelings reflected in the Gothic finery and visual-kei adventurism of the Hollow Ones. Artists, clubbers, runaways and scenesters who chase their own mysteries through the night can look at the Hollow Ones and perceive a glorious reflection. If nothing else, many folks admire the Darklings for the sheer balls it takes to *be* them. And so, although the majority of Hollowers are distinctly pasty in the complexion department, they've earned a lasting bit of street cred that comes in handy when you live along the edge.

Beyond that, the group also cultivates an eye for social dynamics. A smart Hollow One can scope out a relationship between four people on the dance floor even if she can't hear a word said

by any of them. The Darklings read people well – they *have* to, as a survival mechanism – and this makes them valuable to the Alliance as a whole. Hollow Ones *know* people, too... people who can hide you, get you plane-fare, sneak you past security guards, or ditch a body in a grave the cops will never find. On a related note, they know mages too; the Hollow Ones have more experience with the Council of Nine than any other group, except the Ahl-i-Batin, within the Disparate Alliance. Those ties – especially with regards to the Cult of Ecstasy, Thanatoics, Verbena, and Adepts – still prove helpful, if only in terms of information and the occasional favor. (Of course, this limited goodwill depends on whether or not the Hollow Ones betrayed Horizon; see the ***Hollow Treachery?*** sidebar in **Mage 20, pg. 201**.)

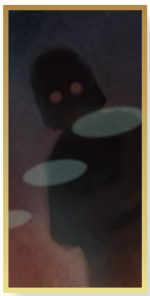
The international club scene, meanwhile, provides a convenient home for the Disparate Alliance. Although Templars, Wu Lung, and Taftani usually won't be caught dead in such places (with some exceptions here and there), the other groups – notably the Children of Knowledge – have ties to the globe-trotting neotribalists who occupy that scene's elite. Small enough to glide under the Technocratic radar, new and apparently "frivolous" enough to escape every mystic faction except the Ecstatics, Dreamspeakers, and some Verbena (who see exactly what's going on, and generally support it), this scene winds through the undergrounds of every major city in the technological world. Folks can meet up in Goa, run into one another in Tokyo, wind up trading stories in Athens or Berlin, than catch up again in Sydney, Detroit, and Dubai. The music drowns out their conversations, and the tangled lingo of codes and experiences confuses unwelcome observers. In short, the scene makes a perfect meeting-ground for new-millennium mystics... and the Hollow Ones hold passkeys to that scene.

Marginalized Cultures

Like the cultures from which so many of them come, the Disparate mages appear to have been swept off the face of the modern world. The Technocracy considers them throwbacks, the Traditions consider them recruiting stock, and the Nephandi usually set their sights on more clearly influential parties. And so, the Disparates, for the most part, represent people and cultures on the apparent outside of the modern world – and thus, find allies among them too.

While the Technocracy presides over the technological world and the Traditions uphold their ancient views, the Disparates slip along through shadows and cracks, united by a common cause and a tentative Alliance whose strength remains to be seen. Among movements where their people find common cause, many Disparates strike more personal alliances with members of other groups, especially among the Dreamspeaker, Akashic, VA, and Ecstatic Traditions; whether or not those Tradition mages recognize these alliances, or regard them the same way the Disparates do, is an open question at this time. Meanwhile, their unAwakened allies and devotees believe in them, respect them, and view them as family, not intruders. In the twenty-first century, as the colonial and industrial ideals jumble into cross-cultural chaos, those people outnumber the Euro-American Technocracy and its Hermetic-Ordered rivals. The people who've seemed "invisible" or beaten for the last two centuries have the weight of numbers and the convictions of survival. In the coming century, those factors might swing reality in unexpected directions – and if the Disparate remain whole, they might dictate terms for a new reality.

Among the Fallen



Oh, *them*.

By now, we're rather ascertained that the conventional wisdom insisting that the Nephandi had been driven out beyond an Avatar Storm-torn Gauntlet and Horizon is wishful thinking at best. And although the vast majority of mages who've heard of the Fallen think they're a bunch of Hammer horror-movie rejects with Iron Maiden fixations, the truth is far more disturbing than that. Whether or not the Fallen have truly taken over leadership of the Technocracy, the Traditions, both or neither is an open question to which only your Storyteller has an answer. Have they somehow become the puppet-masters of the Ascension War? Or are they just really good at misdirection and shadow-plays? The current state of the world makes a powerful argument in favor of pending Nephandic victory. It may be soon enough to pull humanity back from the brink of self-inflicted Apocalypse... but seriously, is humanity really worth the trouble of doing so?

The ultimate role of the Fallen in your personal World of Darkness is for your Storyteller to know and you to find out. We can't tell you that here. All we can say with certainty is that Nephandi are rarely where you expect them, seldom who you think they are, and always moving pawns around just beyond your sight.

Crime and Punishment

Does a group based on deliberate, calculating malignancy even *have* a definition for crime in its collective lexicon? It stands to reason that they do, but its nature and the bent-ass legalisms that must be involved in such a twisted group remain the secret of those who belong to it.

The odds are good that the most awful crime a Nephandus could commit against his kind is the sincere desire to defect and

Roleplaying a Nephandus

As **Mage 20** points out, we do not condone Nephandi as player characters. Some lines are best left uncrossed, especially if you value your friendships and chronicle. For Storytellers, however, or for players whose curiosity leads them to Faustian excess, it's worth keeping the following points in mind:

First off, each Nephandus has chosen that Path. Even the Widderslainte, who appear to be born damned, may have the opportunity to step away from their souls' dark guidance if they refuse to become monsters. (Whether or not they can do so *successfully* in your chronicle depends upon the wishes of each individual Storyteller. An ambiguous answer keeps things unpredictable.) As Enlightened beings, these people have good reasons for doing what they have done. As metaphysicians, they hold elaborate philosophies that justify their actions and fuel their Arts. As mages, they understand such things so deeply that they shape Reality in their malignant image. And so, from a roleplaying perspective, it's essential to figure out what those reasons may have been, work out what those philosophies might be, and then decide why the Fallen One asserts them in the face of agonized extinction. Adolescent rebellion isn't enough – that's kids' stuff, suitable for penny-stock cultists but too weak to sustain a Fallen Path. A Nephandic character needs powerful motivations for her choice, and those motivations drive terrible decisions. Such awful motivations come from the character's backstory, and probably provide a generous helping of pathos and complexity to what would otherwise be a cardboard villain figure.

Secondly, a Nephandus is a human being, doing monstrous things for human reasons. No matter how divorced from idealized humanity a Fallen character might be, that person is still a *person*. The person in question may believe that he has transcended silly little things like feelings, but that's not really true. The Fallen reflect the shadow side of humanity, and so it's essential that such characters remain human even at their most atrocious excesses.

(Remember that "human" doesn't mean "nice." The most flamboyant atrocities are committed by people who believe themselves to be utterly justified in their activities and morally superior to their victims.)

Third, Nephandi are shoot-on-sight antagonists. *NO* faction – not even the Marauders – tolerates open cooperation with Fallen mages. Oh, sure, there are plenty of Nephandi within the various groups... possibly even pulling their strings. But such cooperation is *N-E-V-E-R* sanctioned, not even within groups run by Fallen puppet masters. The official response to Nephandi is always *Kill the fuck out of them, kill the fuck out of everyone who's anywhere near them, and then kill the fuck out of their ashes for good measure.* All collaboration between Nephandic characters and folks from other groups goes on behind the scenes, usually without the dupes knowing who their "good friend" might be.

When playing a Nephandus, then, keep a low profile and employ a long-game approach. Waving around puppy-guts while chanting invocations to Cthulhu will peg you for a bad guy, so be subtle because your existence *depends* upon subtlety. Rather than running rampant like a lunatic, subvert the people around you by playing to their fears, aspirations, and pride. Yes, that *will* sometimes involve a Bad Boy /Bad Girl approach, but know your victim, and draw them along carefully.

Extreme conditions, of course, breed extreme behavior. A warlord in a combat zone can get away with mutilating children, raping their parents to death, calling up dark gods, and eating his victims alive while capering wild like a nudist lunatic. (You think I'm kidding? Google General Butt Naked – as real a Nephandus as you could possibly hope to find.) A corporocratic tycoon can dump toxic chemicals into the nearby drinking water while convincing the press and public that he's an upstanding citizen, and then go sic state cops on those damn Indians who keep making noise about his oil pipeline. Some Fallen really *do* behave like monsters – they simply make sure that they can get away with it. A cannibalistic sadist in downtown Chicago must act sane and cover his tracks; that same sadist in a warzone is just another fucked-up soldier.

From a roleplaying perspective, Nephandi are about as extreme as **Mage: The Ascension** gets. Hatred, sadism, sociopathy, and betrayal are their Enlightenment, and the toolbox they employ to get what they want is as dark as it is bottomless. If you're taking on such a role, then be prepared to stare straight into the abysses of the human condition – and remember that you're taking your fellow players up to the edge of those abysses too.

Trigger Warning

Nephandic characters do horrific things. That's why they're the most hated mages alive. As a player or Storyteller, please bear in mind that the Fallen are walking trigger-factories, and that your fellow players may be seriously upset by the things they do.

For the sake of your group and the enjoyment of your chronicle, figure out where the limits are within your group *before* you trip emotional land mines among your fellow players. A Nephandic character may conduct her worst atrocities offstage (hell, she probably *should* do so...) but discomfort within the player group may still well up around the fact that she exists to begin with. Whenever possible, use the suggestions in **Mage 20**, under the entry ***Problems, Boundaries, and the Three-Strike Zone*** **(pp. 344-345)**. And if you're a player running a Nephandus (or a Storyteller who allows a player to do so), then be *very* careful not to hurt real feelings with fictional activities.

The Fallen are supposed to be disturbing; if they're not upsetting the applecart, then they're not doing their jobs. But there's a huge difference between traumatizing *characters* and traumatizing *players*. If you're running over real-life toes with a steamroller, then it's time to chill the fuck out and reconsider your approach.

repent. Is such a thing even possible? That's been a topic of debate outside the Fallen ranks for centuries. Sure, there've been rumors of Nephandi who've wanted to reform, even a few who seemed as though they meant it. The stories about them, though... they don't end well. The ultimate answer, then, remains unknown.

Considering that the primary virtue (if you can call it that) among the Fallen involves the strength to Do As You Will, regardless of the consequences or the forces arrayed against you, it's reasonable to assume that anything a Nephandus has the wit and power to get away with doing is considered fair game among the Fallen. Lesser beings, of course – the pawns and low-ranking Nephandi – well, those who lack the power to manifest their Will in the face of annihilation are indeed annihilated. And said annihilation is as excruciating a process as may be conceived by the bottomless sadism of human ingenuity.

Nephandic Influence Upon the Cattle

The Devil's greatest trick involved convincing people that they didn't see his reflection in the mirror. No, instead, we look for evil in The Other – among those *SJWs*, *MRAs*, *fags*, *sluts*, *rednecks*, *Jews*, *Muslims*, *Christians*, *cucks*, *crackers*, *feminzais*, *socialists*, *conservatives*, *libotards*, *Rethuglicans*, *gooks*, *commies*, *wetbacks*, *slant-eyes*, *round-eyes*, *white devils*, *yellow perils*, *rich bastards*, *welfare queens*, and whatever other brand of fundie infidel white-trash dark-skinned immigrant bitch poison liberal terrorist folks have been told to hate. Oh, no, the Devil doesn't look like *US*, God literally forbid. That's that other guy over there. And so, the Devil sets up shop within our own skins. And that's where the Nephandi dwell – right in our living rooms, unseen by almost everyone.

That's not to say there are Fallen mages everywhere. No, in numbers this sect is actually pretty small. But their *influence* is legion. While Technocrats and Tradition mages wrestle for the halls of academia, Nephandi pawns are raping co-eds in the dorms and putting the crime on YouTube for the world's vicarious enjoyment and disgust. It's not that the Fallen are controlling minds or sending in cultists to commit their crimes. That's the scary part – *they don't have to*. Human beings do that shit for them without even being told to do it. Maybe a little nudge here, a tiny push here, some whispered words in the right ear at the wrong time, and some hometown hero finds himself on the front page, wondering how he could possibly have done what everyone knows he did. He's not a bad guy, after all – that's just what boys *do*, and she shouldn't have been dressed that way if she wasn't asking for it anyway.

Is this cutting a little close to home? Have the last few sentences seemed kinda heavy for your Storytelling game? Maybe they are. If so, the Nephandi can remain a distant presence in outer space, occasionally showing up as freaky cultists trying to summon a tentacled horror from the Void. Certainly, some Nephandi meet that description, and if you want your **Mage** chronicle to skirt real-life horrors in favor of escapism, that's a perfectly valid way to run things. But if you want to see the face of these Dark Reflections, it's as close as your nearest Internet connection... or maybe the nearest mirror... because if the Fallen really *are* winning the Ascension War, it's because we want to let them do it.

Nephandic influence, both subtle and overt, concentrates on ***selfishness***, ***fear***, ***indulgence***, ***despair***, ***hate***, ***greed***, ***division***, ***blindness to consequence***, and ***the social Darwinist myth*** that promotes "survival of the fittest" as long as that "fittest" looks like you. The Fallen ethic is total self-interest, whether that interest involves a fat bank account, "cultural purity," or the desire to escape suffering regardless of the effects your "escape" has on other people. As far as the Nephandi are concerned, there *is* no escape. The universe is cruel, hope is a myth, and so you might as well enjoy yourself on the road to Hell. To buy that message, one doesn't need to feel hopeless or believe in Hell. Just ignore the Devil's reflection until it looks like the folks next door.

In short, Nephandic influence is as diverse as human evil, and as pervasive as you fear it might be. It could reach from heavy-metal grave-robbers to heads of church, state, and industry. If indeed the Fallen are winning their endgame for Reality, their gospel could be echoing from talk-radio shows and whispered conversations in bunkers far beneath the ground. You might find traces of it in any popular website's Comments section, or hear about its effects after one too many drinks with your friends out at the bar. It's the late-night siren and the bleary blackened eye, the thing that waits just beyond the warning that suggests you're at the edge of sanity.

And maybe they're correct. Perhaps the universe really *is* as cruel as they believe. There could be something out there even *worse* than people... and if the Nephandi are as bad as you can imagine humanity to be, then what happens if they're serving something worse than humankind?

Among The Mad



And then, there are those whose awareness has led them to places beyond sanity's delusions – mages who have opened themselves, willingly or not, to an implacable cosmos. Such people are *arational* – not merely anti-rational but lacking in any sense of rationality to speak of. The cosmos within their own heads may have sorted out *attempts* at rationality, delusions similar to the ones we "normal" folk carry in our minds, but those perceptions are even more flawed (or perhaps, more *accurate*) than our own. The world they experience, the "self" they envision as identity – such things remain forever disconnected from "reality" as other people – even other mages – perceive it. And so although some of them might externally appear to be "normal" human beings, they remain apart from humanity, even from other mages. For while all mages reconstruct Reality through force of will, Marauders recontextualize Reality simply by existing. Everything they touch is transformed through that contact – not always in obvious ways, but with enduring effects.

There's No Justice Here

Despite the ways that mages (and **Mage** books) refer to them collectively, the Marauders are not a "faction" as such. They've got no social structure to speak of. No laws or leaders, no rules or ranks, no hierarchy of sins and penances... nothing of the kind, as a whole. *Individual* Marauders have laws and ethics, oh yes; small groups which manage to collaborate through the fog of inner madness, *they* have rules, although what those rules might be remains a mystery to saner minds. But the Mad... well, see, that's just it: they're *mad*. The external categorization that lumps them all into something resembling a faction of their own is illusory. It's what *we* see of them, not what they see in themselves. The impression of unity is false. Where the Fallen are shadows, the Mad are mist.

As a result, there *is* no system of justice among the Marauders. Oh, a given Marauder may consider certain things to be crimes against his person, and react accordingly, while a gang of Marauders might conduct trials for "crimes" as strange as exhaling blue air instead of green air like all "normal" people do. Such Mad trials combine the tyrannies of the Queen of Hearts ("*Off with their heads!*") with the ever-changing vagaries of a Calvinball game ("*It's never the same! It's always bizarre!*"), and depend solely upon the whims and delusions of the Marauders involved. And so, one mage who's killed a Marauder's pet goat could be sentenced – after a long bout of confusion – to have her hand shaken vigorously by a gnu, while the desperate criminal who was caught having a shadow after the appropriate hour of day could be sealed inside a pocket Realm and left to die.

Disconcerting Influence

In a similar vein, Mad "influence" upon the Masses is the sole province of a given Marauder. Some few, such as ***Witch-House*** (described below), have cults of personality which expand their madness throughout the land; others, like ***Hive*** **(Mage 20, p. 629)** exert unconscious influence through their apparently mundane existence. The majority of the madder Marauders are simply too demented to exist in Consensus Reality, and so their influence among unAwakened humans is nonexistent. A few, though, do the proverbial "walk among us" thing, and their influence is as subtle as the glare in the eyes of a passing stranger, or as pervasive as the nightmares planted in the minds of children whose mother lost her own mind a very long time ago... nightmares that grow and shift and produce their own sort of madness somewhere far down the road...

Madness is Like Gravity: Fellowships Among the Mad

Does not play well with others heads almost every Marauder report card. Even so, certain groups manage to function with a certain... dare we call it *mad?*... level of efficiency. With a handful of exceptions, the memberships within these strange alliances change with dizzying frequency; when Marauders successfully cooperate, however, their legacies speak for themselves.

The Underground

Originating in the European medieval period as *the Knights of St. Stephen*, the Underground began when the Mad proto-Verbena mage Stephen of Warwick decided to start moving enchanted beasts into the Otherworlds for their own protection. Over the centuries, Stephen's Umbral Underground established various Horizon Realms where both the Bygones and like-minded mages could live in relative peace. Although Stephen Warwick eventually disengaged himself from his old identity (living in a mild Quiet as mortal professor Stephen Warwick), his training program continues to this day.

In the Underground's ranks, the saner members spot budding or unaligned Marauders, entice them into training programs, and then guide their madness toward productive ends... productive, that is, for the Underground. Fitting like-minded lunatics into one another's company, the Underground has shaped several dozen organizations where shared insanity connects the Mad Mages involved. And although most of these groups implode within a year or two, several have survived for a decade or more.

On the whole, the Underground (whose name and methodology might have changed in the wake of the Avatar

Roleplaying the Mad

Insanity can be seductive. It may inspire protectiveness, terror, even love. It can seep out at inopportune moments, like the stain of urine down your pants in the middle of a big date. It could perhaps become endearing, if you like that sort of punishment. But although it can seem whimsical, it isn't cute. If you're gonna play a Marauder, then take madness seriously.

Madness isn't always obvious. More often than not, it remains hidden until the moment when the curtain drops and the true scenery is exposed to view. It's your best friend who suddenly talking about the lizard people she saw eating babies in your living room last night, or the look on your father's face when he stares straight at you and asks, with apparent clarity, who you are. Marauder madness is flamboyant when displayed by some reality-warping force of nature like Pillory or Witch-House, but when it appears in someone who was apparently sane until that moment, it's awful to behold.

Mage 20 explains how the clown-shoes need to be left at the door if you choose to roleplay the Mad. (For details, see **pp. 237 and 240.**) It's worth emphasizing, though, that the person who embraces the Marauder role ought to play that role for chills and tragedy, not cheap laughs. Otherwise, Marauders become a joke, not a threat. And considering that the Mad embody – even more so than Nephandi – the dreadful terror of Awakened life, that lost threat would be a real shame.

The primary text presents an array of different Marauder types. And because Marauders are mages who've fallen into more-or-less eternal Quiet, the three varieties of Quiet presented in **Mage 20** – ***Denial, Dementia Madness***, and ***Morbidity*** (see **pp. 557-559**) – can provide a wealth of roleplaying suggestions about the way a given Marauder behaves. If you want to get specific about the form of craziness involved, check out the Derangements offered in the same book (**pp. 649-650**), and then take those conditions to extremes. For some cinematic examples, you could draw from Heath Ledger's chilling Joker in *The Dark Knight* and Charlotte Gainsbourg's unhinged Eve in *Antichrist*, Scarlett Johansson's ice-clear disconnection in *Lucy* and Jack Nance's eerie delusions in *Eraserhead*, the grim self-disintegration of Nina Sayers in *Black Swan*, or the howling dementia of pretty much everyone (even Legs, by the end) in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. As Willem Dafoe's character points out in *Antichrist*, "Your thoughts distort reality." That's what being a Marauder is like.

Storm) strives to weaken the Consensus by killing the living fuck out of every Technocrat and Nephandus they can find. To this end, the good people of the Underground wreck outposts, foil operations, and commit theatrical atrocities against their hated foes. It's worth noting that these Marauders consider themselves to be moral, ethical folks working toward the greater good; if that greater good happens to involve mass murder, disemboweled Black Suits, and the occasional dragon dropped in the middle of Hong Kong, then so much the better!

The Underground's more reliable subsects include:

The Butcher Street Regulars

A loose but long-running association herded like a cauldron full of cats by Dr. Robert Davenport, the BSRs are anything but regular. Still, Dr. Davenport has kept the group running for over 25 years, which is some sort of record for the Mad. Based on Earth, the Regulars favor silent madness over screaming dementia. Its longest-lived members – Mother Goose, Senorita Abraxas, the Lord High Executioner, and Davenport himself – learned long ago how to move through the shadows of their world. As usual, the turnover rate can be somewhat high among lesser associates, but the BSR strives to contain the crazier side of the Marauder experience... or at least aim it at the folks who truly need killing.

The Numpa Kachpa

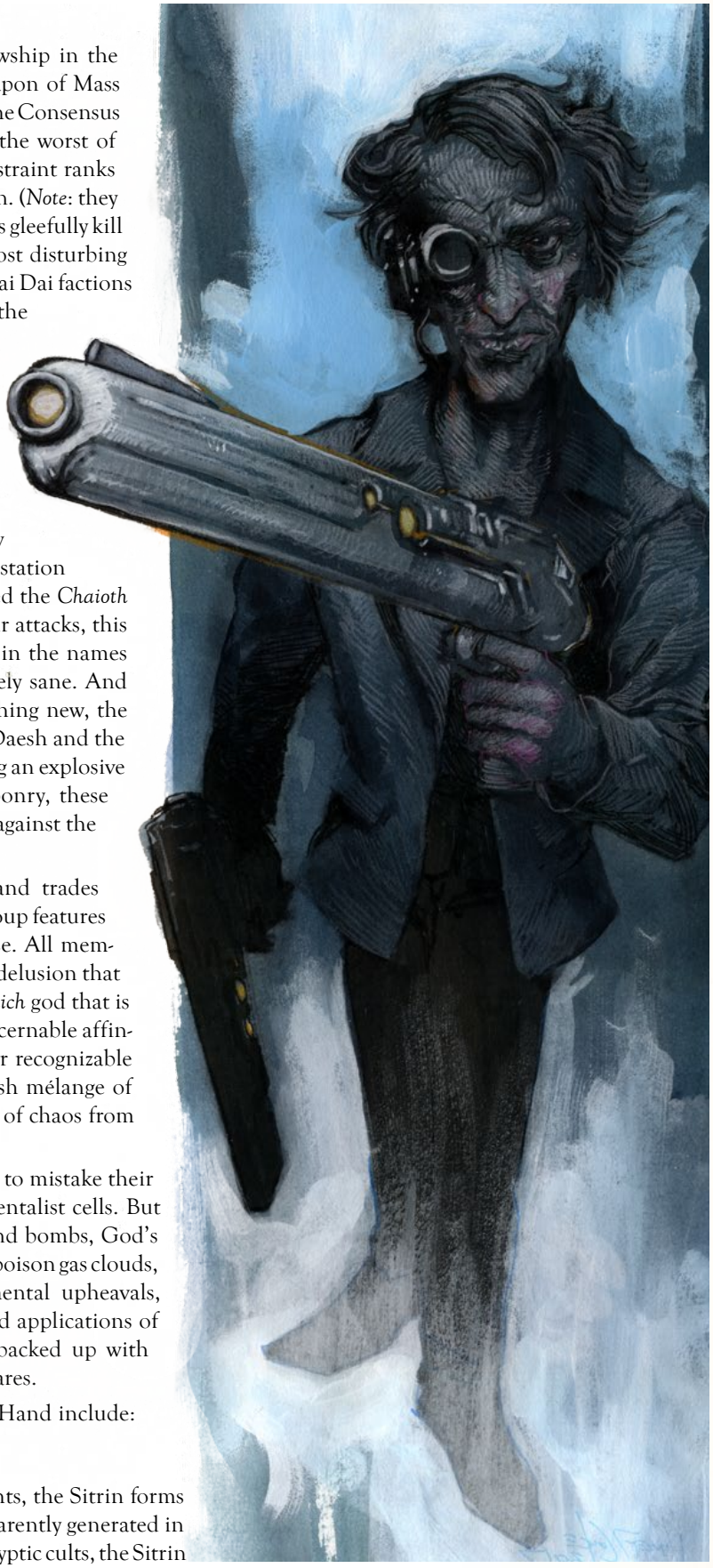
A deep-west sect composed of various Native American Marauders, this group takes its name from the Brule term for "Two-Strikes." Referred to by outsiders (and rather incorrectly) as *the Ghost Dance*, this group works to undermine the White Man's World through bizarre acts of zooterrorism, elemental command, and occasional carnage. Having learned the hazards of direct assault, the Numpa Kachpa prefers to buckle reality with strange phenomena: marching cacti, inexplicable rainstorms, talking animals, and roads or railroad tracks turned into glass, sand, or – in one memorable prank – buffalo shit. The various members take on trickster-animal identities, with at least three members going by the name Coyote... which, if you think about it, is totally appropriate.

The Railroad (A.K.A. Tubman's Trackers or the Knights of St. Stephen)

When folks imagine Marauders who want to bring back the Mythic Ages, they're thinking of the Knights of St. Stephen and their associates. Following the original purpose of the Underground, this three-pronged Railroad literally spirits Bygones across the Gauntlet. And although this task might have become more difficult since the Avatar Storm, the heirs of St. Stephen have continued his labor, establishing distant Realms where the shades of Earth's mystic past can remain safe from the suffocating power of ***Unbelief***. (See the entry of that name in the ***Paradox*** section of **Mage 20, p. 553**.)

The Bai Dai

More of a homicidal conflux than a fellowship in the BSR mode, the *Bai Dai* comprises a living Weapon of Mass Destruction. Ostensibly dedicated to shattering the Consensus through creative genocide, the Bai Dai attract the worst of the worst – Marauders whose compassion or restraint ranks slightly lower than their sense of self-preservation. (*Note*: they have none.) Walking reality bombs, these maniacs gleefully kill anyone and everything in sight, often in the most disturbing ways possible. By the twenty-first century, most Bai Dai factions have died out through sheer attrition; only the **Hemlock Court**, the **Fire of the Mahdi**, the **Maenads**, and the **Flowers of Camaxtli** still exist by 2017. (For details, see **The Book of Mirrors, p. 73.**)



God's Left Hand

As the millennium turned, the global fascination with Apocalypse inspired a new Marauder breed: "God's Left Hand," a manifestation of modern religious madness. Initially christened the *Chaioth ha-Quadesh* by a babbling survivor of one of their attacks, this demented faction appears to have been forged in the names of a dozen gods or more, none of them remotely sane. And though madness in the name of divinity is nothing new, the sheer ferocity of these Bai Dai inheritors make Daesh and the mortal Lord's Army look like amateurs. Wielding an explosive mix of magick, hypertech, and mundane weaponry, these demented shock troops have waged bloody war against the Consensus in all its forms.

Unlike the Underground, God's Left Hand trades subtlety for firepower; unlike the Bai Dai, this group features fusions, not confluxes, as its organizational base. All members of this demented collective seem to share a delusion that they're hand-picked warriors of God. Exactly *which* god that is remains unclear, as these Marauders hold no discernable affinity for Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or any other recognizable creed; instead, their god appears to be a freakish mélange of extremities from every human faith, with flecks of chaos from no comprehensible religion at all.

In the global Age of Terror, it's awfully easy to mistake their heavy-weapons fanaticism for religious fundamentalist cells. But whereas human terrorists use mundane guns and bombs, God's Left Hand employs insect plagues, hallucinatory poison gas clouds, screaming angel-demons, wicked storms, elemental upheavals, power armor, blaster cannons, and other twisted applications of Awakened Arts and Enlightened technology, backed up with infernal miracles out of Old Testament nightmares.

The most infamous subsects of God's Left Hand include:

The Sitrin

An occultist cadre of hypertech chaos knights, the Sitrin forms the tactical backbone for God's Left Hand. Apparently generated in the late 1990s from three or four different Apocalyptic cults, the Sitrin

takes its cues from distorted Christian and Muslim doctrines taken to lunatic extremes. Though supposedly striving against the forces of Darkness, Sitrin warriors dress like cybernetic Nazi-Templars and behave like Satanists on crack. (The Templars suspect that a lodge or two of their own brethren might have been involved in this group's foundation, but they won't admit as much to anyone outside their fellowship.) Net-savvy and versed in the Digital Web as well as mundane cyber-terrorism, the Sitrin has become a voracious black hole in the twenty-first-century Ascension War.

The P'o Chun

The Broken Army Star began as a Chinese Bai Dai cult. Swept into the Chaioth ha-Quadesh around the turn of the millennium, this growing sect of Awakened bandits combines a fascination with China's Imperial past with post-apocalyptic, survivalist hypertech. These days, the P'o Chun rampage through the industrial heartland, turning factories into debris and massacring every soul inside. Officially considered a nativist terrorism front by the Chinese government and its American contractors, these Marauders top the Asian Technocracy's kill list. Ominously, the group appears to enjoy support from sects of Asian vampires, whose hell-born powers complement the Arts of the Broken Army Star.

Team 23

An armored storm of technological dementia, Team 23 pursues an aggressive crusade against... well, pretty much everything. Forged of synthetic materials fused to living flesh, this strike force probably began as Technocrats driven mad by Pogrom atrocities. Armed with absurd weaponry, these armored nightmares teleport into strike-zones, kill pretty much everything, and leave their signature blast-graffiti burnt into the ruins.

Oddly enough, Team 23 favors Night-Folk and unAwakened targets; other mages, aside from the Nephandi, rarely get attacked unless they interfere with Team 23's operations. More... *communicative*... than most Marauders (if testosterone-fueled bragging can be considered communication), the members of Team 23 echo the worst fears of anti-military activists. Perhaps even more disturbing than their obvious love of carnage is the thought that there might be 22 other teams just like them...

(For details about Team 23, see the **Revised**-edition **Book of Madness, pg 67**. And for an example of Team 23 in action, see **Mage 20**'s ***Prelude***, wherein Lee Ann, John Courage, and a Technocratic clean-up team battle against madness commandos.)

Faces of the Storm

Affiliated or alone, all Marauders exist outside the confines of sanity even by the slippery definitions of that term that apply to the Awakened. Beyond that shared element, though, the term *Marauder* seems infinite and contains multitudes. You've got the cosmic jesters and sadistic brutes, shape-slipping psychopaths and mystic zooterrorists. Certain Wyld Ones Awaken in a burst of self-immolating mania; others float through the darkest reaches of the Umbrae, playing hide-and-seek with the phantoms of old worlds, populating Realms with the specters in their heads or staging cruel theatricals with souls willing and unwilling. The least obvious ones nurture that silent insanity that warps the edges of the everyday world and trickles out in small acts of subterfuge and self-sabotage that doesn't seem like insanity at all until the moment when the bottom drops out and everyone falls into Crazyville. Common lore insists that Marauders live beyond the Gauntlet, striving to bring back the Mythic Age or fading into spirit-stuff thanks to the shredding effects of the Avatar Storm. In truth, though, they're all around us even now. You'll never know until you become part of their insanity... and quite often, you won't even know then.

Such insanity may be kind as well as cruel. Despite their fearsome reputation, some Mad Ones perform acts of compassion that would shame a saint. A Marauder could be gentle, loving, fun to be around. The defining feature of a Marauder is simply this: his reality exists apart from the reality of everybody else. Within that reality, he might be a dozen Mother Teresas scattered across the globe, performing secret acts of mercy... or he could be the breathing ruins of a long-dead corpse... or the child in a sandbox where her sculptures talk and move... or a mythic figure... or the one true thing in a world composed of mirrors... or, or, or... You get the picture. A Marauder, in the words of Coyote Ashley Ward, makes love *and* war, perhaps viewing each one as its apparent opposite, simultaneously realizing that they're all the same damn thing.

Yet despite their vast differences, Marauders appear to fall into several distinct categories, at least to an outsider's perspective. Each category also features an example of this sort of madness and the way it shapes a particular Marauder.

Blood-Mad Maniacs

Possessed by the Quiet form known as ***Morbidity*** (detailed in **Mage 20, pp. 558-559**), a blood-mad maniac craves sadistic, imaginative slaughter. Often a convert from another faction, this Awakened psychopath employs her Arts in orgies of magnificent cruelty. Thankfully, a maniacal Marauder tends to enjoy a short, gory career that climaxes in a horrific showdown with a force of other mages. Until she gets brought down, however, this Wyld killer crafts oceans of carnage, often while bringing like-minded mortals along for the ride.

Occasionally, maniacal Mad Ones gather into bands. The fearsome Bai Dai and God's Left Hand factions unite such Marauders into terroristic fusions whose excesses scare even the Nephandi... especially since the Fallen occupy a special place of honor on the Mad Ones' hit list. "Mass murder" is

a tame description for a maniacal strike; by the time these Marauders leave, vortices of limb-shredding chaos have reduced every living thing to quivering biomass.

Bony Qin

An aspiring artist whose hands were crushed in a steam-press by a San Francisco Triad member who wanted to make an impression, Bony Awakened in shrieking pain. Broken physically and metaphysically by the attack, Bony now folds, spindles, and mutilates people into grotesque works of art. Floating in a glowing blue haze, this maniac stalks his victims from the air, using telekinetic force to shove obstacles into their paths and out of his own. Raising his mangled hands, Bony fumbles at the air with his fingers; from a distance, the bones and organs of his victims grind themselves into arcane shapes. In his wake, Bony Qin leaves chairs, curtains, rugs, sculptures, lamp posts, boxes, and household appliances behind him... all composed of living, thinking, screaming meat.

Gouge-Eyed Saints

Enlightened madness seeds the cosmos with gouge-eyed saints: Marauders whose grasp of sublime reality has driven them stark-raving buggo. Embodiments of ***Crazy Wisdom*** (as per the practice described in **Mage 20**'s section regarding ***Focus and the Arts***), these Chaos Mages have looked beyond the heart of the sun and discovered madness dancing there. Too crazy for mundane Reality, such saints often retreat to the wilderness and remake its landscape to suit their vision: glass deserts, tangled woodlands, snow-scoured mountaintops, pockets of eternal twilight where the stars shine in unfamiliar configurations... those realms of desolation where Reality's normal rules do not apply. Some saints gather small cults of insane worshippers, and others prefer their solitude. Those who can do so retreat into the Umbra, crafting or discovering Realms that coincide with their vision of existence. Every so often, though, such Marauders scrape against the surface of our corrupted world; when they do, the Mad saints strive to bring their insights to the Masses, often through psychotropic spectacles that reveal the vast scope of cosmic dementia.

Witch-House

A psychedelic insect-woman with antlers, wings, and a cloud of amber fireflies, Witch-House was crazy even before she Awakened. At some point, however, a revelation of divine chaos burnt through whatever was left of mortal sanity. The result is a reality-melting bodhisattva of perpetual transformation whose words make a frightening amount of sense once you stop trying to listen in rational terms.



Essentially a Zen koan in elemental form, Witch-House exists in a network of prismatic caverns that dig themselves under cities throughout the World of Darkness. These catacombs use complex Correspondence portals to cross oceans and collapse distance when a person travels through them. Within those caverns, tribes of mad mortal pilgrims trace the bones of the Earth, painting hosannas in their own blood and tears upon the walls. Occasionally, Witch-House, her pilgrims, or both emerge into the false light of the Consensus; at such times, the Consensus runs screaming as far as it can go away from these demented visionaries. Mages who encounter them feel an almost irresistible urge to join the tribe and seek the evanescent Truth beneath the surface of our world.

Horror's Heads

The most visibly grotesque Marauders, these horrors twist Awakening into monstrous shapes: screeching clouds, scar-fleshed terror-beasts, scuttling blobs of Enlightened protoplasm, and other abominations of once-human origins. Such entities manifest internal nightmares into external forms. Although they don't tend to last long in Consensus Reality (either burning out completely or else retreating into Umbral terrorscapes), creatures like the Islington Horror, the Echo, and Pillory embody ultimate sickness within the human condition.

Pillory

The screaming flagellation nightmare known as Pillory began as a girl whose disconnection from reality drove her to seek and inspire pain. Eventually, that pain burst forth into incandescent madness – a madness that warped every element of her being into an incarnation of agonizing hunger. (For details about Pillory, see **Mage 20, pp. 628-629**.)

The Mirror Cracks

When Awakened mages go Marauder, their former paradigms crack in new and exciting ways. Although their Mad identities echo their previous affiliations, these mages now pursue demented variations of their Path's most hazardous extremes. Cracked Hermetics commune with insane angels through dense rituals of staggering complexity; mad Ecstatics shake the shackles of time and space; mad Iterators craft themselves into impossible machines; and mad Nephandi become the gibbering K'llasshaa, self-annihilating servants of cosmic entropy. Essentially, a cracked mirror mage feels that he's discovered the Truth behind the filter of his old practice. And the scary thing is? He's not *wrong* in that assumption...

Basuko-Aii

A Baga priest who retained the traditional, animistic beliefs of his people in the face of Islamic and Christian influence, Basuko-Aii had been a shaman (though not a Dreamspeaker) allied with the spirit of Crocodile. During a catastrophic vision quest, though, his unity-mask fused itself to his face. In time, Basuko-Aii *became* that mask – a flying, wood-skinned entity whose carved features shift between aspects of man, bird, and crocodile. Occasionally growing legs or wings, the mask now hovers or crawls through the wilderness of Central Africa, manifested as a man-sized, mouthless horror whose presence warps the surroundings and drives all living things into frenzies of ecstatic dance. In his presence, spirits possess the people, objects, and animals in Basuko-Aii's vicinity, shaping them into pale-glowing shadows that embody hidden aspects of their inner selves.

Mundane Clouds of Ordinary Madness

These folks appear to be perfectly normal... or whatever passes for normal in the increasing alienation of this millennium's World of Darkness. They're office clerks, data-entry technicians, street folks, clergy... the Strangers Next Door whose lives you might glimpse for an instant before disappearing back into your own existence. Their madness might never become your problem – until and unless it suddenly *does*. At that point, the bright edges of Crazy slice through the mundane world, taking bits of Normal with them.

Hive

The name given to a collective of identities, Hive exists in a perpetual state of disconnection from itself. Split by Mind, Life, and Correspondence principles into a group of apparently mundane people sharing a single mystic origin, Hive works in offices as a number of essentially nameless drones. S/he technically has names, faces, personalities, and lives; all of them, however, reflect a single individual whose Multiple Personality Disorder manifests as a connected bunch of different selves. Between those selves, Hive runs an agenda of quiet sabotage, making small yet crucial leaks and errors throughout a dozen separate offices. (For more details about Hive, see **Mage 20, p. 629**.)

Negation Men

The maddest thing a mage can do is to deny the existence of magick. Even Technocrats – who suppress the very *idea* of magick – still enjoy the powers of Enlightened Science and hypertech control. Certain Marauders, however, negate the effects of magick because they refuse to believe it exists. Walking paradoxes, these *Negation Men* assert the strength of the Consensus through sheer deniability.

Not long ago, the idea of such Marauders would have been inconceivable; the Mad Ones, after all, assert Dynamism, not Stasis, and strive to bring humanity into some new, chaotic Mythic Age. But in the wake of the Week of Nightmares (or some other factor, if those events never occurred), certain mages went utterly mad with *Denial*: a form of insanity that refuses to admit the existence of otherwise obvious facts. Since then, the Negation Men (no one yet has met a Negation *Woman*, although they probably exist) lead apparently normal lives, suppressing magick whenever it occurs in their presence.

Optional Rule: The Negation Men

In game terms, a Negation Man's Quiet is an extreme form of the Denial described in **Mage 20, p. 557**. Instead of using his Spheres to create magickal Effects, he uses them as a constant and unconscious form of ***Countermagick*** – see that same chapter, **pp. 545-546**.

As an *optional rule*, a Negation Man's Arete Trait gets rolled against any magickal Effect within roughly 15 feet (four-and-a half meters, or five yards) per point in his Arete. Each success removes one success from another mage's or Device's Effects. Despite his Awakening, a Negation Man also counts as a Sleeper witness whenever a mage of any kind performs magick in his presence. This requires no effort on the Negation Man's part; in place of the usual Marauder chaos, his madness manifests as crushing and unshakable *normalcy*. No matter what happens, such Mad Ones *refuse* to accept the possibility of magick. And yes, there *can* be female Negation Marauders; the syndrome simply asserts itself more frequently in men.

All Negation Men appear totally mundane. They have neither auras nor apparent souls, dress neatly, and share the fastidious habits of some folks with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. That disorder, in fact, seems to be part of their madness. On many levels, they appear to be perfect Technocratic drones – efficient, orderly, and controlled. The presence, however, of a Negation Man blunts Technocratic Science as well as mystic Arts; this, in turn, dampens Enlightened Devices and Procedures, many of which provide essential systems for Technocratic operations.

Mages who've begun to recognize the Negation Man Syndrome theorize that such Marauders began as Technocrats whose obsession with order became too strong. That might even be true. It's possible, however, that some Negation Men were mystic mages who broke under the strain of their Arts. In pushing those powers far from their conscious minds, these mages might have adopted that ultimate paradox: the wizard so Awakened that he denies his own Awakening.

George Blank

He doesn't actually use the name "Blank." To everyone he meets, he's simply "George." Yet George has no aura, no apparent soul. His eyes seem a little too clear, his speech a bit too clipped for comfort. People who've heard of Asperger's Syndrome wonder if George is a high-functioning Aspie. He's not, though – his apparent hyperfocus is instead a wide-eyed state of denial. George literally *does not see* extraordinary things. He's locked them out of his perceptions. To him, the world is orderly and correct, free from shadows and ambiguities. Like most Negation Men, he's polite and efficient – the good citizen of a technological world. To George, however, there's no sense of wonder or mystery in life, only the well-ordered function of a perfect universe... which, considering that he's a citizen in the World of Darkness, makes him seem crazy as a shithouse rat.

Rabbits in the Night

These "Invisible Marauders" move through the mundane world, aware of their insanity but revealing very little of it. Like rabbits in a garden under the cover of darkness, they nibble at the edges of Consensus Reality, leaving little bits of it scattered in their wake. These folks tend to be a bit too crazy to fit in with the Masses, yet they still pass for normal to the uneducated eye. Such Marauders tend to be uncannily charming – the crazy hotties who seduce people into taking care of them – or implacably repulsive – the folks who make your skin crawl simply by existing. Their madness manifests in small but undeniable ways, eroding the Consensus through subtle radiation. Somehow, these Mad Ones manage to work together, recognizing fellow Marauders and appealing to their shared insanities. Although they're not showy about their power, they tend to be among the most dangerous of their kind, simply because they're sane enough to know what they are, yet crazy enough not to care.

Robert Davenport

Perhaps the most infamous Marauder, Robert Davenport heads the Butcher Street Regulars and has done so for over 25 years. Despite his longtime proximity to the Mad, he manages to retain a fair amount of apparent sanity, even passing for normal when he cares to do so. Once a doctor who'd attracted the attention of the Technocracy, Davenport survived an assassination attempt that killed his family and drove him mad. Since then, he has marshaled the forces of Chaos in an eight-dimensional chess game of subterfuge, terrorism, and extradimensional alliances. Although the years have worn deep grooves in Davenport's face, the madness of his role still manifests as a deep conviction that his wife and daughter – both long gone – still stand beside him, occasionally dwelling in a faerie-tale fortress forged from his own subtle yet pervasive dementia.

Older incarnations of Robert Davenport can be found in both editions of **The Book of Madness**. Even now, his magickal power is expansive in scope (he knows all of the Spheres) yet limited in power (Spirit 5, every other Sphere at 3 or below). His Avatar appears as his dead wife Maraya, and has convinced him that his medical talents now serve an ailing Reality that needs to be cured of its Technocratic cancer.

Shock Troupes

Bent into fusions of shared insanity, Marauder shock troupes display a common madness. Those communal bonds transcend rational evaluation; folks who try to read those hive minds discover psychic gravity wells of mental static and intoxicating allure. Spawned from a single incident of mass insanity (a battle, massacre, atrocity, disaster), or broken along similar and compatible lines (like the way in which the original Hell's Angels began as World War II fighter pilots unable to adjust to being post-War civilians), these shock troupes share a functional commonality. This bond forges a group identity within their madness, and although the individuals within that fusion maintain a singular identity (unlike, say, the "all-are-one" nature of Hive), those identities recognize a common purpose. And so, whereas other Marauder bands clump together in messy alliances, the troupes collaborate in mass dementia, bringing reality storms wherever they go.

The Wyld Ones

A cycle-borne pack of Marauders who function as one fearsome unit, the Wyld Ones don't actually answer to that name... or to any other form of coherent conversation, for that matter. Composed of roughly a dozen Mad Ones (the number varies from incident to incident), this gang resembles a time-tripping bunch of souped-up *Road Warrior* rejects whose activities transcend temporal and material physics. Also referred to as "the Synnars" and other sarcastic names, this fusion has existed in some form or another for several decades, skipping in and out of Earthly and Otherworldly space on errands that only the bikers understand.

(For details about this Marauder cycle gang, see the **Mage** module **Loom of Fate**.)

Trickster's Brood

According to certain theories, each Mad One is an aspect of *the Trickster*, that cosmic archon of gleeful misrule. Inverting conventions and leveling thrones, this Trickster's brood exists to undermine Stasis and humble pride. Like their spiritual ancestors – Coyote, Raven, Rabbit, Lucifer, Loki, Harlequin, and so forth – these Marauders pursue schemes that overturn the established order and often backfire in spectacular ways. Although they're clearly *not* the godlike figures of Trickster legendry, such Mad Ones carry on that venerable tradition with style and a deadly sense of fun.

But although such tricksters might be playful and engaging, their activities can be dangerous as hell. Consider a Wile E. Coyote, for example, with real dynamite, painting walls with dimensional portals into gods-know-where... or a Hop-Frog jester whose idea of a good time involves setting fire to busloads of kids. Legendary tricksters have notoriously grotesque pranks: giant prehensile penises, transformative elixirs, skins that slide off their bones and run around without them... Imagine a Marauder with such powers, and suddenly that cosmic clown seems far less amusing. A Trickster Marauder is more like Alan Moore's Killing Joker than like Caesar Romero's Clown Prince of Crime, combining elemental powers and a frightening libido with shape-shifting powers and a mastery of time, space, and probability that puts all of Creation at the butt of his jokes.

Mother Goose

A stalwart veteran of Robert Davenport's Butcher Street Regulars, Mother Goose is a friendly but apparently senile Black American grandmother whose specialties include illusions, dimensional portals, yummy baked goods, and baroque acts of zooterrorism. Quiet and polite by nature, she tends to mother everyone except the folks she really doesn't like; those people, she eliminates with spectacular magicks, Bygone beasties, and her trusty shotgun. (For details about Mother Goose, see **The Book of Madness**, original edition, **pp. 83-84**).

Wyld Spirits

To the few mages who understand werebeast cosmology, the Mad ones appear bound to *the Wyld*: an embodied force of generative chaos. From the Wyld, all creativity comes... but that creativity is too chaotic to be stable, too fertile to be contained. The insanity at the heart of Art may come from the Wyld too, inspiring the madness that all creative people know. In this sense, then, the Wyld Mages may be considered artists on the cusp of reality... or perhaps, more strangely, as generative figures whose fertility births weird new forms of sanity.

That's an esoteric concept, sure... but among mages, esoterica are a way of life. And although it's kind of odd to think of Marauders as some sort of cosmic artists, that idea's not hard to grasp from a mystical perspective. Indeed, certain Marauders appear to be warped fertility figures – the Sleeping Lord comes immediately to mind. Things often *do* grow in the presence of the Mad Ones, and although those sudden, unpredictable growth spurts often pass into rapid decay, such displays of wild (or Wyld) energy underscore the connection between Marauders and the force of primal genesis. It's also not surprising, then, that such Marauders often run with the werewolves, charging into battle alongside nature spirits, werebeasts, and bizarre entities of unbound Change.

The Sleeping Lord

Once, they say, he was a Verbena or some other nature mage. Cursed into an eternal slumber, he became one with the forest, sinking his roots into the ground and blossoming into occasional eruptions wherever Stasis takes hold too deeply. In the many, many years since then, the Sleeping Lord has occasionally appeared: a comatose Green Man whose dreams send forth tendrils, roots, and flowers. Yet



despite that apparently peaceful demeanor, the Sleeping Lord embodies the implacable surge of Nature. When he manifests, plants burst through sidewalks and walls; trees erupt through houses within minutes or even seconds; foundations and bridges break apart under the strain of sudden erosion and restless roots. Hyperoxygenated air loosens inhibitions and inspires wild flights of energy and passion. Werebeasts, called by his Wyld essence, stalk the New Green, defending it from attackers and returning the Wild Law to man's world. Through it all, the Lord slumbers, his leafy face relaxed into calm repose. That sleep, however, begs an awful question: *If this is what he does when he's asleep, what will happen if the Sleeping Lord ever wakes up...?*



Chapter Five: To Speak of Many Things...

Information doesn't just want to be free, it longs to be free.
– Eric Hughes, "A Cypherpunk's Manifesto"

They never tell you about the tears.

Funny thing about a punch in the nose: Not only does it hurt like fuck, but it also fills your eyes with tears. There's this sudden flash of pain, maybe a little crack if you're not lucky, and then your eyes go white and your vision's blurry and someone's pounding on your back and knocking you to the floor, and if you could only see, and maybe add ***breathing*** *on to that, then maybe, just* ***MAYBE****, you could stop them.*

So that's how I got this little souvenir. The nose, I mean. It adds a bit of dignity, don't you think? Makes me look like I've been around. 'Cause, y'know, I have been. Got the marks to prove it. Some interesting ones. Maybe we could compare notes.

But they don't tell you about the tears, or that helpless feeling you get when someone tags you a good one and sends you to the floor.

When it happens to you, though, you don't forget.

Even if you fix the outside scars with a little hocus-pocus, the ones inside never really go away...

Straight-Up Magick: The M20 FAQ



"*I want to bring the magic back.*"

Back in late 2011, Onyx Path owner Richard Thomas and I were discussing our plans and vision for **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition**. As longtime veterans of the World of Darkness – in Rich's case, he's one of its initial creators, and I joined the White Wolf pack in 1992 – we both wanted to recapture the rush of wonder that both fans and creators alike felt in the early years of White Wolf's run. Back then, it wasn't unusual to see folks spend 12-to-14-hour days at the office because we were just that into what we were creating. It's been a long time since then, and gods know that our middle-aged selves had no desire to put in those kinds of hours again. Still, though, Rich and I both missed the heady dementia that produced those batshit labors of love. And on **Mage 20**, we agreed to come as close to that sensation as we could.

Obviously, there's only so much lightning in a bottle one can recapture after two-and-a-half decades, but I think we caught quite a bit of it with that half-million-word monster we've since dubbed **M20**. And yet, even with such an epic word-count, such magic can raise questions... especially when it includes that goddamned pretentious "k" at the end of the word.

DISCLAIMER

The following sentiments are the personal opinions and recollections of the author of this book, **Mage 20**, and lots of other **Mage** stuff. They are my words alone, and in no way reflect the official positions or representatives of Onyx Path Publishing, Paradox Interactive, other **Mage** line developers, or any iteration of the ever-changing White Wolf entity. If something in the following words pisses you off, blame me. It's all my fault. If it *doesn't* piss you off, blame me anyway.

And so, let's dispense with formalities. Hi, I'm Satyr – the dude who wrote the lion's share of **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition**, and the one who's written the book in your hands as well. My relationship with **Mage** goes back to the summer of 1993, when my then-boss Ken Cliffe handed me a thick purple game book with the words, "It's all yours. We don't have the slightest idea what to do with it." **Mage** tends to have that effect on people; given the metaphysical concepts, freeform rules, and epically complex setting involved in **Mage**, that's not really too surprising. Most times, I've found that a conversational approach – one I sometimes refer to as "bardic profanity" – seems to be the best way to get beyond the initial burst of *What the fuck is THIS?* which is part and parcel of **Mage**'s quarter-century legacy. And so, rather than roll out pseudo-poetic profundities (of which I myself have been guilty on many an occasion) that continue to muddy **Mage**'s waters, I figured that we'd kick this off this chapter with some straight-up **M20** Q&A. No parables or obfuscatory prose, just your questions and my answers.

Sure, there's a place for mystery in magic... but sometimes it's even more enlightening to speak plain.

So yeah – let's do this thing...

M20 in General

Mage 20 answered a lot of longstanding questions about the series, especially in **Chapter Ten**, which resolved certain issues that had been around since the game's debut. Even so, a half-million-word project still invites various new questions, especially ones that involve the creative decisions made while designing that book. And so, to start things off, I'll address some of the ones I've seen most often on forums, or heard from fans, since **Mage 20** first appeared.

Isn't Mage Stuck in the 1990s?

Nope. **Mage** is dynamic, not static. The original 1993 **Mage** was a product of its time. **Mage 20** reflects our current age. Although a lot of the classic **Mage** elements remain intact, the setting, story possibilities, groups, and technologies have been updated to reflect the second decade of the twenty-first century. **Mage 20**'s approach to politics, economics, technological advances, gender, identity, and other important topics all reflect the current era, not the 1990s. And although you can still "Tarantino it up" – cross-pollinating decades to get the look and feel that you want – **Mage 20** is very much a game of Now, not Then.

Most importantly – as far as I'm concerned, anyway – we've addressed the '90s-era limitations that we had with regards to language, cultural accuracy, and other blind spots of the early Internet era. Back in the old days, we had to rely on written sources and personal connections in order to research cultures and languages other than the ones we had experienced personally. Along the way, we made some embarrassing and occasionally offensive errors... mistakes we can correct in the age of social media, where a knowledgeable source is only a Facebook post or Google search away.

To that end, among others, I assembled the **Mage 20** brain-trust: a collection of trusted friends and fans from literally across the world. These people – whose names can be found in the credits of each **M20** book – help me vet the material long before it even reaches an editor. This way, we can catch errors of fact and perspective that would have slipped past the old White Wolf crew. As a result, **Mage 20** is more historically and culturally accurate than previous editions had been. And although some folks seem to consider those updates to be "political correctness run amuck" (more on that subject below), I'm glad that we've been able to fix some of the more glaring examples of linguistic and cultural fail that dogged earlier editions.

(Admittedly, this question has been more or less answered for anyone who's read **Mage 20**. Still, I continue to see it pop up on the forums, so I figured this would be a good place to begin the FAQ.)

Why Was the Material for Mage 20 Split into Four Individual Books (M20, How do You DO That?, The Book of Secrets, and Gods & Monsters), Instead of Released as a Four-Volume Set Called Mage 20, Vol. I–IV?

Well, it could be argued that that's exactly what we *have* done. Really, though, these are the reasons we haven't compiled **Mage 20** into a four-volume format:

One: Because no other World of Darkness RPG has been released in a multi-volume format, and we wanted to keep things consistent with the rest of the series.

Two: Because we wanted the core **M20** rulebook to be "one-stop shopping" for someone who wanted to play **Mage**, with the other books serving as supplemental material that's *helpful* but not *essential* when running the game.

Three: Because we'd still be working on the damned thing if we'd been trying to spread it out between four volumes. Considering that the book in your hands is obviously still in

progress, with **Gods & Monsters** nowhere near completion, as of this writing, our sponsors and fans would be waiting until **Mage** had passed its *25th* anniversary before they got a four-volume **Mage 20** set.

Four: Because a four-volume set would be bloody huge, hella expensive, and damned near impossible to get through when you needed a given piece of information.

Five: Because that four-volume set would need its own separate index... and speaking as the guy who hand-compiled the Index for **Mage 20** itself, there is not enough money in the world to be worth the amount of work involved in that index times four.

Why is Mage 20 So Big/ Why Isn't Mage 20 Bigger?

Originally, **Mage 20** was slated to be around 300,000 words and 500 pages, like the **Vampire** and **Werewolf 20th Anniversary Editions**. As I began the process of re-reading the books from my own run ('93-'99) and the **Mage Revised**-era books I had not yet read, I realized there was no way I could fit the material into so small a space and do it all justice. **Mage** has always been the biggest and most complex of the World of Darkness lines, packed with metaphysical weirdness, Otherworldly regions, and a baroque metaplot. During the **Revised**-edition era, the series also acquired (for better and worse) a ton of new and revised rule systems and metaplot elements. And then there were the essential twenty-first century updates, plus a smattering of new material that I wanted to add. For a variety of reasons that I'll go into below, I knew that we had to cover a lot of ground. Rich and I were determined to make "a **Mage** for all **Mage** fans," and that demanded a wealth of material. And so, with Rich's full support (thank you, Rich!), I began writing... and writing... and writing.

With the help of a collection of classic-era **Mage** authors and my **M20** brain-trust, I assembled a pre-edit draft that featured everything that – within reason – I could imagine a **Mage** fan demanding from its 20th Anniversary edition. Even then, I stopped writing certain portions – like the Merits and Flaws Appendix, the "sub-groups" section that proved to be too large for even this **Book of Secrets**, and the "How Do You *DO* That?" section, which eventually appeared as the sourcebook of that title – because I realized there was no way it would all fit into the book. That draft rang in at roughly 650,000 words – an utterly unpublishable length. I cut it down to around 530,000 words before sending it to editing, and then cut between 30,000-35,000 words of material during the layout process, once we realized that the book would still be impossible to bind reliably if it ran over 700 pages in length. (I don't know the exact amount of those cuts because I could not run word-counts on the layout files, and I had to rewrite certain sections to cover the bits that had been cut.) Art director /graphic designer Michael Chaney moved heaven and earth to cram that roughly half-million words into those 700 pages, with room left for an index and the character sheets (thank you, Mike!), and we got our "**Mage** for all **Mage** fans" at an affordable length that could be manageably published in a Print On Demand format. As it is, **Mage 20** is a monster... but a big, friendly one. We wrote it with an eye towards clarity... which has not always been a strong suit of **Mage**... with as little of the old-school ponderousness as we could manage while still keeping the book recognizably **Mage**.

Why isn't it bigger? Simply put, the damn thing would be so fragile that it couldn't stand up to even casual wear-and-tear, and would cost more than it already costs. We felt, though, that a smaller book wouldn't be true to the vast expectations of the **Mage** audience, or to the grandiose setting and rules that define **Mage**. And so, while it's not exactly an entry-level browse, that tome-like final product is true to the epic spirit of **Mage**.

Why did You Spend the First Five Chapters on Occasionally Redundant Setting Stuff?

That epic spirit involves a lot of complicated concepts, a blizzard of terminology, and a setting that reaches from mundane living rooms to the furthest reaches of comprehension. There's no way to adequately address all that material in a single setting chapter – much less to do so without smothering the reader beneath Infodump Mountain. And so, ever since **Mage 2nd Edition**, we've divided the setting material into a collection of chapters, each one of which renders a certain area of **Mage**'s vast scope into bite-sized pieces.

Realizing that **Mage 20** would probably become an introduction to folks who'd never played **Mage** before, I started with the assumption that each reader knew nothing about the world or its particulars... and because I also realized that most **Mage 20** readers *would* be familiar with the setting, I also addressed the subjects from new angles, offering insights and information that had not been given in a single source before.

Echoing **Mage 2nd** and **Mage: The Sorcerer's Crusade**, I decided to write those first few setting chapters "in voice" – that is, as a guided tour through the concepts of **Mage**. That decision also makes a clear delineation between the *setting-through-the-eyes-of-its-characters* section and the *rules-in-plain-English* section – a distinction that was not always a feature in earlier **Mage** books. Earlier editions tended to muddy the waters by combining in-character descriptions of the setting and the Spheres with player-centric rules material, so I didn't repeat that mistake.

Because I wanted to recall the old-school device of presenting the setting through the eyes of a character in the World of Darkness, I chose to write **M20**'s setting chapters in an ambiguously meta voice. You can read them as an elder mage guiding a young initiate through a strange new world, as the author talking directly to the reader about **Mage**, or as both. Rather than unleash a torrent of information, I structured



each chapter as a journey from the basics to the complexities, leading the reader further into the labyrinth, step by step. And because so many concepts within **Mage** overlap each other, I returned to certain ideas – like Quintessence, Paradox, and the Vidare – several times, elaborating on them each time while also reminding y'all that we'd seen those ideas during earlier portions of our journey.

Given that **M20** is presented as "faction neutral," as opposed to the Traditions-centric perspective of earlier editions (see below), I also emphasized an all-inclusive approach, as opposed to the "heroic Traditions saving magick from the Big Bad Evil Technocracy" mode of classic **Mage**. Inclusion and diversity are major themes in **M20** (more about that subject below), and so I wrote those sections from the perspective of someone who saw validity in all Paths, not simply in one. That decision also mirrored the meta-perspective I wanted to offer – a perspective that emphasizes the subjective nature of Reality in **Mage** and, to my beliefs, our world as well. Finally, the motif of journeying – conveyed, respectively, through the Tarot, the progressive understanding of magick, the mortal world, the Otherworlds, and the history of Awakened humanity – reflects the theme of a Path that leads from initial innocence to expansive understanding. Such journeys sometimes loop back upon themselves, and so certain subjects come up again and again throughout the trip.

As far as the rules themselves, I elected to maintain a conversational approach, describing the systems as if I was explaining them to a reader across the table. I made charts for everything that I could imagine needing easy access to in the middle of a game, and I made sure those charts were all gathered into one easy-to-find spot, even if they were described in more detail – and occasionally duplicated, for clarity's sake – elsewhere in the book.

In general, I wanted to convey all of these things in a voice that's fun to read and relatively easy to understand. **Mage** has a tendency to trip over its own metaphysical feet, and often takes itself too seriously. By structuring those five setting chapters as series of trips in the company of a sardonic, cranky, and frequently profane elder (who may or may not be me, depending on how you want to read them), I chose to show and tell this vast world through a human view of the Path that all Awakened people – Tradition mage and otherwise – walk in one form or another.

Why Was the Technocracy Presented on the Same Level as the Traditions?

Despite my own work on some of the earlier "Technocracy bad, Traditions good" **Mage** books, I have never really liked or agreed with the "soulless monolith" presentation of the Technocracy given in the initial edition of **Mage**. Brian "Mr. Technocracy" Campbell and I always felt like the truth was a

lot bigger than that idea, and as we fleshed out the background for the Technocratic Union (a name he and I created to reflect their ideal of unity), Brian and I turned the Black Hats and Mirrorshades into a metaphor for good ideas gone bad. As we saw it, however, those ideals were still worth fighting for, and so we introduced the internal conflict between corrupt authoritarian Technocrats and idealistic visionaries who believed in the purpose of the Union without always agreeing with its methods. That conflict, among others – including the idea of sending Black Suits against raging werewolves and so forth – made the concept of an all-Technocracy chronicle seem far more entertaining than yet another "Rage against the machine" adventure.

(On that note, the whole "technology = evil" thing is far more appropriate to **Werewolf** than it ever was for **Mage**. As I point out in **M20**, magick *is* a technology, and so the idea that tech is inherently anti-magical goes against real-life occult history and practice. For more about this topic, see the essay ***Do You Believe in Magic(k)?***, later in this chapter.)

And so, in keeping with my work on **Sorcerers Crusade** and **Guide to the Technocracy** (for which I wrote, among other things, that "*Yeah, we saved the world for you – you're welcome*" Introduction), I felt that **M20** should present both factions as equal options, and then let the players decide which one they wanted to portray. Given that the Technocracy is arguably as popular as – if not even more popular than – the Traditions are among **Mage** players, that decision was sort of a no-brainer for us.

I Wanted to See More About [SUBJECT X]. Why Wasn't That in Mage 20?

Probably because we didn't have enough room to fit it in there!

When I was writing the initial draft, and then when I made the final cuts, one question guided my design choices: *What would a person need in this book in order to play the game?* History, factions, the Otherworlds, and similarly essential rules and concepts had to be detailed, while other, more tangential subjects – Umbraships, Merits and Flaws, the optional rules for Resonance, and other stuff that's covered throughout this book, **How Do You *DO* That?**, and **Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers** – could be left to later books.

I wanted a new or existing **Mage** fan to be able to play **Mage 20** right out of the box, and so I included material that seemed likely to appear in a theoretical "average **Mage** game" (whatever that is!), and cut material that felt optional (like Resonance), advanced (like Umbraships), or tangential (crossover rules for other World of Darkness games – again, see below). I wasn't always happy with some of those cuts; the computer systems given in this book, for example, were something I felt should be in our core rulebook, and a few other cuts were painful too. All in all, however, I think we captured the epic scope of **Mage** without giving either too much material or too few details.

Why Wasn't There More Material on the Various Groups – Like Four-Page Spreads Instead of Two-Page Spreads?

In order to keep the format consistent with **Vampire** and **Werewolf 20th Anniversary Editions**, the publisher wanted us to use the two-page, 1100-words-or-less format in **Mage 20** too. And honestly, that wound up being a good thing for us in the long run. Given nine Traditions, five Conventions, and 11 Disparate entries ("orphans" included), we spent close to 30,000 words on the two-page spreads alone. Four-page entries would have at least doubled that amount, at the expense of everything else in the book.

And yes, we plan to present expanded treatments of all those groups in the future.

Why Didn't You Detail the "Camps" – That is, Groups Within Each Tradition, Technocratic Methodologies, and So On?

I tried. But between the two-page spread limit, the sheer number of those smaller groups (the Order of Hermes alone has 13 Houses and a number of smaller fellowships!), and the need for at least 200-300 words per group in order to describe a "camp" with any degree of detail, there was just no way to fit that material into **Mage 20**... or, for that matter, into the book in your hands right now, which was originally supposed to contain that material until I added up the words and realized it wasn't going to fit.

As of this writing, the plan is to put that material into a book dedicated specifically to the "camps." That project has not yet been approved or scheduled, however, so the best response I can give right now is "We plan to get it out there eventually."

Why Didn't Mage 20 Feature More Crossover Material with Vampire, Werewolf, and so Forth?

Originally, there was a lot more crossover material in **Mage 20**. As mentioned earlier, though, the pre-edit draft needed to be cut severely, and more cuts were made during the layout stage. The crossover material and characters were cut during those stages, to be included in the **M20** sourcebook **Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers**.

First and foremost, **M20** had to be about mages and their world. Every cut I made, and each bit of material I retained, was intended to give a **Mage 20** reader what she needed in order to run a **Mage**-based chronicle. Everything else was secondary. And although crossover material is significant to large-scale World of Darkness sagas, it's not vital to playing a self-contained **Mage** chronicle. Hell, back in the original editions, the various different metaphysical entities were addressed only in passing, with different sorts of rules so that, for example, a **Vampire** player didn't need to also buy **Werewolf** before running his

game. In later editions, we added a certain degree of crossover rules; even then, though, the priority in a given rulebook has always involved addressing the titular critters – vampires, mages, whatever – not trying to shoehorn in every potential possibility.

Why Does Mage 20 Feature so Much Liberal Politics?

That depends on what one means by "liberal politics." **Mage**'s core conceit – that reality is subjective and changeable, as opposed to objective and fixed – is innately "liberal" rather than conservative. On the other hand, **Mage**'s emphasis on consequences and personal responsibility is more in keeping with old-school conservatism. Certain elements of **Mage** – such as the reclamation of a golden age, the respect for tradition, and the perils of unbridled whims – are essentially conservative. There's also the concept of remaking reality in your own image and then considering it "ascension" when everyone else sees the world the way you do, which is a totalitarian idea no matter how many dragons and unicorns you choose to paint all over it. (For more about that subject, see the essay ***Magick and the Fascist Urge*** later in this chapter, pp. 289-290.) And yet, **Mage**'s intrinsic optimism – its insistence on building a better world than the one you inherited, the idea that things in the future can be better than they were in the past, the faith that people can be trusted with the freedom to remake their world – is much more progressive than the angry pessimism so often associated with the "conservative" label in recent years. It's not really accurate, then, to call **Mage** "liberal" or "conservative" because philosophically it is both.

And yet, **Mage** – especially in its **20th Anniversary** incarnation – is essentially progressive. Ideally, that's a characteristic of both liberal and conservative philosophies, though extremes of both approaches tend to be regressive instead. Progressive thought maintains that things can be made better when we take a hard look at the world around us and decide to improve what we see. A potential flaw in progressivism, of course, is that *my* view of "improvement" might not be *your* idea of improvement. Colonialism, slavery, eugenics, genocide... all of them begin as "progress" for one group at the expense of another, and **Mage** has never been shy about pointing out that fact. Even so, **Mage** favors progress over stagnation and eventual decay.

For all of its ideals, **Mage** also remains deeply skeptical about militant idealism. Every group in **Mage** is guilty of hubris; each mage commits excess. Although progress is possible, said progress tends to steamroll people in its path. As a **Mage** author and designer, I've taken one of my most influential cues from the movie *Rashomon*, in which people attempting to find the truth behind a crime realize that "truth" is a slippery and perhaps impossible concept to attain. (It's no accident that *Rashomon*, though set in Japan's shogunate era and inspired by earlier source material, was made just after World War II. The agony of facing a terrible crime and recognizing that you might not ever truly understand it is palpable in that film, and it's one of the reasons that *Rashomon* has become such a touchstone in modern popular culture.) I guess, again as a designer, I should also credit *Mad* magazine as an inspiration behind **Mage**. I grew up reading *Mad* during and after the Vietnam/Watergate era, and that magazine's constant sense of sarcasm undercut both the hippies and the straights, showing how both extremes were essentially fucked. That satirization of human absurdities, and of the fallibility of human institutions, is deeply imbedded into **Mage** as well.

Obviously, my own sense of political philosophy is also an intrinsic part of my work on **Mage**. And as I have often written, my work reflects a soul-deep outrage at injustice, oppression, and the subjugation of "othered" people. Some folks read that as "liberal politics," especially when it involves characters from marginalized groups rebelling against being marginalized, or when I call out abusive people and institutions. They can do that. Honestly, if someone wants to defend the likes of Dick Cheney or Ayn Rand, it says more about them than it does about **Mage**. (I take elbow-shots at Michael Moore and the Clintons too, but some folks seem to forget my jabs at left-wing icons.) And seriously – if someone feels that we should pretend that the Triangle Trade was not an atrocity, that genocidal conquest equals "civilization," that queer people... or female people... or people of [fill in your ethnicity of choice] are somehow "inferior" to others, then that someone is perfectly welcome to go play some other game that does not comment on those issues. **Mage** *does* address those issues, and I make zero apologies for that. Although I have seen folks argue that a game about subjective reality should have no moral baseline, I disagree. In art, life, and games about both, actions do not exist in a vacuum. A person who commits destructive actions reaps destructive consequences.

Beyond my personal involvement, White Wolf in general, and **Mage** in particular, have always been devoted to diversity and inclusion. Richard Thomas, Stewart Wieck, Travis Williams, and Joshua Gabriel Timbrook signified that by putting the Black Virtual Adept Master Dante on the cover of **Mage** in 1993 – one of the first depictions of a Black character on the cover of a roleplaying game who was not a slave, a "tribesman," or a thug. And yes, I capitalize *Black* when referring to folks of African ancestry, because that's considered to be a respectful way of observing a historical social distinction and all the experiences it implies. As with "magick," (see below) that linguistic distinction holds an important significance to the people most involved with it. And speaking about the power of words, White Wolf was among the first RPG companies (if not the first) to employ feminine and gender-neutral pronouns as defaults, as opposed to the once-proper masculine default pronoun. Yes, such things are "liberal" in the eyes of certain people... and honestly, if someone is offended by the presentation of female, queer, or other "othered" people as being the equals of white, heterosexual men, I don't understand why such people would play White Wolf games to begin with.

And beyond all of those other factors, **Mage** is a game about having the power to change your world. To me, it makes

sense that folks who have that power, and who have been marginalized and oppressed for whatever reasons, would use it to change that situation. The Sisters of Hippolyta, who have been repeatedly cited as examples of **Mage**'s "liberal agenda," are a group of women (created, incidentally, by female author Deena McKinney) who use magick to address the undeniable oppression they face and reject. Dreamspeakers are often angry because their cultures got bulldozed by European colonialism, and the Bata'a were formed as a direct result of the Triangle Slave Trade. Players are able, if they desire, to downplay those groups and their histories if, for some reason, those historical facts seem offensive, but we're not going to do that in an official capacity. That's not merely disrespectful to the real human beings involved – it's bad history, too, and a disservice to the core concept within **Mage**: *Change reality to save your world.*

Mage 20's Metaplot

Perhaps the most contentious element of **Mage**, other than its freeform magick system and the controversial "k" at the end of magick, involves the **Revised Edition**'s Reckoning metaplot. Lots of folks loved it, lots of folks hated it, and both sides got to have things their way in **Mage 20**... a situation that inspired a flurry of questions about the design choices involved.

Why *Did* You Bring Back That Damn "K"?

Because words have power, and the magick-with-a-k word reflects an important theme within **Mage**: Magick is an extension of the person who uses it, changing the world in accordance with that person's will to change it. "Magic" is fundamentally different from *magick*, and so we brought back the original Crowleyian spelling of that word. To me, those two words mean very different things.

But Didn't People Forget the Difference Between Magic and Magick?

Given that only a few weeks passed between the beginning of the Avatar Storm and the time when everyone supposedly had "forgotten" the true nature of magick, that idea was pretty silly.

Why Isn't There One Unified Metaplot? And Why Didn't You Bring in New Changes to the Setting?

First off, because I don't – as a designer – feel that it's a good idea to cram massive changes to your game-setting down your audience's throat. An RPG metaplot, to me, should be a backdrop for the individual stories created by our players, not a box that restricts what our players can and cannot do. **Mage** does have a pretty epic metaplot, but I've never said that, for example, you must kill off Porthos or detonate Doissetep in your own chronicle. That, as far as I am concerned, is forcing players to play the story you tell them to play...

...which, again as far as I'm concerned, violates the spirit of **Mage**. As a game based upon the premise of changing the world, infused with the idea that reality is subjective, and thematically hopeful rather than despairing, **Mage** should be open to creativity, not forced down a certain direction by a metaplot. And so, although there are metaplot options that provide a backdrop for twenty-first century **Mage** tales, I feel we should not dictate what y'all can and cannot play, based on what we might think is cool at the time.

Beyond my personal feelings on the subject, **Mage 20** was intended to heal an edition-wars split among fans. Whatever merits the Avatar Storm metaplot might have – and I found myself rather liking many of its dramatic possibilities – the Reckoning metaplot tore **Mage**'s fanbase in half. Taking one side of that dispute and refusing to consider the other would have involved insulting a large portion of people who love **Mage**. Both Rich Thomas and I agreed that **M20** should be "a **Mage** for all **Mage** fans," and that choice involved leaving the metaplot open to individual interpretation. And so, rather than keep the split intact (or worse, create a new one on top of the old rift!), I adopted the *Future Fates* device from **Sorcerers Crusade**, and left the particulars to each individual **Mage** troupe.

As of this writing, forthcoming **M20** sourcebooks continue the Future Fates tradition. Instead of introducing a single metaplot that influences the direction of this series, the books currently in progress (or, as in **Mage 20** itself, completed) feature several options that could influence events in the background of your chronicle without forcing you to adopt those events as canon. Examples of these options include the switchover of several Tradition names (Cult of Ecstasy, for instance, back to Sahajiya), the Disparate Alliance, the Nephandic infiltrations, and the rumors of a pending Technocratic re-org. You *can* use these options, but you don't *have* to. And that, as a designer, feels like the right way to pursue a metaplot in **Mage**.

Didn't the Technocracy Win the Ascension War? And Isn't Technology the Enemy of Magic?

No to both.

The **Revised**-era claim that "the War ended and the Traditions lost" was based on ideas from marketing people who weren't familiar with **Mage**. Those people thought the Ascension War was a winner-take-all showdown based upon whether or not the Masses believed in magick or technology. As **Mage** fans know, things were never that simple. The Ascension War is based upon different factions fighting on many different levels over what they believe in – possibly even acting out some metaphysical struggle that's bigger than human belief – and although the nature of that War has changed, the conflict remains.

Also, the **Revised** contention that "the apathetic Masses just want fast food and TV" was rooted in very suburban, late-'90s, American assumptions. The real world is far larger

than the United States, however, and **Mage 20** takes the entire world into account. As events since 9/11 have shown, many people around the world – even in the States – believe deeply in the so-called "supernatural." Science, faith, and magic can and do co-exist in the real world, and **Mage 20** reflects that reality as well. (Again, see ***Do You Believe in Magic(k)?***, p. 287.)

Despite a common misconception, a Technocratic victory is not based upon whether or not people use cell phones or "believe in technology." People have *always* believed in technology; magic itself is a technology, as I mention above, and tools of technology have always been used as magical tools as well. Writing, money, metalsmithing, geometry, chemistry, architecture... as shown throughout the ***Focus and the Arts*** section of **Mage 20**, **Chapter Ten**, they're all applications of technology that remain intertwined with "occult" principles. Contrary to the **Mage 1st Edition** contention that technology and magic are diametrically opposed – a contention that came from a handful of suburban American kids who had very little experience with real-world occultism – an overview of metaphysical practices shows the close ties which continue to exist between both pursuits. And that, in part, is because technology and science nurture a spirit of inquiry and wonder. The more you understand, after all, the more you believe is possible.

Although technology can be used to oppress a person's sense of wonder, massive adoptions of technology throughout history have always *opened* more doors than they've closed. Recording technology, for example, allows folks to hear, see, create, and disseminate things that could not have been imagined before such technologies existed. Advances in travel technology let people go to places that were inaccessible to older generations, while electronic technology and broadcasting media revolutionized our understanding of the human experience. Historically speaking, occult revolutions go hand-in-hand with technological innovations, and technological discoveries often begin as explorations of so-called "magical" practices. Ironically, it's *religion*, not science, that tends to suppress magical practices; although modern science breeds skepticism, organized religions demand orthodoxy... and anything that grants unusual power to someone outside that organized hierarchy undercuts the religion's supremacy, and must therefore be destroyed.

The Technocratic Union, then, is not the force of oppressive technology, but *a force that uses technology to enforce oppression*. There's a big difference. When Brian and I fleshed out the history, goals, and tactics behind the "Black Hats and Mirrorshades," we emphasized that the Technocracy is based upon controlling reality, not upon exploring scientific possibilities. We used real history (occult and otherwise) as the foundation for the Union, its opposition to mystic practices, and its path from an idealistic Order of Reason to an authoritarian Technocratic Union. Even then, we said, there are dedicated personnel within that Union who strive to further its ideals while countering its excesses. That struggle made for a far more interesting, nuanced, and realistic Technocracy than the one which was portrayed in the very early **Mage** books. That more nuanced Union it can be seen, as well, in the **Revised**-era Convention books... so long as you can overlook the idea that the Technocracy supposedly committed global genocide at the close of the twentieth century. And again, such acts of genocide have nothing do to with technology, except to use it as a weapon. The enemy of magic(k) is not technology, but *control*.

Also, as we move toward the third decade of the twenty-first century, it's obvious that technology neither destroys a human sense of wonder nor brings apathetic stagnation to the Masses. If anything, advanced technology has added to the world's mystic chaos. Religious fundamentalists employ high-tech weapons. The Internet disseminates profound illogic. Our world is becoming more *diverse*, not more homogenized, thanks to technology, with possibilities of belief, culture, and identity that were inconceivable a century ago. In short, the premise that technology = stagnation has been conclusively proved wrong. Cell phones and the Internet make humanity *more* magickal, not less. And that's not what the Technocracy wants at all.

Victory, for the Technocratic Union, has nothing to do with the number of people who use computers. It's based on the extermination of Reality Deviants and the pacification of the Masses. If the Technocracy had won, there'd be no vampires, no werewolves, no Banes or rival mages, no Daesh, Internet trolling, or popular media based on wizards. A victorious Technocracy would grind religious fundamentalism down while making clean air and water available for everyone. Science classes would be mandatory, and politicians who slash school funding would be retired, reformed, or replaced. HIT Marks would be mowing down Daesh, not obscure Goddess cultists. In short, the ideal Technocratic world looks nothing like the World of Darkness – or like our own world, either. Obviously, no matter what Book X said, the Technocracy did not win... not that this keeps them from trying to do so.

Although I left it as an option in **Mage 20**, the Nephandic infiltration metaplot explains a lot about many elements of our world and **Mage**'s setting. A corrupt Technocracy, after all, would have no compunctions about wiping out all rivals, no matter what the cost in lives or money. A Fallen Union would let vampires and Banes do their thing, while hounding Tradition mages to death and beyond. It would explain why a supposedly "advanced" humanity is acting rabid, and why the world's high-tech superpowers are run by religious fanatics. Again in short, that option explains a lot about why the world is as fucked up as it is, and it gives Technocracy players an enemy far larger and more fearsome than Council mages – the might of the Union they're trying to save from itself. And the same is true of a Nephandic Council subplot too.

Why Did You Bring Back the Disparate Crafts? Does Mage Really Need Them? And Do You Think Those Groups Would Actually Band Together?

Let's be honest here: The original **Mage** was the creation of a bunch of 20-something American suburban kids, all but one of whom (Travis Williams) were white folks. The cultural spectrum was Euro-American aside from two ethnically stereotyped groups that were quite, as we might say these days, problematic in execution. That's not downing the folks who wrote **Mage 1st Edition** and its subsequent books; we worked with what we had to work with, which in 1993 did not include social media or an extensive Internet research network. But **Mage 20** is a product of the twenty-first century, and we have a lot more to work with now then we had in 1993.

Even in that original edition, the authors mentioned "other Traditions" beyond the core nine and the Hollow Ones. And so as my authors and I expanded the background and history behind **Mage**'s world, we began creating groups that were based in cultures other than the Euro-American default. Because of the intensely mystical cultures of the Middle East, I felt we needed at least one Middle-Eastern magickal society – specifically, a Muslim group – to round out the background of the Nine Traditions. Given the modern origins of two of those Nine Traditions, we had some room to move in terms of previous groups. Sam Chupp, Brian Campbell, Kathleen Ryan, Bill Bridges and I cobbled together the historical background for **Mage.** (No such history existed in **Mage 1st Edition**, beyond talk of "Pure Ones," the Mythic Age, and the encroachment of the Technocracy.) Sam Inabinet (himself a Sufi mystic) and I came up with the Ahl-i-Batin, while Bill and I began referring to the "Crowned Ones," or *Solificati*: an alchemical Tradition that had likewise left the Council by the twentieth century. This background history began appearing in late 1993, by way of **The Book of Shadows**, **The Fragile Path**, and the original **Sons of Ether** Tradition Book.

A bit over a year later, I gathered a group of writers together to create **The Book of Crafts**, which introduced 10 new groups based in real-world mystic lore. Kevin Andrew Murphy's Children of Knowledge became the modern incarnation of the Solificati, while other authors created groups that ranged from my perennial favorites the Wu Lung and Bata'a, to the cringe-inducing Wu-Keng. (I left that group out of **Mage 20**



for a host of reasons, ranging from linguistic stumbles to cultural insults and unintentional transphobia.) Despite our best intentions, we still had a very limited pool of information to work with, and so even the best of those groups suffered from embarrassing linguistic and cultural errors. For the most part, though, I liked having a greater diversity of groups, cultures, and practices represented in **Mage**. When later, in **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, we added other groups, I counted that as a win. By that time, Internet social media was beginning to rise, and so we had begun to work past the cultural and linguistic mistakes involved with the earlier groups. I had some serious plans for certain groups – notably the Wu Lung, Bata'a, Batini, and Ngoma – but then, toward the end of 1998, I left the White Wolf staff to concentrate on **Sorcerers Crusade** and my own creations.

During the brainstorming for **Mage Revised Edition**, it was decided that the epic sprawl of **Mage** needed to be cleaned up and pruned back. And so, Jesse Heinig was told to wipe out the Crafts in that edition, folding the survivors into the Nine Traditions. During the **Revised** era, that was the official story: The Crafts were essentially gone – exterminated in a genocidal fury by the Technocratic Union, aside from a few refugees in the also-ravaged Traditions or on the fringes of the world.

And I hated that idea.

First off, as bad as the Technocracy could be, the idea that they suddenly decided to go on a global killing spree – exterminating hundreds, probably thousands, of human beings while wiping a bunch of cultural small-t traditions off the map within a matter of weeks – seemed extreme even by 1990s standards. The fact that the majority of those exterminated people and traditions also came from marginalized groups – women, Asians, Africans, Polynesians, African-Americans, and even fervent white Christians – left a nasty taste in my mouth, especially given the Technocracy's Euro-American culture. The Crafts weren't all hanging out in the same place, either; source material placed them all over the world. And so, when viewed from a metaplot angle, the purge of the Crafts would have been a horrific act of worldwide genocide. It presumed that the Technocracy somehow, suddenly, and with extreme precision, eliminated deep-roots cultural legacies like Chinese High Magick, Islamic and Zoroastrian miracle-work, a global network of alchemical guilds, and the cultural tradition collectively known as "voodoo": a tradition with millions of adherents on four continents, and which arose from a vast slave-trade and its racist repercussions. That idea wasn't just dark – it was war-crimes-level stuff. Combined with the Calcutta nuke metaplot event from **Vampire Revised**, such a purge would make the Technocracy a force of unapologetic evil, destroying any semblance (at least for most **Mage** fans) of a potentially sympathetic "honorable opposition." Considering that Brian Campbell, Jesse Heinig, and I had only recently recast the Union in a more sympathetic light with the wildly popular **Guide to the Technocracy**, that concept went down poorly with **Mage** fans and creators alike.

And then there's the logistics side of things: In order to pull off that deed, the Technocracy would have had to have accurate information on dozens of mystic societies worldwide – several of which kept extremely low profiles – and then coordinated a simultaneous global takedown of all of them (destroying their loved ones, properties, and support personnel) while also invading Horizon (as described in several **Mage Revised** sourcebooks), which would, in itself, have been the metaphysical equivalent of the Normandy Invasion. Supposedly, the Union had exterminated several hundred Awakened mages – some of whom were among the most powerful wizards in existence – while also losing vast resources to the Avatar Storm, nuking vampire-gods, and capturing the global paradigm besides? All within a matter of weeks, and with minimal notice among the Masses? And *then* the survivors of that massacre were supposed to have congregated among a bunch of predominantly Euro-American folks that the Crafts had spent centuries opposing? Again without notice in the budding Internet age? For these reasons among others, the concept just didn't work for me.

Beyond all of those factors, I also really *like* the Crafts. Speaking personally, I find the Bata'a, Ngoma, Wu Lung, Solificati, Kopa Loei, and Ahl-i-Batin to be far more interesting and colorful than most of the Nine Traditions... and far more rooted in real-world mystic culture, too. As I said earlier, I feel it's more constructive to give players *more* options, not *fewer* ones, especially when those options reflect greater inclusion and cultural diversity. So yeah, I feel that **Mage 20** *did* need the Crafts, and lots of fans have felt the same way.

And so, Rachelle Udell and I just said, in **Mage 20**, "*It didn't happen the way you heard it happened.*" We added a new metaplot, updated the concepts while correcting some of the glaring cultural mistakes, and left the final decisions about if, how, and where the Crafts appeared in a given chronicle up to the players, not to the metaplot.

Incidentally, I have seen references to the Disparates as "the SJW (Social Justice Warrior) Traditions"; when you consider that this sentiment denigrates people of different cultures for standing up for those cultures, especially in the face of adversity, that's a pretty offensive sentiment. It also misses an essential fact about magick and the people who employ it: *magick serves needs*. If a person needs to protect her people, and she knows magick, well then, she's gonna use magick to defend those people, and to hell with what anyone else thinks of her for doing so. This isn't just a **Mage** thing – it's a magick thing, and both past history and current events are filled with people and cultures doing just that in real life. As for folks who wonder why groups like the Sisters, the Bata'a, or especially the Dreamspeakers would be militantly angry, I'd invite those folks to look at the real-world situations of the people in question and ask, "Given what's going on, why *wouldn't* they be?"

As for the wobbly nature of the Disparate Alliance, the real world shows that such confederations are not merely "possible"; historically speaking, they change the course of history. As an example for that Alliance, look at both sides of World War II:

On the Axis side, three aspiring empires based upon racial superiority – yet composed of different ethnicities – banded together to conquer the world in spite of their professed distain for one another; on the Allied side, nations that had been at war with one another for centuries (in the case of France and England, for nearly 1000 years) put aside their differences to stop the Axis. In the wake of one of the most vicious wars in human history, with atrocities on both sides, the United States and Japan have become one another's staunchest allies, to the mutual prosperity of both. England, France, and the United States present the fulcrum of the modern Western World alongside Germany, despite the many wars between them all. And as of this writing, one of the strangest coalitions in history has banded together to stop the Islamic State – A.K.A. ISIS or Daesh – even though many of the powers involved downright loathe one another. So yes, it's possible for groups as "disparate" as the Hippolytoi, Templars, Wu Lung, and Taftani to work together for short periods. I created the idea of that Alliance as a comment about the nature of real-life coalitions. Whether or not that particular coalition will hold together for long is a matter of debate... but then, the same could have been said of the Traditions and Technocracy in their early days as well.

Are the Nine Traditions Culturally Exclusive (That is, Are All Akashayana Asian), or Can People of Any Culture Belong to Any Tradition?

For the most part, the Council groups welcome any mage who seems to grok their ideals. A Cherokee Verbena? Sure. A Persian Etherite? Hell, Persians *invented* certain principles of imaginative technology, so why not? The simple answer, then is *yes* – anyone can join any Tradition.

That said, certain groups *do* favor certain cultures and ethnicities, if only because they're... um, traditional. The Dreamspeakers will accept European white folks – after all, Western Europe has its own shamanic traditions too; given that Tradition's long history of abuse at the hands of European conquerors and bigots, though, a white member is likely to find himself shunted off to the margins. Etherites, on the flipside, retain many elements of their Victorian English origins, and while this doesn't mean that non-European Scientists *cannot* participate, the group's internal culture still favors a *vehddy* British mystique. The Chakravanti, Hermetics, Choristers, Ecstatics, and Virtual Adepts may be the most culturally diverse Traditions, with the Akashayana, Verbenae, and Dreamspeakers tending to be more culturally conservative and the Etherites splitting the difference. Ironically, the innately conservative Order of Hermes is also among the most ethnically diverse Traditions. Essentially, anyone who's smart enough and dedicated enough to endure the Order's strict requirements is worthy of inclusion.

That same inclusivity is not as true among the Disparate Crafts. Although certain Crafts, like the Hollowers and Solificati, accept anyone who understands their ways, other groups – notably the Hippolytoi, Kopa Loei, Ngoma, Templars, and Wu Lung – remain strictly segregated by gender and /or ethnicity, with specific roles within those groups defined by the culture of the group in question.

Also ironically, it's the supposedly repressive Technocracy that may be the most culturally inclusive group of all. For while certain individuals still harbor racial and gender prejudices, such bigotry is officially forbidden within the Union. Especially in the twenty-first century, inclusion is encouraged, if only because racism, sexism, and homophobia are counterproductive and unmutual. The Fallen and Mad, of course, accept anyone who's ruthless or demented enough to join their ranks... whatever those "ranks" might look like in such informal and individualistic groups. And so, despite their "good guys" mantle and long dedication to diversity, the Traditions still cling more to old-school prejudices than their most fearsome rivals do.

Is the Avatar Storm Still "Officially" Canon?

Sort of. In my personal "official" **Mage** chronology, the Storm happened as a result of many other catastrophes in the Awakened world at the time (the Ascension Warrior's rampage, the Horizon War, the Great Whiteout in the Digital Web, and so forth). It happened, but it passed, and the world has been recovering ever since. Some things changed, others didn't, and many things shifted but have since returned to more or less "normal." Change is a fact of life, and this seems like a natural choice for my approach to the game. Thanks to the Future Fates, however, it does not have to be *YOUR* choice. You can totally ignore the Storm and its effects if you want. It's your game.

Mage 20 Rules

Thanks to its freeform magick system, **Mage** has been – and remains – a nexus for questions about its many rules. Although a fair amount of **M20**'s bulk addresses longstanding rule-questions (most especially in the ***Common Magickal Effects charts*** on **pp. 508-510**, the ***Axis of Coincidence*** sidebars on **pp. 533-534**, and the sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That?**), certain questions remain.

Why Didn't You Completely Overhaul Mage's Magic(k) System in Mage 20?

Mostly because we wanted to celebrate the legacy of **Mage**, and to get folks playing the game again. Radical changes to the rules would have invalidated the dozens of **Mage** books that had come out before **Mage 20**, fundamentally changing the game itself in the process. That sort of upheaval was pretty much the opposite of what we had in mind. Although certain rules really *did* need to be changed (more on that process below), I tried to keep those changes to a minimum. Ideally, folks can use characters and rotes from older **Mage** books – possibly with some tweaking – in their **Mage 20** chronicles. That would not have been possible if we had created an entirely different rule-system.

Besides, I *like* **Mage**'s Sphere system. It has, admittedly, been a pain in my ass for over 20 years, but what rules system doesn't have annoying flaws? One of the features that appealed most to me when I was applying for the **Mage** Line Developer position in mid-1993, and reading over the edit-draft of the original rulebook, was that magick, in **Mage**, is an extension of the person who employs it. That, to me, is by far the most authentic and imaginative way to depict what is all too often handled with a series of combat maneuvers defined by class, level, and an arbitrary number of hexes and dice.

The Spheres also allow a player to reflect any form of metaphysical practice imaginable, simply by adjusting the focus employed by the character in question (see below). That universal application suits both the global nature of **Mage** and the subjective-truth theme behind the game. A system that favored a particular strain of magic – say, one based on Western Hermetic High Ritual occultism, Alexandrian Wicca, or medieval Catholic metaphysics – would limit a player's ability to be, say, a Siberian shaman, a Chinese Taoist sage, or a cybernetic tycoon. Although it's true, as certain critics have pointed out, that **Mage**'s magick system owes a lot to postmodernist chaos magic(k) as defined by Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare, that twentieth-century approach to metaphysics was itself an attempt to synthesize all forms of mystical practices under a single coherent approach. It's far from perfect, obviously, and infused with a certain degree of modernistic European egotism which posits the willful individual, not gods or the greater world, as the source of metaphysical power. As an abstract game system that allows its players to create any sort of so-called "mage," however, the Sphere system is the best I've seen thus far. That system has its headaches – I know that more than anyone else alive. That said, there is no system I would prefer, or create, to replace it.

Why Not Adopt the Magick System(s) from Mage: The Awakening, Dark Ages Mage, Ars Magica, or World of Darkness: Sorcerer?

Beyond the reasons given above, those games are not **Mage: The Ascension**. They're all games in their own right, with rules that were created to fit the concepts involved.

So, Are the Spheres Something That Characters Talk About, or Are They Only Used when Talking About the Rules?

According to many **Mage** books, they're both. Personally, I hate the idea of a Flambeau Hermetic saying something along the lines of "*By my Mastery of Forces and the Sphere of Prime, I cast these flames upon you!*" That sort of thing sounds downright ridiculous to me, and it kicks my suspension of disbelief right out the nearest window. Your mileage may vary, though, and the Spheres were certainly established as an element of the setting before I was involved. Ultimately, then, it's the decision of the players and Storyteller involved. My personal stance is that it should remain rules-jargon only.

How Did You Decide Which Rules to Change, and Determine How to Change Them?

First off, I brainstormed up a list of potential rule-fixes, comparing my experiences with running the game, playing it as a player, and hearing about it from other **Mage** fans. I formed the **Mage 20** brain-trust, and asked folks on the forums about their preferences in terms of the rules from various editions. I went through the books from the entire series, picking out things I felt needed to be addressed, and I checked through the rules presented in **Vampire** and **Werewolf 20**, making sure that **M20**'s rules remained consistent within the **20th Anniversary** series. During the writing process for **Chapters Six**, **Nine**, and **Ten** – a process that took over eight months for those three chapters alone – I bounced my work off the brain-trust members, and revised material when appropriate. Ultimately, I aimed for clarity, consistency and ease of use, with plenty of options but as much simplicity as I could manage for such a titanic set of rules. Wherever I found rules that seemed ambiguous, contradictory, overly complex, or simply unexplained in terms of their in-game applications, I changed them. On the whole, however, I tried to avoid altering the rules unless a given rule needed to be changed in order to better suit the whole.

Why Did You Change the Rules for Foci?

That's one of those "better suiting the whole" situations. I never liked the old focus rules, and so I had been gradually changing them from the *Group X uses Focus Y when employing Sphere Z* mode of **Mage 1st Edition** to the *magic tools and styles* mode of **Mage 2nd** and **Sorcerers Crusade**. I had conceived the *paradigm + practice + instruments = focus* idea while brainstorming through the challenges of **Mage** live-action rules; soon afterward, though, I left the White Wolf staff and kept those ideas for myself, putting a variation on them to work in the magic rules for *Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium*. During the 13 years or so in between my departure from **Mage** and my return to **Mage 20**, I also learned and studied a great deal more about real-world metaphysics and the practices involved. So when I set down to work on the **Mage 20** magick system, the focus rules were at the top of my priority list.

(I had no idea just how *long* that particular section of the book would run, though. In the final cut of **Mage 20**, ***Focus and the Arts*** involves roughly 40,000 words of material, with an additional 5000 words or so that was cut and then expanded into the 20,000 words of paradigms, practices, and instruments featured in **Chapter Three** of this book. At one point, I even considered giving ***Focus and the Arts*** its own chapter in **Mage 20**;

most of the book was already written by that point, however, and doing so would have necessitated rewrites through the text, so I decided against it.

(Oh, and as a side-note: I had briefly considered rendering the three elements of focus into *paradigm + practice + props* in order to maintain an alliterative cohesion between the three. "Props," however, has connotations of theatrical stage dressing, and I wanted to show that instruments are essential tools of a metaphysical practice, not merely "props" you wave around in order to fool the Masses. After checking out the dictionary definitions of several words, and tossing the question to my brain-trust group, I stuck with "instruments" because that word gave the best definition for what I wanted to convey.

(On another related note, *focus* is singular, and *foci* is plural. A mage doesn't have "a foci" – she has one focus and two or more foci. I know this is a minor issue, but the wordsmith in me breaks out in hives every time I see someone use *foci* as a singular noun.)

By revising the focus rules, we also resolved several long-standing issues within **Mage**'s magick system. Defining a given mage's paradigm, and then tying it to that mage's magick style, had been the subject of endless questions and debate over the years. Meanwhile, the freeform nature of the Spheres, and some especially egregious (and often inconsistent) examples of what a mage could supposedly do with the Spheres, fueled endless arguments. We needed a way to limit the potential excesses of that freeform magick system while inspiring roleplay opportunities and enforcing the needs of story and character. It seemed to me that the key to all of that involved getting the player to define *What are you doing in order to make X happen, and why does your character think that should work?* In order to do that, though, we needed to provide a bunch of cool options, tie them together in a way that made sense, and set them into the rule-system so that the mage's beliefs defined (and sometimes limited) the magickal things that mage could do. In **Mage 20**, I finally had the word-count, the space, the opportunity, and the experience to bring all of that together and make it work. Although the new focus rules raise a handful of questions (see below and **Chapter Three**), the equation *paradigm + practice + instruments = focus* provides an intuitive answer to a lot of old questions.

Why are There New Abilities for Esoterica and Martial Arts When We Already had Occult and Brawl?

Man, I never expected to see this become one of the most controversial elements of **Mage 20**'s execution! For the many folks I've seen asking and arguing about these two new Traits, however, here's my response:

The Occult Trait, since its inception and through every edition of a World of Darkness game, has been defined as a generalized knowledge of occult topics *as they are understood by the Masses*. Many entries even emphasize *in those words* that this knowledge is comprised of "myths and legends" which may be, and often are, erroneous. (Yes, I checked this out before deciding to create the new Knowledge Trait.) Accurate, practical, working knowledge of, and experience with, metaphysical fields had been addressed in previous **Mage** editions by various secondary Abilities – Stone Lore, Enochian, and so forth. This situation left **Mage** players digging through various sourcebooks for the appropriate Abilities, spending a lot of points on them, and having characters who, by definition, possessed patchy and erroneous knowledge about the fields that mages are supposed to understand better than anyone else alive. Meanwhile, I had expanded my own knowledge and understanding of various metaphysical disciplines far beyond anything I had known back in the '90s... realizing, in the process, that knowing some generalized stuff from yoga class is not the same as an in-depth dedication to the *Patañjalayogasastra*. The word *esoterica* means "private knowledge understood only by a few." (From the Greek root *esoterikós*, "inner.") Thus, the Occult Knowledge simply was not an accurate or useful reflection of the things that mages should know. Honestly, I would have liked to have done away with it entirely, as my own experiences and observations have shown that the definition of that Trait as it is used in **Vampire**, *et al*, doesn't capture an accurate representation of the way practical esoteric study and practice really works. Occult is such a foundational Trait in the other games, however, that ditching it entirely was not a viable option. So I made a separate Knowledge that reflects the sort of in-depth practical study that mages do as a matter of course but which few other WoD beasties would pursue unless they specialized in that particular discipline.

As someone with some basic understanding of both brawling and martial arts, I also realized that the Brawl Talent – again, as it's been defined for 20-some-odd years – is not the same thing as a dedicated and often esoteric practice of martial disciplines. That esoteric element is especially important if you want to reflect the paranormal capabilities of martial mastery – chi-flight, molecular disruption, and other elements of martial-arts legend and pop culture. A street tough, no matter how badass he might be, can't skip across tree-limbs or cause his fists to burst into flames because he's *just that good* at brawling. I wanted a Trait that reflected martial arts as mages would practice martial arts. Also, martial arts have themselves come a very long way since 1991, when the Brawl Talent first appeared in **Vampire 1st Edition**. More people know them, more disciplines combine them, and more practices exist now than they did in the early 1990s. Especially considering that twenty-first century mages would be a lot more apt to use advanced martial disciplines than their 1990s counterparts may have been – and that Technocrats would be among those practitioners – I wanted an Ability that would grant access to a range of refined combat maneuvers while reflecting a potentially esoteric understanding of the art. From a game-rules standpoint, we'd already defined

martial arts as an Ability in its own right (admittedly, not well) in **Kindred of the East** and other World of Darkness sourcebooks. Therefore, I took that idea, crossbred it with the specialized combat maneuvers from **Destiny's Price**, **World of Darkness: Combat**, and various other sourcebooks, and created a Skill that reflects intense training beyond the innate Talent of beating someone's ass.

Like the **Vampire 20** and **Werewolf 20** catch-all Traits ***Hobby Talent***, ***Professional Skill***, and ***Expert Knowledge***, the Esoterica Knowledge also consolidates a ton of secondary Abilities into a single Trait, differentiating between those fields with a specialty rather than forcing the player to buy a separate Trait for each one. Especially if the Storyteller chooses to use the ***well-skilled craftsman option*** (see below), this allows your mage to learn a bunch of esoteric disciplines – which is certainly appropriate for a mage! – without sinking all of your points into different Traits for each one.

As shown throughout **Mage 20**'s ***Focus and the Arts*** section, the ***Martial Arts*** entry in **How Do You *DO* That?**, and this book's own **Chapter Three**, the Esoterica and Martial Arts Traits are also innately connected to a mage's focus. A Black Suit with the ***Martial Arts*** practice is more than simply a brawler, and can do things with her skills that other fighters cannot do because she understands those arts as a suprior fighting technology. A practitioner of the ***Yoga*** practice isn't just a dude who takes classes at L.A. Fitness, and so he's got an Esoterica specialty to reflect his understanding. The Esoterica and Martial Arts Traits, then, are intrinsic parts of the new focus rules. All of this is plainly stated in the **Mage 20** rulebook, so I've been puzzled about the lingering questions. The question *does* keep showing up on forum discussions, though, so I felt it should be addressed in this FAQ.

Can Non-Mages Learn and Employ Do?

A seriously dedicated student who has not yet Awakened can learn the basic and special secret techniques of Do, assuming that the student adopts the lifestyle associated with The Way. (See **Mage 20, pp. 426-430**). However, that person *cannot* use the spell-like applications of Do. Such techniques and insights come only to the most Enlightened students of The Way.

On a related note, *ONLY* the most devoted associates of the Akashayana get trusted with such sacred wisdom. And no, vampires and werewolves, Technocrats, and other Night-Folk are not on that list, *EVER*. Vampires, being corrupted souls, are forever lost to The Way (in this incarnation, anyhow), werebeasts and changelings are far too mercurial to adopt such discipline seriously, and other Night-Folk are simply too uncanny to truly understand The Way in its sublime perfection. Technocrats – even ex-Technocrats – remain blinded by their trust in science, and can't accept such superstitionism. Such people can study philosophy and learn martial technologies, but the gulf between quoting the *Dhammapada* and grasping The Way is wider than oceans and yet smaller than the scales on a butterfly's wing.

Where Did the Well-Skilled Craftsman Option Come from? Can I Use It in Other WoD Games?

One of the many things I learned between age 27 and age 49 was that you could, in real life, learn a whole lot of different but related skills without devoting yourself to the study of a mere handful of them... or, to put it into game terms, without spending all your points on them. And so, I made up that option so that players could create characters who possessed a significant number of useful skills without spending a ton of points on, say, carpentry, plumbing, and electrical engineering. And considering how wizard-types tend to focus on a range of related studies, that option certainly makes sense with regards to **Mage**.

As for applying the option to other game lines, your Storyteller is the ultimate judge of that. Speaking personally, though, it'd be fine by me. Honestly, if I'd thought of the idea 20 years ago, I've have implemented it back then.

Does the Arcane Background Apply Only to Sight, or Does it Blur Recognition in Other Senses Too (a Wolverine-Style Sense of Smell, for Example, or an Especially Keen Sense of Hearing)?

It applies to any way in which a person could be recognized. (Wow, *that* one was short and easy!)

Is There a Single Penumbra That is the Gateway to All Three Umbral Worlds, or Are There Three Separate Penumbrae Which All Lead to Different Realms? Oh, and Where and How Do the Vidare Fit into All That?

As **Mage 20, p. 91**, points out under the header ***Umbral Travel: Upwards, Sideways, Down***, the Penumbra is a single "location" from which a traveler moves into one of the Three Worlds. Essentially a shadow of the material realm, this Penumbra is sort of the crossroads where all three Umbrae meet along "the skin of the world."

As for the Periphery, it's a *perception*, not a *place* (see the headers called ***The Periphery*** in **Mage 20, p. 81-82 and p. 474**). A person with suitable awareness perceives them but does not "travel" to them, unless she's in astral form and skims along the border between perception and existence. (Yes, that's confusing – consciousness is weird that way.)

None of these regions and/or perceptions have firm boundaries marked with, say, *VIDARE ENDS HERE* or *WELCOME TO THE EDGE OF THE PENUMBRA*. (Well, except for the Shadowlands; without the special agama sojourn magick, mortals can *sense* the Dead World but cannot enter it unless

they're... y'know, dead.) The ephemeral and perplexing nature of the Otherworlds is part of what defines them from the more predictable nature of material reality.

Also, to be frank, the authors and designers have ourselves gotten confused by this stuff on occasion. Although the Umbra is supposed to be ambiguous, not all of the confusion and contradictions have been intentional on our part.

What Does My Mage Character Need in Order to Detect a Pending Awakening or an Awakening in Progress?

Ultimately, that's a Storyteller call, based on the needs of the chronicle and story. As a general rule, though, you could say that a successful Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 10, can spot an Awakening that's about to occur. That difficulty may be lower if the Awakening is especially powerful, and it drops to between 9 and 5 once the new mage Awakens, depending upon how potent the newly Awakened mage's Avatar is (Avatar 1 would be 9, Avatar 2 would be 8, and so forth).

Certain Spheres could help a mage perceive an Avatar that's on the edge of Awakening, or which has begun to Awaken. That mage could use the Spheres of Mind, Prime, Spirit, and /or Time at Rank 1 or higher to reduce the difficulty of that Perception + Awareness roll, with the usual rule for employing a Sphere to help reduce the difficulty of an Attribute + Ability roll. (See ***Magick Enhancing Abilities***, **Mage 20, pp. 533-535**.) An appropriate Rank of Correspondence could help a mage spot an Awakening or ready-to-Awaken character from a distance, assuming that the perceiving mage can successful bridge that distance with Correspondence.

What does an impending Awakening look like? Again, that's a Storyteller call, although I would suggest that the nature and power of the new mage's Avatar has a lot to do with the appearance of that Awakening. A powerful Dynamic Avatar could blaze like a phoenix or explode like a psychic volcano, while a low-key Questing avatar might manifest as a breeze blowing the hair of the mage-to-be. For suggestions, check out the ***Avatar Essence*** section of **Mage 20 (pp. 266-267)**, and ***The Avatar: Portraying the Mystic Self*** **(pp. 366-367)**.

Does Every Recently Awakened Person Shine Like a Beacon to Characters in the Otherworlds?

Pretty much, yeah – see ***The Shining Ones***, **Mage 20, p. 484**.

Is it Possible for a Mage to Know the Extent of Another Mage's Relative Power – That is, to Know Their Arete or Sphere Levels?

In terms of going "*Hey, look – that Progenitor over there has an Arete of 6, with Life 4, Matter 4, Mind 3, and Prime 3*," no. Characters cannot see one another's character sheets or analyze one another's RPG Traits.

However, a successful Perception + Awareness roll might allow a character to guesstimate the relative abilities of another apparently paranormal /supernatural character (mage, vampire, and so forth). The difficulty for that roll depends a great deal on how showy the target character is being at the time, with a very subtle entity demanding difficulty 9 or 10, and an especially flamboyant (though not necessarily *powerful*) character being 5 or 6. A successful roll, though, would reveal a generalized aura ("*He seems to radiate significant metaphysical might...*"), clues about that character's practices and nature ("*That looks like a solid silver Cross of Thunder, which suggests Scandinavian practices and relative prosperity...*"), or both. Mages and other Night-Folk, therefore, can make educated guesses about one another, but again they can't grab info off each other's character sheets. That crosses the player knowledge /character knowledge line.

Do Mages Use Methods Other Than Certámen to Resolve Disputes? Do They Spar for Fun Too, or Only to Resolve Serious Matters?

There's a whole section about this subject in **Mage 20, Chapter Nine**, under the heading ***Magickal Duels***, **pp. 430-434**. And yes, those duels can be used for fun and sport and even flirtation as well as for more serious situations.

Can the Naming Rules in the Revised Edition Tradition Book: Order of Hermes still be applied to M20?

If you want them to be – see the instrument entry for ***True Names*** in **Mage 20, p. 599**.

Do All of the Members of [Group Whatever] (Akashayana, Progenitors, Bata'a, etc.) use the Same Focus Instruments? If Not, then How Should I Decide Which Types of Instrument My Mage Employs?

No, they don't. That idea is a holdover from **Mage 1st Edition**, and has been gone from the **Mage** rules for a very long time.

As for the specifics about the new focus rules, and for the answers to commonly asked questions about them, this topic is addressed in detail in this book's **Chapter Three**.

Can a Mage Cast Multiple Effects in a Single Casting?

Yes, assuming those Effects are all part of a *conjunctional Effect*, as described under ***Conjunctional (Combined) Sphere-Effects***, **Mage 20, p. 511**. Otherwise no – a mage cannot cast more than one Effect within the same turn – see **Mage 20, p. 523**, under the heading for ***Time Contraction or Dilation /"Bullet Time" /Rewind Time***.



Could I use such a Sphere-Based Attack to Attack Multiple Characters?

Yes – see the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule***, **Mage 20, pgg. 504 and 538**.

Some Related Questions About Aimed Effects:

1. When You're Trying to Hit Someone with an Aimed Effect (a Fireball, Lighting Bolt, Etc.), You Have Two Rolls: Attribute + Ability (to Hit the Target), and Arete (to Cast the Effect) ...

a) Are Both Rolls Performed Within a Single Turn, According to the Mage's Initiative Order?

Yes. As stated under the heading ***Violence as a Focus*** **(Mage 20, p. 413)**: *If the magick is the attack and the attack provides the magick, then in game terms, this is a single action... Assuming the attack is successful, the Effect goes off within the same turn.* This gets reiterated on the ***Combat System Chart*** for ***Magick and Violence*****, p. 445**: *One action, two rolls.*

b) Are the Successes from the Attribute + Ability Roll Added to the *DAMAGE* Pool?

No. The use of a Sphere-based Effect can adjust the damage of a mundane attack (see ***Magick Enhances Violence*****, pp. 414-415**, and the ***Martial Arts*** entry in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 57 and 63-65**), but the "added damage" rule for physical assaults (***Phase Three: Damage*****, p. 412**) *does NOT* apply to increasing the damage of a magickal Effect.

c) Are the Target's Dodge and Soak Attempts Applied to This Shot?

Attempts to dodge the attack get rolled against the Attribute + Ability attack roll, and reduce the number of successes rolled by the attacker as described under ***Dodging*****, p. 411**.

Attempts to soak a successful attack are applied against the damage inflicted, not against the "to hit" roll. (See ***Soaking Damage*****, pp. 412-413**.) If the damage is aggravated, soaking might not be an option.

For examples, see the sidebar nearby.

d) Can the Player /Mage Choose to Add an Effect to a Typical Attack (for Instance, Adding a Fireball Effect to a Normal Shotgun Blast), or Must Such Effects be Pre-Planned Rotes Which Always Happen the Same Way?

I'd say this would depend upon the mage and her chosen weapon. The attacker *could* choose to add a new, one-time Effect to an otherwise mundane attack (adding a fireball "kicker" to a shotgun blast), and then define that Effect as

Example in Play: Electrifying Foster!

Syndicate enforcer Bruce Foster dodges a bolt from an Etherite renegade's Jovian lightning gun. The mad scientist's player rolls four successes on his Dexterity + energy Weapons attack. Bruce's player rolls five successes on a Dexterity + Athletics roll, so Foster escapes with a singed business suit and a newly electrified haircut. (The nearby wall, which catches that errant bolt, is not nearly as fortunate.)

Foster's luck runs out the next time around. This time, the Deviant hits poor Bruce with a bolt; because Foster's decked out in a smart Falconi suit, though, (see **Mage 20**, **p. 655**), he can try to soak that lethal attack. Foster's Stamina of 3 and armor of 2 gives his player five dice to roll. The Etherite player scores three successes with her Arete roll; with an added success for the Forces Sphere, this comes out to eight health levels of damage. Better roll well, or it's curtains for Bruce!

Foster's player gets three successes – enough to save Bruce's bacon, but not quite enough to keep him from getting cooked to the tune of five health levels of lethal damage. Sorry about that haircut, Bruce! Yes, Forces attacks are pretty goddamned scary...

"shooting the gas tank" or whatever other tactic seems to fit the situation. She could also use the Effect as a standard element of her mundane attack – say, by firing specialized dragonsbreath shotgun rounds which always act as the instrument for a fireball Effect. It's the mage's choice – she can do either one.

e) In Such Situations, Does the Damage from the Effect "Stack" Onto the Damage from the Mundane Attack?

No. The Effect determines the damage – see ***Targeted Damage Effect*** under ***Examples in Play***, **Chapter Ten, p. 563**.

f) Can I "Hold" the Aimed Damage Effect Indefinitely so That I Can Accumulate a Lot of Successes before the Effect Goes Off?

No. An immediate-attack Effect that's coupled with a mundane attack is an all-or-nothing affair – *one roll only*. If Agent Adara Okafor adds a Forces boost to a blast from her Bolan Mk. 13 weapons system, the player makes only one Arete roll to determine the Effect.

The Storyteller may rule that a damage-inflicting ritual (as in, an attack using the extended-roll rules described in **Mage 20**, **pp. 538-543**) may accumulate successes for a greater level of damage. Story-wise, this would represent a curse, a death-spell, a war-machine's activation, and so forth. In that case, the usual rules apply... though the Storyteller may wish to set an upper limit of one Arete roll for each point of Stamina the mage possesses, in order to reflect the strain of containing such potent energies, and to cap off a potentially nuke-level degree of damage.

Does a "Pocket Reality" (Correspondence 4) Lock Out Everything, Even Oxygen? And Does a Mage Need to Use Other Spheres When Creating a Realm?

Assume that a mere "hole in reality" contains only the oxygen and so forth that the area had when the pocket was opened and closed. Light? Not unless you also grabbed up a self-contained light-source within that pocket of reality. Thing is, without Prime and other Spheres to hold that hole together, the Effect collapses upon itself within seconds, thanks to the momentum of physics and the Consensus. (So no, you can't use Correspondence 4 to seal someone up in a Realm and let them suffocate unless you're working Prime 4 or higher into the spell to keep the "reality tear" intact.) Even with Prime 4, the "pocket reality" endures only for the normal Duration of the spell unless there's a lot more going into the Realm's creation that that.

As the rulebook says (***Correspondence Sphere entry***, **p. 513**), you need additional Spheres to "*isolate forces, spaces, objects, or people into their own tiny realms*." Thus, if you wanted to lock someone up in a Realm, you'd also need Life 3 or higher (to bind the person to that Realm) and Prime 4 at the *very* least. **How Do You *DO* That?** details the creation of lasting Realms on **p. 41**, and such intricate works of vulgar magick demand a lot of time, resources, and expertise. After all, if isolating folks in "reality cells" was as easy as slapping someone with a Correspondence 4 spell, the Virtual Adepts would have taken out all their enemies a long time ago.

Does the Forces Sphere Add an Extra "Free" Success to an Effect That's Also Having Successes Added to its Base Damage by the Optional Dividing Successes Rule?

That's a good question... but no.

If you're adding successes to a Forces-Sphere Effect, then you choose the number of health levels you wish to inflict (two, four, six, etc.), and then add new successes as stated on the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule chart***: *Two additional levels of damage for each success beyond the base*. When you're adding successes, you do not get a free extra success for using the Forces Sphere.

Can I Turn the Air into Toxic Microbes in Order to Inflict Damage? And If So, What Life-Sphere Rank Would I Need in order to Do So?

A character who knows what he is doing (see the sidebar ***Dude, Do You EVEN Know What You're Doing?*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 28**), and can justify such a transformation under his paradigm (see the sidebar ***SCIENCE!!!***, **Mage 20, p. 290**), could indeed use Life 3 and the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule***, referred to above, to do what you describe.

If you want those microbes to make people sick, as per the ***Drugs, Poisons, and Disease*** section **(Mage 20, pp. 441-444)**, then use the ***Toxins chart*** on **p. 442**. If you want to kill people instantly, then consider the attack to be a vulgar Life-Sphere Effect, inflicting aggravated damage as per the usual rules... and remember that *anyone who's breathing in that space for the foreseeable future* is going to be affected by the microbes conjured by that spell.

(Just for the record, questions like this make me wanna retire from game design and take up something easier... like, say, writing sequels to *War and Peace*. In Swahili.)

Can't I Use Life 2 to Create Killer Microbes /Flesh-Eating Bacteria/Snails Inside People's Hearts/Etc.?

No. By the rules, you need Life 3 or higher in order to inflict damage. *Period.*

Can I Use Life 3 to Make My Claws Grow Once They're Inside a Victim's Body, Inflicting More Damage?

Yes, so long as they're still inside the target. I would say that this tactic would inflict an extra die in lethal damage per turn from the growing claws.

Just remember this: *Body-contact goes both ways*. As any fighter knows, a living enemy who's stuck on your weapon is basically attached to you, and can get free shots in at you while she's dying. (See the climax of the film *Excalibur*, among other examples, for what this means in practical terms.) Also, bodies are *heavy* – especially when they're thrashing around trying to get away or kill you in the process. A character who's trying to pull a Wolverine without adamantium claws is liable to get his claws broken off, and will in any case be weighed down and mauled by the person he's trying to kill. (See the combat maneuvers ***Bite, Claw, Grapple, Kick, Sweep, Blinding, Head Butt,*** and ***Low Blow*** in **Mage 20, pp. 420-423.**)

Do I Need the Life Sphere to Make Plants Grow, or the Matter Sphere?

Matter for dead plant material, Life for living plants – see ***Elements and Spheres*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 27.** , and the ***Life Sphere entry*** in **Mage 20, p. 516**, second paragraph:

As a whole, this Sphere embraces everything that has living cells within itself... If it's inert enough to be irrevocably dead, then it's governed by Matter.

If I Have Initiative, and Employ a Matter 2 Effect with, Say for an Example, a Pool of Mud, Can I Create Mud-Spears That Instantly Pierce an Enemy's Heart?

Could you create deadly spears out of a mud puddle? Sure, though it'd be vulgar magick to do so. Would they instantly pierce the heart of an enemy and score you an immediate kill? Nope. They would inflict damage, just like any other attack would do. Matter-sharpened mud would inflict lethal damage, but you'd still need to deal out a fatal amount of damage (defined as "*I skewer his ass with a bunch of muddy spikes*") in order to kill another character with them.

What Matter Sphere Rank Does a Mage Need in Order to Create Counterfeit Money?

The subject of magickal counterfeiting is covered in **Mage 20, p. 534**, under the header ***Successes and Consequences***. The Sphere-requirements are simple – Matter 2 to shape a similar material into money, Matter 3 /Prime 2 to conjure it from "nowhere" – but the process is anything but easy. (For a related process, see also ***Instant Fake IDs*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 73.**)

What Rank of Mind do I Need in Order to Fragment My Mage's Consciousness Between Several Different Bodies? And do I Need the Correspondence Sphere in Order to Keep the Effect Going Outside the Sensory Range of My Mage's Original "Self," or Does Her Various Different Bodies Extend Her Sensory Range?

Assuming that the bodies in question already exist and are running under their own power, a mage needs Mind 3 to form a mental link, Mind 4 to control the body, and Mind 5 to knock someone else's consciousness out of the body so that he can take over. (See the ***Mind Sphere entry*** in **Mage 20, pp. 519-520**, ***Perception & Psychic Powers*** on **p. 509**, and ***Puppetry and Possession*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 122-123.**)

If your mage can see through the eyes of that other character, he does not need to add the Correspondence Sphere to his Effect in order to expand his sensory range into that other party's senses.

To affect multiple bodies, use the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule*, Mage 20, p. 504**. As detailed under ***Influence-Magick Difficulties*** in **How Do You *DO* That? (p. 116)**, the difficulty for influencing multiple minds is based on whether the feat would be *coincidental* (that is, taking up "silent residence"

in someone else's head) or *vulgar* (abruptly commanding the minds of several people at once). Considering that this sort of trick is probably being performed on Sleepers – commanding the minds of several mages, vampires, and so forth is a whole 'nother kettle of fish, which is *also* described on **p. 116** – a vulgar mind-control attempt would indeed involve *witnesses* unless those people were members of your mage's cult, Chantry, or something else along those lines.

For more details about multiple "selves," see ***Everywhere at Once*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 79**.

Do You Need to Spend Your Own Quintessence Points when You're Conjuring Something from "Nowhere," or does Prime 2 Simply Draw the Necessary Quintessence from the Environment?

Under most circumstances, a force or item that is conjured from "thin air" does not require Tass or Quintessence from the caster... unless it's a vulgar Prime-force weapon, in which case it demands one Quintessence point per turn. (Again, see ***Quintessential Bolts and Weapons***, **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 46-47**, as well as the ***Prime Sphere entry***, Mage 20, **p. 521**.

(The note on **Mage 20, p. 510**, where it says that a Quintessence weapon costs one Quintessence point per health level inflicted, is referencing an old rule, and it's an error. Sorry – that stuff happens in multi-edition game design. Ignore that note, and go by what the Sphere entry says.)

Lasting enchantments and conjurations – that is, the permanent kinds used in creating Wonders and so forth – *do* demand points of Quintessence from Tass, from the caster, or from some other source; otherwise, the conjured energy returns to its component energy (that is, the conjured thing disappears) when the Effect's Duration expires and /or when the energy is dispelled (as in the explosion of a fireball or the release of a lightning bolt). Exceptions could also be made, *at the Storyteller's option*, for conjuring really huge things, like tanks, dragons, or shelves full of gaming books. In that case, a few points of personal Quintessence may be required.

How Long Does an Item that's Enchanted with Prime 4 Hold onto its Magickal Effect?

As stated in the ***Prime Sphere entry*** **(Mage 20, p. 521)** and the ***Expanded Wonder Rules*** in this book, that enchantment is essentially permanent until and unless something destroys the Wonder.

An item that is crafted with the help of Sphere-magick – like, say, a sword forged out of a guitar by using the Matter Sphere – returns to its original form when the Effect's Duration expires, unless it has either been made permanent (with Prime 4), or... if the Storyteller is feeling generous... if the caster rolled six or more successes and forged that item to the *Storyteller's option* level of Duration.

What Rank in Prime do I Need in Order to Create a Huge Ball of Energy that Melts Things and People Out of Existence?

First off, vulgar magick, much? That totally is.

As for the Ranks involved, a ball of vulgar Prime energy that inflicts damage requires Prime 3; making one that drains the essence out of objects requires Prime 4, and one which annihilates living beings is Prime 5. For details, see **Mage 20, pps. 510 and 520-521**, and **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 46-47 (*Quintessential Bolts and Weapons*)** for a deadly ball of energy, and **p. 49. (*Disintegrating Things /Liquidating Assets*)** for a ball of energy that drains the essence from its targets. In all cases, though, vulgar Prime magick inflicts aggravated damage.

At Which Rank do the Spheres of Prime and Spirit Relate to Garou Gifts? And Can They be Used to Counter Them?

Spheres and Gifts are totally different powers. They do not correspond to one another at all. As for countering Night-Folk powers, a mage employs his *Arete*, not Sphere Ranks, as a potential protection against Garou gifts and other powers. For details, see the sidebar ***Night-Folk Counterspelling***, **Mage 20, p. 546**.

Can You Predict or Detect the Presence of Other People with Spirit 1?

No. Although that Rank of Spirit allows a person to read the auras of people he can see, it does not let the mage see people he couldn't see otherwise.

Can a Mage with Spirit 2 Harm a Spirit, and How Could That Mage Protect Herself from Being Harmed by That Spirit?

Although a mage could use Spirit 2 to punch a spirit in the face with her fist (see ***The Spirit Strike*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 65**), Spirit 2 cannot, in itself, inflict or protect against damage. That level of effectiveness begins at Spirit 3. How can that mage protect herself from that spirit, then? Run away.

Regarding the Effects of Time-Sphere Magick, How Can I Storytell a Future if I Don't Know What's Going to Happen?

This question gets answered in detail under the heading ***The Unpredictable Nature of Time*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, pp. 107-108**. The short answer is that *a* future is not *the* future. Everything is subject to change, especially where Time magick is concerned.

How Long Can a "Triggered" Effect be Delayed with Time 4 /Entropy 3 - That is, How Long Can the Effect "Hang" Until the Time-Limit for "Until the Event Occurs" Runs Out?

Storyteller's option. I would say that one year for each dot in the casting mage's Arete makes a good guideline for the trigger's expiration date. In a more high-powered chronicle, though, or a more "legendary" sort of setting, seven years per dot in Arete might be more appropriate.

What About an Effect Whose Activation is Delayed with a Time 4 Trigger?

In that case, use the ***Optional Divided Successes Rule*** **(Mage 20, p. 504)** with the ***Base Damage and Duration chart*** (same page), adding successes to the Duration as usual. Every additional success spent "hangs" the Effect for the stated Duration of time. When that time elapses, the Effect finally goes off as usual.

As detailed in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 113**, under the heading ***Contingency Trigger Effects***, the base number of successes depends upon the size of the Effect you're trying to perform. (See also the ***Time Sphere entry*****, p. 522**, second column, first full paragraph.) If, for example, Lee Ann wants to suspend an explosion that inflicts eight health levels of damage (a base of four successes), her player would need to spend one additional success to "hang" that Effect for one scene (a total of five successes), two successes to hang it for one day (six successes), and so on.

Some folks have wondered if an Effect can be prolonged or delayed with the ***Time Sphere Timelines chart***... and the answer is *no*. As that chart itself states, you *cannot* use Time to stretch the Duration out for a year, five years, 10 years, and so on. Otherwise, skillful Ecstasy Cultists would rule all the known worlds.

If My Mage Gets Embraced, Can She Still Use Sphere Magick?

Unless your Storyteller decides to Golden Rule a system that's been in place since **The Book of Shadows** in 1994, no. Seriously, NO. Please stop asking this question. Fer Realsies.

That said, I appreciate your other questions. (Just not that one.) Your questions show you care, and we all thank you for that!

Storytelling, Genre, and Mage



This genre entry was initially written for ***Mage 20****,* ***Chapter Seven****, but was cut down and briefly summarized on* **p. 375** *when the book needed to be trimmed. That sidebar was condensed from this section, which has been revised, expanded, and updated from its original form.*

Lee Ann kicks in a door. John Courage stalks a killer through the rain. Nix catches the eye of a stranger whose interest seems more than casual. The tale begins, and a genre unfolds. As the characters face off against your plots and complications, the type of story you share – its *genre* – sets up expectations, suggests characters, inspires settings, and lays out *tropes* that you can employ, alter, or discard as you see fit. Unfairly maligned as "predictable" and "clichéd," genres provide you with dramatic maps to follow and explore. You can bend those maps in whichever ways you please, but by following those paths – even when you subvert them – you set your tale in motion and point your players in a familiar direction that may become far *less* familiar as you go along.

Imagine genres as a bookshelf filled with possibilities. Different covers suggest the tales to be found inside. Here, we've got Spider Chase in a hot clinch with a drop-dead gorgeous person of indeterminate gender. Here's a black cover with a bloody handprint that reflects the light. One cover features an exploding Chantry, while another's bronze tone and Victorian flourishes imply a steampunk theme. The genre's tropes attract an audience, and while those tropes may veer into clichés if you're not careful (or if you *want* to play on those clichés for effect), a story's genre, in any medium, offers promises of the tale to come.

Thanks to popular media, you're familiar with plenty of genres. Most movies, comics, games, and TV shows feature easily recognizable genre conventions. Thus, it's pretty easy to craft **Mage** stories around familiar genres – horror, action thrillers, crime noir, and so on. Although your chronicle will probably feature a particular genre as its default tone, you can mix things up and give yourself a theoretically endless range of stories. Sure, your chronicle can draw from dystopian SF for its major atmosphere, plots, characters, and themes; there's no reason, though, that you can't throw in occasional romance stories, noir-style crime plots, grim satires, and revelations of cosmic horror. A variety of genres will keep your game sharp and your imagination popping.

A Rule of Three Rules

When you run genre-based adventures... and you *will*... keep the following three rules in mind:

- **Know Your Genre:** Like I said, you're already familiar with plenty of genres to start with. If and when you employ a genre, though, that you're not quite familiar

with just yet, familiarize yourself with that genre so you can avoid embarrassing mistakes.

- **Juggle Your Tropes:** Genre conventions, or tropes, play to expectations of the genre in question. You can subvert them, invert them, deliver them straight-up or flip them on their sides, but don't try to run a genre story without any familiar tropes – it's not a genre story if you do.

- **Deliver the Goods:** Audiences enjoy genres because such stories have elements that the audience expects to see. A western-genre story without horses, six-guns, or a saloon or two might be perfectly authentic in historical terms but it wouldn't *feel* like a western. Again, you can subvert expectations – and *should* do so, especially in **Mage**. Just don't forget those expectations entirely. Your audience may feel cheated if you don't deliver the goods.

Because **Mage** can seem so insanely huge, genre stories give you something to hold on to as a Storyteller, and familiar ground for your players to tread. And because the Awakened are such a diverse lot, the sorts of adventures they can have, and the range of stories you can tell, is far more expansive than the obvious possibilities.

Knowing Your Genres

Running genre tales is easy when you choose a genre you enjoy on a regular basis. Unfamiliar genres, however, can become a minefield of botched tone and poorly chosen tropes. Genre fans tend to notice those things even if a casual audience member does not, and can get perturbed if it seems as though the Storyteller doesn't know what he's doing... or worse, if it seems like he's making fun of a genre that the player really likes. You see this sort of thing when, for example, a TV show tries to evoke a genre and fails miserably at it because the writer or director were working with a superficial and badly dated impression of what the genre feels like. (The movie *Willow* comes to mind, as well.) The perturbation intensifies if the Storyteller actually feels contempt for his perception of the genre, and so – deliberately or not – makes hash of it because he thinks it's stupid to begin with. It's easy to imagine someone doing this sort of thing with the romance genre, for example, if his impression of that genre comes from garish clinch-covers from early-'80s bodice-rippers, and that impression isn't remotely accurate of the genre form today.

Therefore, before dropping genre plots into your chronicle, make a point of getting familiar with the genre in question. Know at least a few of its current tropes, and try to understand the appeal of that genre even if you're not a fan yourself. A Storyteller whose concept for a horror plot comes from her impression of '80s slasher flicks (that she's never actually seen herself) isn't ready to run a horror-genre session. Check out a few of the better examples of the genre you want to run. Even if you hadn't been a fan before that point – and really, if you're not a fan, then why are you trying to run that genre to begin with? – you could find yourself cultivating a taste for stories that you hadn't appreciated until then.

Genre Tropes and Stereotypes

Blazing guns, crashing cars, desperate kisses on rainy nights... tropes signify the characteristics of a given genre. It doesn't matter how inaccurate or unbelievable those tropes might be, audiences tend to expect a certain amount of them, and so while a trope may be subverted, it's still part of the genre package. If, for example, you decide to read or watch a pirate story, you'd probably feel left out if nobody wore an eye-patch, dueled with cutlasses, or invoked the sort of historically inaccurate *Talk Like a Pirate* Speech that defined the genre centuries after the real-life Golden Age of Piracy sailed off for safer waters. If Storytelling is a ritual, then tropes are the flickering candles and showy invocations of that rite. You *can* do without such things, but your audience might feel cheated in their absence.

Tropes can be characters, environments, situations, objects, goals, set pieces (see ***The Memorable Set Piece***, **Mage 20**, **p. 361**) ... essentially any story-element you can imagine probably has a related genre trope attached. Likewise, every genre has associated tropes which define it as the appropriate sort of story. A romance story, for example, has extraordinarily attractive leads of a suitable gender (a character trope) who are irresistibly drawn toward each other despite their best intentions (a situational trope), jealous rivals who try to screw things up for those lovers (a character *and* situational trope), incandescent passions that drive people to extremes (an emotional trope), environments that heighten the danger of the relationship (a setting trope), and a climax which will either unite the lovers or gloriously destroy them; a story, for instance, in which two fairly sensible mages get mildly attracted to one another and wind up dating each other without external complications is not a romance story – a healthy relationship, perhaps, but not a candidate for the romance genre.

Certain tropes have become shopworn from overuse; the old "*bad guys beat up the hero in order to send a message*" thing is done to death, although you'll still see it appear in crime-genre stories all the time. Others are now considered offensive even if they used to be popular; the "fainting chick" or "magic Negro" used to be fixtures of genre storytelling (and often still are), but they tend to piss people off, and should be avoided unless you plan to turn that trope inside-out... and even then, you're still liable to piss someone off. (Just ask George Lucas.) A "discredited trope," to use a marvelous phrase from the TV Tropes wiki, can be redeemed by clever usage, especially if it's being subverted in the process. *Mad Max: Fury Road* managed to do all of those things within the same movie, and thus stands as a classic of its kind. A Storyteller can learn a lot from watching that movie and noting the ways in which George Miller deploys, subverts, and plays familiar tropes at face value for maximum effect.

What does "subverting tropes" mean? Essentially, that term refers to taking an expectation and turning it on its head, often to undercut the shopworn and potentially offensive nature of the trope's usual appearance. When apparent "great white hero" Jack Burton, in the movie *Big Trouble in Little China*, fires his gun into the ceiling and knocks himself unconscious for the big climactic fight, John Carpenter subverts the Great White Hero trope and leaves the climax to Wang Chi – the real hero of the film, who would in most stories be the Scrappy Ethnic Sidekick. When John Courage asks Ecstasy Cultist Lee Ann Millner for help, quotes the *Dhammapada*, and allows her to use magick on him, the "Black Hats and Mirrorshades" trope of the soulless Man in Black is subverted. This sort of thing can defang offensive stereotypes while revealing unexpected dimensions of an apparently flat cliché.

The following entries feature a handful of appropriate genre tropes that you can use, abuse, or ignore in your chronicle. The ridiculously addictive wiki **tvtropes.org/** provides all the tropes you could possibly desire, and helps you spot the ones that have the potential to be more annoying than inspiring. Check it out... whenever you've got a few days to spare.

Delivering the Goods

Y'know the primary distinction between a good genre story and a bad one? The fulfillment of – or the failure to deliver on – what *Save the Cat!* author Blake Snyder calls *the promise of the premise*. Essentially, this means that you give your audience what they came for. If you promise fireworks, deliver fireworks. A great genre story can be ludicrously cheesy, physically impossible, and ridiculously over the top... but if it delivers the goods in an exciting way – like, say, *Mad Max: Fury Road* – then all is forgiven by the audience. By any "realistic" measure, that movie makes no fucking sense at all; that doesn't keep it from being one of the greatest action thrillers ever filmed. Creator George Miller and his lunatic cast and crew fulfilled the promise of their premise. They came, you saw, and they kicked your ass all the way to Holyshitsville and beyond. As a Storyteller, you can do the same thing with your players if and when you deliver on the promise of your premise... and knowing your genre inside and out helps immeasurably in that regard.

Genre Flavors

Often considered genres in their own right, the following flavors can be applied to other genres to amplify particular qualities and convey a given atmosphere which might not be as obvious otherwise.

- **Utopian:** The best is yet to come! *Utopian* style reflects an essential optimism through which problems are overcome by innovation, hope, and gleaming technology. Sacrifices will be necessary, of course; the best and brightest will thrive in a Utopia, and while the Masses may have to give up certain freedoms and individuality, the greater good will certainly be served. As a genre flavor, Utopian stories concentrate on a gleaming sort of nostalgic futurism, combining the best features of the legendary past with the prosperity of better days ahead. On the darker end, Utopianism is essentially authoritarian, with top-down social hierarchies that enforce their vision through wit (when possible) and force (when need be). For better and worse, Walt Disney's Atom Age Americana reflects the modern Utopian ideal... but then, so did Nazi Germany. Post-War Tokyo, Singapore, and Dubai represent a more current form of Utopianism, wherein clean cities and breathtaking technologies preside over repressed undercurrents that are seen and heard only by the select few who deal with them accordingly.

- **Dystopian:** The fuck-you flipside of Utopianism portrays the world as a worst-case scenario. Everything you heard was wrong is true, and hope is a dead bird washed up to rot on a glass-encrusted beach. What remains is defiant cynicism that goes down kicking. While this flavor tends toward bitter nihilism, it can still be fun when mixed with satire (as it often is) and a punk sensibility that lets folks work through our frustrations with the forces we can't destroy in real life.

- **Gothic:** Fixated on glorious mortality, the Gothic approach emerged in the late 1700s as a melancholy revolt against industrialized ambitions. Where Utopianism envisions a Brave New World governed by technological accomplishment, Gothicism reminds us that we too shall die, as will all other things. Morbid romanticism (see ***Romance***) forms the touchstone of a Gothic aesthetic, in which unabashed emotion goes howling over the top of conventional tastefulness. Like most of the terms on this list, "gothic" began as an insult that was gleefully reclaimed as a badge of honor; that insulting connotation referred to Goth's bombastic passions, emotional heaviness, and obsession with bygone grandeur gone to seed. Insanity, decay, psychological introspection, and preternatural ruin forge the framework of the Gothic style, which doesn't so much flirt with pretentiousness as it outright embraces it, raising a sneering smirk at anyone who can't appreciate the joke.

- **Punk:** A term abused to the point of meaninglessness, *punk* infers a snotty anti-authority attitude wrapped in ragged glamour and topped off with raging hostility. Although overuse has tamed the label past the point of absurdity, a punk flavor features urban wreckage wherein scrappy malcontents piss in the face of a parasitic elite class. Gritty, loud, and gleefully profane when it's fucking done right, punk kicks over idols, drops trou, and takes a massive dump on convention while offering a sharp two-fingered salute to the world.

- **Urban:** Another overused adjective, *urban* suggests a gritty city environment, typically with non-white ethnic

connotations. Popularized by hip-hop culture and the various types of ***Urban Fantasy*** (see main text), an urban flavor tends toward a more supposedly realistic approach. In practice, of course, urban media involves just as much hyperstylized wish-fulfillment as any other genre style, with flashy clothes, barking guns, blazing graffiti, and blaring music rumbling through an often-decaying cityscape where car-crashes and gun-battles are an everyday thing.

- **Pagan:** In contrast, a *pagan* flavor conveys a lush and living world where even supposedly inanimate materials are alive. Spirits, rituals, earthy passions and unapologetic carnality are part and parcel of this "witchy" tone. More sinister applications of pagan reveal the *Shadow*, in a Jungian sense, of things that are forbidden and suppressed but which will not be denied. The Latin root of pagan means "of the country," and so pagan-style stories feel more rural, elemental, and "natural" than urbanized adventures do; that said, the *urban pagan* flavor emphasizes a defiant naturalism breaking through the façade of an industrial world.

- **Core:** Generally used as a suffix (hardcore, grindcore, nerdcore, etc.), *core* essentially means *extreme* with a capital X. Like *punk*, this term is laughably overused. (Gorecore? *Seriously?*) Ideally, though, it conveys menace, extremity, and remorseless *give-no-fucks-ibility*. Core isn't really a genre or flavor so much as it's an adjective that floors the gas on a particular idea. Anything that's got "core" appended to that genre is going as far as it can go.

- **Nostalgia:** A word which literally means "the pain of homecoming," *nostalgia* refers to a sense of missing a comforting past that's more imagination than reality. Genre-wise, a nostalgic tone looks back to a time and place that feels like "home" to the characters, players, and /or society in question. Certain time-periods merge with locations like pre-War Paris, Victorian and Edwardian London, and America under the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Reagan administrations, to create a mythic aura of "the good old days." On a personal level, nostalgic stories focus on a character's childhood, adolescence, or especially prosperous times which have since ended and to which that character wishes to return. Reality, of course, has little to do with nostalgic impressions, and the character(s) in question may find out the hard way that, as Thomas Wolfe put it, "you can't go home again" because the home they miss never existed in the first place. Then again, though, in the mythic realm of **Mage**, perhaps you *can* go back there after all...

A genre – any genre – sets up expectations in its audience. We expect to see smoke-filled rooms and rainy nights in a noir tale, absurd reversals in a comedy, the threat of death and worse in a horror story. You can subvert tropes, twist clichés, bend those expectations back upon themselves, but you've still got to deliver the goods. If an audience hits the theatre, bookstore or gaming table wanting a certain experience, it's the story-teller's job to give them what they want, if not always in the form that they expect.

To that end, then, know your genre and understand what your audience wants from it. Figure out, before you start the dramatic ball rolling, what your premise is. Keep that premise in mind as you go along, and salt your story with scenes and characters and genre tropes that excite you and keep your players entertained.

Suitable **Mage** genres and their tropes include – but are not, obviously, limited to – the following story types:

Fantasy

The obvious option for a game of modern wizards, fantasy has become one of the most diverse genres in modern media. Technically, most of the genres mentioned below could qualify as fantasy of one sort or another, and fantasy can be added to all of them that aren't already fantastical by nature. In genre terms, the label *fantasy* refers to stories in which the laws of scientific rationality get ignored whenever it's dramatically appropriate to do so. The extent to which they're ignored depends on the sort of fantasy involved. Instead, magic and the supernatural call the tune, and the extent to which they do so also depends upon the type of fantasy involved.

High Fantasy

Gods! Wizards! Dragons! Magic! *High fantasy* marks the most archetypal form of the genre, with mythic inspirations and a general lack of subtlety. Everything's larger than life, with very little connection to realism in any form. Depending on the story-teller's approach, high fantasy can feature talking animals, personified gods, giants and monsters of wondrous nature, powerful spells, sinister foes, kings, princesses, curses, quests... although it's not always as vast as the ***Epic Fantasy*** described below, the high fantasy genre accepts magic as a given, and bears very little resemblance to the everyday world we know. Tolkien's work has become the Ur-text for Western-style high fantasy, but the genre goes back to classical mythology and includes most cultures on earth.

When mages speak of the High Mythic Ages, this sort of thing is what they have in mind. If your chronicle includes Horizon Realms, their localized realities often operate within a high-fantasy paradigm. Genre tropes include quests and heroes, swords and wizardry, palaces and forbidden forests, treacherous landscapes and ominous beasts. Peopled with Bygones and filled with enchantment, high-fantasy adventures generally – though not always – include a fairly obvious moral compass, old-school monarchies, and supernatural traditions That Must Be Obeyed Or Else. Such tales feature non-human races more often than not; those entities don't have to be Tolkien-style



elves, dwarves, orcs, and the like, but sophisticated societies that resemble human cultures with several major differences are more the rule than the exception. Almost inevitably, this genre takes place in pre-industrial environments; Horizon Realms where a "lost" time or culture has been preserved make excellent settings for high-fantasy sagas. Even so, modern high fantasy *a la* the Harry potter series is possible as well.

Reality's attitude toward magick, within such stories, depends heavily on the focus of the mage. If her beliefs and practices suit the environment and overall "tone" of that setting and story, then it's coincidental. Hypertech and other forms of modernistic or futuristic craft, however, are nearly always vulgar... as described under ***Primal Reality*** in the ***Reality Zones*** section of **Mage 20, p. 615**. Guns are almost never found in such adventures, because the introduction of practical firearms rang in the end of the appropriate eras here on earth. Classic-style wizardry may or may not fit the reality of a high-fantasy adventure – if you're a European sorcerer summoning Christian archangels, they might not hear you in a Chinese fantasy realm!

Which brings up an important distinction: *High fantasy is not exclusively Euro-centric*. The wild fantasia of Chinese high fantasy, the Persian and Arabian allure of Sinbad and Scheherazade, the adventures of Hiawatha, Soatsaki, Splinter-Foot Girl, and the Little Thunders... that's all high fantasy too.

Low Fantasy

In a similar style but a much lower power-level, *low fantasy* has a much more "realistic" feel, wherein magick is more subtle and less common and the monsters stay out of sight until the moment when they're suddenly *not*. Such fantasy still tends toward a pre-industrial aesthetic, and generally has a more rural-peasant feel, with cities and royalty being far-off wonders more heard of then experienced. Nature, in this genre, tends to be more magical than human-crafted sorcery is; as a result, reality favors Pagan paradigms, shamanism, and medicine-work.

The moral compass, in low fantasy, is much grayer and more subjective. This is the realm of Howard's Conan and Burroughs' Tarzan, Martin's Westeros and Lindskold's Firekeeper. Its common tropes include traps and intrigue, hidden horrors, and deadly struggles in which strength and wit matter more than pyrotechnic spells. Traditional European faerie tales tend toward a low-fantasy aesthetic, although their modern cinematic adaptations veer toward high fantasy instead. Magic, in such settings is difficult and slow, traditionally demanding rituals and elaborate preparation, bargains with extra-human entities, and witchcraft-style spellwork rather than potent wizardry. Technology, in most cases, remains at the pre-industrial level of high fantasy, although certain interpretations of low fantasy take place in our own modern world instead, as per ***Urban Fantasy***, below. More often, though, low fantasy takes

place in our world during a pre-industrial or early-industrial time period, traditionally during fairly realistic portrayals of classical antiquity, the medieval era, or the colonial period. (See the genre entry for ***Historical***.) Even so, historical fantasy is still fantasy, and its treatment of bygone eras is more like *300* than like *Gladiator*.

The **Mage** sub-lines **Dark Ages** and **Sorcerers Crusade** tread a line between high and low fantasy, depending upon the Storyteller's wishes. Courtly intrigue and swashbuckling adventure hew closer to low fantasy, while dragon-riding airship battlers soar into high fantasy territory. Otherworldly Realms generally favor the high-fantasy end of things, although the subtler reaches – such as the Hollow Earth and Paths of the Wyck – verge onto low-fantasy ground. In any case, the major distinction between those subgenres involves the degree of mystic flamboyance involved. If magic is subtle and slow, and monsters emerge from the shadows at dramatically appropriate moments, we're probably talking about low fantasy; if dragons and fireballs fly with exciting regularity, then high fantasy rules the day.

Epic Fantasy

When battle-horns sound the charge to defend the land, *epic fantasy* unfolds. Earth-rending spells, monumental enchantments, an aura of Grand Events Occurring, and a chance to be a hero when the world's future hangs by a thread... such are the tropes of this fantasy genre, wherein a fantasy realm of high (*Wheel of Time*, *Lord of the Rings*) or low (*Game of Thrones*, *Deed of Paksenarrion*) aspect trembles on the verge of catastrophe. Essentially a subgenre of those other subgenres, epic fantasy deals in large-scale events with titanic consequences. Where other fantasy adventures focus on individual heroes and small groups, epic fantasy swings for the fences, ranging across kingdoms and continents for stakes that will affect them all.

On a metaplot level, **Mage**'s Ascension War is an epic fantasy setting, especially in its **Sorcerers Crusade** incarnation. Your own chronicle can deal with more intimate sagas than that (see ***An Intimate Epic*, Mage 20, pp. 18-19**), though if you want to go full-blown Ascension Warriorsville, the setting encourages that. A modern epic-fantasy saga would involve crucial conflicts in a global war, with some faction – possibly the Fallen, Technocracy, Traditions, or even the Mad – gaining a winner's endgame edge that puts all other mages at risk. Perhaps the Disparate Alliance has chosen to surprise-attack the Union... with your players on either the Disparate side, the Technocracy side, or involved with a Traditions Council that's not certain which side to back in that fight. Maybe you're running a group of Technocratic idealists against the weight of a Fallen Union... or running Tradition idealists who've realized that the Council is corrupt. Maybe the Nephandi have successfully pulled off a major coup, and Tradition, Technocracy, and Disparate mages must put aside their differences and save Reality from the Void. Whatever setup you choose, epic fantasy involves epic scope with epic payoffs. Strange alliances, reversals of fortune, vast battles and inescapable consequences are essential elements of such tales.

Dark Fantasy

When you swing swords and fling fireballs, you cut folks open and burn them alive. Dark fantasy deals with the gritty side of magical worlds: poverty, tyranny, blood, grime, disease, revenge. The moral scale rides so far into the gray that even the most apparently "good" characters do appalling things (*hello again, George R.R. Martin!*), and being nice can get you killed in the most appalling ways.

This subgenre reflects a more "honest" approach to fantasy, though it also has a tendency to slide into what's often called *grimdark* territory, where things become almost comically grim simply for the sake of making them dark. (Again, Martin is often guilty of this sort of thing.) Characters are recognizably human even if they're technically not human at all. Torture is a common occurrence, and nothing good happens without bad results. Villainous characters tend to have sympathetic aspects, but they also embrace sadism and ruthlessness in ways rarely seen in more "wholesome" fantasy tales. Hope may be found here, but – as in the *Hunger Games* series – even an ostensibly happy ending may involve more survival than prosperity.

Given its emphasis on powerful mystic superbeings, the World of Darkness is, in many respects, an especially dark fantasy setting. That's especially true of **Mage**, whose themes concern the role of power in a hostile yet changeable universe. Although it contains elements of ***Horror*** too (see that genre entry below), the overall tone of **Mage** favors black leather and bloody chrome. **Mage 20** chronicles with a dark fantasy aesthetic favor **Chapter Three** over **Chapter Four**; magick involves gritty practices and sinister instruments: blood, sex, drugs, control. And while dark epic-fantasy chronicles certainly exist (*dammit, George, quit hogging this section!*), such fantasy tends to focus on the private struggles of tormented individuals set against a brutal, uncaring world. (cf. the TV shows *Jessica Jones*, *Orphan Black*, and *Daredevil*.) As a result, unless it takes place in a pre-industrial setting, the dark fantasy genre often veers into...

Urban Fantasy

The shadows of our modern world provide a home for *urban fantasy*, an increasingly popular mode of low fantasy (sometimes verging into high fantasy) that takes place in the here-and-now or someplace very close to it. Technically, the World of Darkness setting is dark urban fantasy, as it occupies a sardonically fantastic version of life as we know it today. Though **Mage** has all sorts of possibilities, the most obvious **Mage** tales start here.

As a label, urban fantasy (dark or otherwise) is contested territory. Some folks apply it to the melancholic subtleties of Megan Lindholm and Charles de Lint, while others prefer the ass-kicking exploits of paranormal heroes like Buffy, Dresden, and the like. The subgenre covers both, really, and **Mage** can favor either variation.

Trope-wise, urban fantasy contains dark streets, conspiracies, garish nightclubs, and angry cops. Elements of ***Noir*** (explored below) show up a great deal, though urban fantasy also features an emphasis on music and art that's alien to most noir-style tales. Elves and faeries, for some reason, rub shoulders with vampires and witches in most urban fantasy sagas – perhaps because the Fae and Undead mingle so well with humanity. As a result, this subgenre makes an excellent venue for **Mage/Changeling/Vampire** crossover games, with **Wraith**'s weird cosmology and **Werewolf**'s bizarre violence bloodying the upper levels of the genre's stratosphere. On the **Mage** end of things, urban fantasy sticks closer to the intimacies of human life than to the epic reaches of Otherworldly Realms. Sourcebooks like **The Orphan's Survival Guide**, **Destiny's Price**, and the **Mage 20 Quickstart** suggest the sorts of stories you can run on the subtler end of that spectrum, with higher quotients of mayhem and magic being seen in **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures**, *True Blood*, *Night Watch*, and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

Literary Fantasy

Way over in the corner, away from the fuss, the outré reaches of *literary fantasy* beckon Storytellers and players with an imagination and the will to use it. From the surreal mysteries of Cat Valente's *Palimpsest* and Helen Oyeyemi's *White is For Witching*, to the classic phantasmagoria of Carroll's Alice stories (and their revisitations), the labyrinthine pondering of Eco's *Pendulum*, the brain-cracking fuckery of bizarro fiction (Mellick's *Warrior Wolf Women of the Wasteland*, Krall's *Beyond the Valley of the Apocalypse Donkeys*, and other weird shit), and the more relatable (though still surreal) ground where *Fight Club* Palahniuk and *Little Big* Crowley sow their wild *Bellfleur* Oates, literary fantasy breaks conventional rules and aspires to something deeper than mere adventure.

It's hard to pin a tale on this particular genre because it's as diverse as the authors who work with it. As an overall description, literary fantasy deals with heady subjects and bendy landscapes, poetic descriptions and hallucinatory reality, mythic tropes on a miniscule scale. Such stories are almost inevitably personal, intimate in scope and humanistic in approach. Although the settings can get pretty goddamned strange, especially in bizarro territory, you'll almost never find elves or goblins in such stories unless they're the product of broken human minds. Magick is subtle unless it's outrageous (as in, again, Wonderland or bizarro fiction), and "reality" is more likely to change of its own accord than it is to be changed by meddling wizards and metaphysical wars. Socio-political themes often appear, but cloaked in symbolic fantasias (once again, Carroll's Alice) unless such commentary is the core of the tale. (**cough* Palahniuk *cough**) Certain authors and editors prefer the term *interstitial fiction* because it slips between the cracks of easy definition; likewise, such stories slip between the cracks of a supposedly rational world, reflecting the ultimate irrationality behind that illusion. Instead of "adventure" in the classic mode, literary fantasia often deals with personal explorations which tend to be *picaresque* – that is, little stories connected by the journey of a roguish hero in a corrupted world – rather than linear. ***Satire*** often makes appearances (as described below), with elaborate symbolism and plays-on-words almost essential to the genre.

From a **Mage** perspective, literary fantasy asserts an apparently "realistic" world which peels back to reveal a ***Borderlands and Crossings/Primal Reality*** sort of setting that might go full-blown ***Realms*** instead. (Again, see ***Reality Zones*****, pp. 614-615**.) Even then, the expected game systems should not apply... except, of course, when you want them to. ***Seekings***, ***Demesnes***, and other sorts of ***Dream-Realms*** make excellent locations for the stranger sorts of literary fantasy, as seen in Gaiman's *Sandman* series, Wonderland, Palimpsest, and Oz. Though it'd be challenging to base an entire chronicle in a literary fantasy approach, this sort of thing can break up the monotony of HIT Mark battles by dropping your heroes in someplace where the usual rules turn into dead leaves and blow away in the wind.

Magical Realism

The subtlest and most "realistic" form of literary fantasy may be *magical realism*: a subgenre wherein the setting is more or less our world, except that the world operates under Primal Reality rules that favor only the most subtle and organic forms of magick. Witchcraft, shamanism, medicine-work, mediumship, and so forth are far more effective than either hypertech or classic-style wizardry. In place of reality-quaking factions, such stories feature ordinary people and tiny miracles. The realm of Sherman Alexie, Alice Hoffman, Francesca Lia Block, and Gabriel García Márquez, magical realism often feels more rural and non-Anglo-ethnic than traditional fantasy or many forms of the literary kind.

Trope-wise, magical realism stories focus on families and homes, everyday life with strangeness on its fringes. It's not a place for fireballs. Characters have the Traits of normal human beings, plus one or two elements that set them somewhat apart – a minor Merit or Flaw, an Arete of 3 or less, and Spheres no higher than 2, with Abilities and Attributes in the 1-3 range, with perhaps a single 4 or 5. Obviously, this approach fits a chronicle better than it suits a short adventure, in part because "adventures" are an odd conceit in a magical realist world. This is more of a *mode of playing* than it is a setting for **Mage**, and though it fits certain themes of the game quite well, it requires a very different mindset than the typical heroic-game approach. Protagonists tend to get dragged along for the ride, and "victory" is more of a matter of understanding yourself than it is a quest toward vanquishing your foes.

SF

Interpreted as *science fiction*, *science fantasy*, and occasionally *speculative fiction*, SF is the other obvious go-to genre for **Mage**. Most clearly associated with the Technocracy, SF also wraps its loving robotic arms around the Etherites, Adepts, and almost anyone else who prefers computers and machines over chalk glyphs and naked bloodshed. There's a lot more to SF than robots, obviously, but technology and its consequences remain a core theme in SF media; although recent SF subgenres have explored the possibility of ***Alternate Histories*** (see below), the genre as a whole deals more with the possible future than the legendary past.

Especially in the current era, SF is nearly as diverse as fantasy can be. In contrast to the fantasy genre, science fiction deals with tech that's at least remotely plausible, while science fantasy – A.K.A. ***Space Opera*** – wraps fantasy tropes in technological gloss. The distinction between them isn't nearly as simple as *Star Trek* vs. *Star Wars*, but that's as good a place as any to draw lines when you're talking about a genre that's expansive enough to go from *Frankenstein* to *The Andromeda Strain*, from *Cloud Atlas* to *Who Fears Death*, from *Akira* to *Cryptonomicon*, from *Flash Gordon* to *Ender's Game*, and from *The Matrix* to *The Fountain*. SF is often called "a literature of ideas," and critic Paul Constant referred to it as the medium that asks *Now what?* when confronted with the fallout of our best and worst ideas.

Science Fiction

At least giving lip-service to realistic technology and its effects, science fiction takes liberties with the world as we know it but usually attempts to portray the world *as it might be*. Its view of science can range from Utopia to dystopia (see sidebar) but it's generally couched in real-world possibilities. Trope-wise, it's all over the map while drawing all-new maps to go all over as well: Spacecraft, rayguns, brash heroics and outer-space wars, manufactured beings and cosmic entities, time-machines and planetary travel, cybernetics, holographics, psionics, clones, etc., etc., etc. If you can think of something vaguely associated with science past, present or future, there's a science-fiction trope or three connected to that idea.

From a **Mage** perspective, the Void Engineers, Adepts, Etherites, Iterators, and Progenitors most closely match the tropes and sagas of archetypal science fiction. Within such stories, ***Technocratic Reality*** rules the day, as per ***Reality Zones***, **pp. 613-614**. Settings for science-fiction tales generally involve a location dedicated to advanced technology – labs, factories, office buildings, space stations, Technocratic Constructs, and so on – although Otherworldly tech Realms, and Zones like Autochthonia and the Digital Web, are always a possibility. Conversely, your heroes could find themselves in places where advanced technology is rare, forbidden or nonexistent... at which point, they need to figure out how the bloody hell they'll survive. Challenge is essential in any kind of genre, but science fiction emphasizes the struggle for a future. In **Mage**'s case, that involves constructing a new and better Reality in which humanity can escape the horrors of our past.

Alternate History

And then there's the form of science fiction that postulates a different past than the one we're told is real – a world where Nazis won WWII, where Castille and Aragon failed to topple Muslim rule, where Queen Victoria built robots or a United Native Nation pushed the white man back into the sea. Alternate history SF blends science fiction and science fantasy, asking *What if?* instead of *What now?* Steampunk, steamfunk, dieselpunk, Weird West or Weird War... each type of alternate history has a subgenre of its own, with tropes that merge SF's visionary attributes with the nostalgic fascination of ***Historical*** adventure (as per that entry, below).

These sorts of adventures can take place in Otherworldly locations like the Hollow Earth, or in the Middle Umbral Realms described in **Mage 20 (p. 98)** and **The Book of Worlds**. They might involve Time-Sphere magicks, temporal vortices, or quirks of time and space. You could set an entire chronicle

Afrofuturism, Steamfunk, QSF, and More...

Not without cause, SF has, shall we say, a very white-guy rep. Women often get excluded from discussions of "*Real* SF" even though Mary Shelly arguably created the form with *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, while queer, Black or otherwise "minority" creators and characters have been sidelined for most of the genre's history... unless, of course, they happen to be Japanese.

That situation, however, is changing. The expanding fields of Afrofuturism, steamfunk, Indigenous SF, diaspora fantasy, Native fantasy, wuxia, QSF, Sword & Soul, and related genres have built upon the earlier work of authors like Octavia Butler, Steven Barnes and Samuel R. Delany, Sherman Alexie and Jin Yong to craft a growing field of alternate history and pancultural SF. Certain Euro-ethnic authors have joined the club as well, presenting more nuanced and respectful characters and tropes than the stereotypes found in early genre work.

Essentially, these genres present SF themes through a non-European or non-heterosexual lens, taking *What if?* and *What now?* in exciting new directions, often adding in themes of alienation and identity. Folks who want to know more can look up those genres online, and check out the following authors too: Nalo Hopkinson, Minster Faust, Nnedi Okorafor, Bran Lindy Ayres, Rimi B. Chatterjee, J.F. High, Balogun Ojetade, Catherynne Valente, Crystal Connor, Ramez Naam, Steve Berman, Mary Anne Mohanraj, and more.



in an alternate history, and let your players discover... or decide... the direction of events. Every action, after all, has consequences, and player-characters inevitably change the face of history when they act.

As noted above, **Mage** already has alternate history potential within the medieval **Dark Ages Mage** and the *Renaissance* **Sorcerers Crusade** series. **The Book of Mirrors (pp. 129-139)**, **The Fragile Path**, and the ***Awakened History*** section of **Mage 20**'s **Chapter Five** all suggest possibilities for almost any historical setting you can imagine. Although an alternate history story, Realm or chronicle demands extensive research, the freedom to rewrite history to your heart's content makes this subgenre a perfect venue for **Mage**'s themes.

Space Opera

Old-school *blasters 'n' bug-eyed monsters* stuff, science fantasy has little connection to real-world science or possible events. Instead, it jumps into hyperdrive with a plasma sword in one hand and a pulse rifle in the other. Initiated by Edgar Rice Burroughs and his Barsoom, Amtor, and Pellucidar series, this genre exploded through the pulp era by way of Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and their kin, becoming a mainstay of Hugo Gernsback-style SF. Unlike the ponderings of modern science fiction, space opera is pure adventure stuff; swashbuckling aliens, voluptuous princesses, death-rays, robot armies, that sort of thing. **Mage**-wise, this is Etherite territory – the province of Doc Eon, the Gernsback Continuum, Hollow Earth adventures, and similar glorious fun.

Space opera can have its serious side, of course. The *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, despite its botched execution, is epic tragedy with lightsabers. *Avatar* rages against genocide when it's not dazzling us with CGI fantasia, while Honor Harrington and Miles Vorkosigan caper and scheme their ways through dark space-opera sagas. The endless wars of a certain gaming workshop feature a wild flux of space opera and grimdark high fantasy. It's not hard to see where things could go horribly wrong for your swashbuckling Etherites, especially if the ***War in the Ruins*** still rages (see **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventure**) or the Deep Umbra vomits forth gibbering hordes of madness incarnate...

Action-Adventure

Trenchcoats. Katanas. Exploding gas mains. HIT Marks and Black Suits. **Mage** was damn near tailor-made for action-adventure tales, and many a chronicle has begun with Technocracy agents trashing some poor Chantry... or vice versa. Despite its philosophical mien, **Mage** kicks ass on a pretty regular basis. And so, although your chronicle might not be based around action-adventure hijinks, this genre certainly suits the dirty side of the Ascension War.

As popular media, this genre's pretty obvious. The vast majority of films and TV shows feature action-adventure tropes

even if they're not based upon the genre to begin with. Chases, brawls, gunfights, death-traps, narrow escapes, knockout blows to the head, guns that don't run out of ammo until it's dramatically appropriate to do so, angry face-offs, Mexican stand-offs, bloodied heroes who won't give up, exploding buildings, exploding cars, exploding pretty much everything that could possibly explode (and lots of stuff that shouldn't explode in real life) ... we've seen it all a million times, and yet when it's done well (as in *Fury Road*, *The Raid*, pretty much all of the Marvel Entertainment films and shows), this genre still rocks our socks off. From a Storyteller standpoint, the challenge in an action-adventure story doesn't involve finding the tropes, but in deciding which tropes to use, invert, and discard.

Although members of the Traditions and Disparates can certainly become action-adventure heroes, the group that comes into its own within this genre is the Technocratic Union. It is, after all, the duty of field agents to go forth and take out Reality Deviants by any means necessary. A group of Black Suits, Enlightened cyborgs, enforcers, and other ass-kickers live and die as part of one long action-adventure saga. Whether the ass in question belongs to Superstitionist magi, rampaging were-things, demonic invaders, alien infiltrators, Nephandic shock-troops, Marauder lunatics, vampiric parasites, crazed Masses, it matters not to those brave agents on the front lines of the Reality Wars. And if the Union itself is corrupt, then enemies are everywhere and paranoia becomes the only way to stay alive. Sure, anyone can *have* adventures; certain Technocratic operatives, however, *ARE* adventures.

The **Mage** sourcebook **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventure** addresses this genre in detail. The entire Technocracy series of sourcebooks favors action-adventure options, and **Mage 20** itself is loaded with systems that enhance or encourage such scenarios – see most ***Background Traits***, the ***Combat*** section, and the entries which deal with ***Magickal Duels***, ***Environmental Hazards***, and ***The Technological World***, for starters. **How Do You *DO* That?** features sections about ***Elemental Mastery***, ***Martial Arts***, ***Mystic Travel***, and ***Uncanny Influence*** that can play a huge role in action-based chronicles. For the most part, though, you should keep the pace moving quickly, using rules only when need be. Over-reliance on complex game-systems can slow gameplay to a crawl, and when playing out this genre, that's the *last* thing you want to do.

Spy Thriller

The obvious subgenre for Black Suits, cyborg infiltrators, and VA hacktivists, this realm of James Bond, Jason Bourne, Charly Baltimore and Ethan Hunt combines smash-'em-up action with heady paranoia and plenty of treachery for everyone involved. Everyone's got various agendas, no one's being honest with anyone (possibly not even with themselves), and the stakes of each mission range from personal mortality to the extinction of life on earth. High-tech gadgets and daring escapades are *de rigueur*, filled with reversals, seductions, assassination attempts, exotic locations, international travel, and enough physically impossible activity to task the limits of the Forces, Life, and Matter Spheres. (Entropy, Mind, and Time are also handy Spheres for an Awakened spy to have.)

Although any Bond, Bourne or *Mission Impossible* film provides lovely inspiration for an Awakened spy thriller, **Mage** players are especially commended to the movie *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, which manages to be awesomely Black Suit-ish despite some rather gross sexism and racist overtones. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* also makes an excellent addition to this list, with Charly Baltimore as an especially Euthanatoic assassin. The *Matrix* films merge metaphysical SF with tons of spy-thriller tropes, taking the genre's fondness for ridiculous stunt-work into the realm of vulgar magick gone berserk. On an only slightly subtler note, *Inception*, for all intents and purposes, *is* a **Mage** spy thriller, with (**choke**) *Wanted* not even bothering to hide its debt to a certain Thanatoic assassin-cult which appeared nowhere in the movie's source material: a graphic novel about supervillains, starring Eminem.

War

The Ascension War's not the only war where mages belong. Every large-scale human conflict has probably included at least one Awakened combatant, and many – such as World War II – have included hundreds or thousands of them. A war-based story doesn't have to involve combatants, either; a civilian Awakening in the midst of war, an Enlightened child refugee, medics, protesters... anyone involved with such a conflict might be Awakened, and so the war genre – a category based in our horrified fascination with military conflict – provides fertile grounds for an Awakened chronicle.

Given the scope of history, war-tales make excellent venues for ***Historical*** adventures; that said, the modern age is certainly full of wars. From a genre-tropes standpoint, war stories feature military forces, machines and discipline, blood-rage and combat-fatigue, the awful power of modern weaponry, and the grotesque mayhem of pre-industrial warfare. Weapons, obviously, are essential, and the conflicts could range from the psychological warfare of *Inglourious Basterds* to the huge-scale carnage of *Saving Private Ryan*. War wrecks havoc on one's psyche, and so the Flaw: ***PTSD*** and the rules for ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***, as per **Mage 20, p. 407,** could easily come into play. Some folks consider war to be the great crucible for manly accomplishment, and others see it as the ultimate human curse. Themes of such stories, then, are endless. War's absurdities can even be played for gallows humor (see ***Comedy /Satire***), as in *Catch-22*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Tropic Thunder*, and *M*A*S*H*.

What role do mages and their Arts play within the conflict in question? Are they grunts (as in *Private Ryan*)? Specialists (as in *Frankenstein's Army*)? Partisans and spies (*Inglourious Basterds*)? Do they have something to prove (*Red Tails*), escape (*Three Kings*), or destroy (*Zero Dark Thirty*)? Might they, in fact, be on "the wrong side" of a war, like Russians in Afghanistan or Germans in WWII? And – considering that **Mage** is all about subverting paradigms and subjective reality – your story could show that "the wrong side" of a war is relative... as one might do when

revealing that the "insurgents" facing an American mage-squad are Taftáni fighting to save their homeland from invasion.

Mages wield powers both subtle and magnificent; in war, such powers can make a huge difference. And yet, few mages of any faction could survive a direct hit from a tank shell. Fighting smart, obviously, is the key to war-based scenarios, with the definition of "smart" depending a lot on the technologies involved and the scale of that war. If your story also involves other World of Darkness Night-Folk, the fighting can be downright epic – imagine a throwdown between cyborgs and werewolves amidst the ruins of Stalingrad, witch-folk and Gabrielites in the forests of Scotland, or Yezidish Batini facing Daesh werecats in the hills of modern Kurdistan. When mages get involved, Sherman's dictum that *War is hell* can be taken at face value!

Paranormal Action Thriller

On that note, a popular genre at the moment involves supernatural critters fighting it out in the shadows of our world. The *Blade* films, the *Underworld* series, *Van Helsing*, *The Brothers Grimm*, *Night Watch* and *Day Watch*, *The Crow*, book series without number, and shows like *Grimm*, *Supernatural*, *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* all constitute the *paranormal /supernatural action thriller* genre, wherein the trappings of old-school horror get a workout in action-movie tropes.

This genre is sort of a default setting for World of Darkness games, especially **Werewolf**, **Hunter**, and a front-lines treatment of the Technocratic Union. As shown in the *Men in Black* movies, the genre is especially appropriate for agents scrapping with those pesky RDs. S.H.I.E.L.D.'s struggle with Hydra could be seen as a mass-media reflection of the Fallen Technocracy metaplot option, while *Ink* pits medicine-working story-tellers against Fallen corrupters. Really, these sorts of stories write themselves, so your job as Storyteller, in such cases, involves setting up the antagonists, establishing potent stakes, and keeping a few ***Memorable Set Pieces*** in mind so that your players have a ball. (See **Mage 20**, **p. 361**.) A little extra angst, too, is part of the genre, so be sure to throw in lots of relationship complications and messy emotional fallout for the characters involved, as described in the ***Romance*** entry below.

Superhero

As cringe-worthy as it might seem to mention the superhero genre in a **Mage** book (if only because of some of the truly awful character concepts this author has seen from folks combining the two), the current wave of superhero films provides extraordinarily good inspirations for a twenty-first century **Mage** chronicle. The *Iron Man* and *S.H.I.E.L.D* series essentially present the best side of Enlightened hypertech, while *Jessica Jones, Luke Cage*, and *Daredevil* could just as easily be about orphan mages as gritty superheroes. *The Matrix*'s debt to comic books is obvious, and we've already mentioned *Wanted*, *Blade*, *Kingsman*, and *The Crow* above. The Robert Downey *Sherlock Holmes* films make good **Mage** inspirations too, and they own more to superhero movies than to their original source material. Marvel Entertainment's *Doctor Strange* film is, of course, absurdly **Mage**-appropriate. In this book, the ***Invigoration*** and ***Psionics*** practices (see **Chapter Three**) hold explicit ties to modern superheroics, and it's easy to see Tarzan, Batman, the Shadow, and many other heroes in **Mage** terms...

...which highlights a pitfall of combining this genre with **Mage**: It's also easy to make both **Mage** and superheroes look stupid if they're combined poorly. (The pulp-hero Marauder character in the **Revised-Edition Book of Madness** comes immediately to mind.) As a Storyteller, then, focus on the elements of power and responsibility, the verges between human and inhuman abilities, the labyrinthine moral psychology involved in freakish vigilantism, and the allure of hypertech and gritty street violence if and when you adopt superheroic tropes to a **Mage** chronicle. Leave the Spandex duds and the ripe soliloquies back in the comics where they belong.

Crime

That allure of street violence hits center stage in the *crime* genre. Turn the action down and turn the grit way up, and you're got a fascinating stage for Awakened tales. Sleazy bars, bloody alleys, desperate people and dirty jobs dominate this genre, with organized crime and deadly conspiracies adding paranoia to an already vicious environment. The obvious playground for Syndicate enforcers, Black Suit agents, and orphans of all kinds, crime settings move from cop shops to inner-city ruins, the estates of the untouchably rich, and the ghettos of the unbearably poor.

Genre-wise, crime tropes include smoking guns and whispered threats, late nights and bleary days, trash both human and otherwise, and the ragged glamour of the worst side to human existence. Almost inevitably urban but occasionally rural, crime stories deal with the cost of desperation, the claws of addiction, greed, lust, courage, and fear... from the cops to the crooks and everywhere in between, crime stories are human stories. Even if the people in question are Awakened, their lives, in this genre, are recognizably like our own.

This isn't a genre for metaphysical pyrotechnics. The set of reality should make flamboyant magicks vulgar. Although certain areas might have more "give" than others (see the ***Localized Reality*** entries in **Mage 20**, **pp. 614-615**), crime stories often take place in Technocratic Reality Zones. That's not to say, of course, that you can't stalk corruption or investigate homicides in a Horizon Realm; the bigger Realms have crime too. As a genre, however, crime focuses on "the problems of little people like us." Thunderbolts might come into play, but the human dimension is paramount.

This book's **Chapter Four** describes crime and justice among Awakened factions, and the **Mage** sourcebooks **Destiny's Price** and **The Orphan's Survival Guide** deal explicitly (*quite* explicitly, sometimes) with crime-based stories and settings. The **Mage 20 Quick Start** booklet features a pack of street

orphans and their little corner of Seattle too, and **The Bitter Road** suggests possibilities for young mages living on the edge. For the most part, such adventures involve mages who either can't afford to be showy or who have compelling reasons to play things close to the vest. Save the fireballs and cosmic horrors for a different kind of tale.

Noir

An especially sullen brand of mystery comes with the label *noir*, meaning "black." All crime stories deal with unpleasantness, but noir tales – by definition – get especially dark. Rare is the scene that takes place before night; cigarette smoke and bloody knuckles are everywhere. Treachery is a given, and every angel's got busted wings. Mages who find themselves in such situations are down-and-out by the standards of their kind. This is Fallen territory whether the Nephandi are involved personally or not. Back-alley magick is the only kind you'll find here, so it's perfect for orphans, rogues, turncoats, oathbreakers, and the Mad. Mages who trawl this beat know what evil lurks in the hearts of men. That evil lurks in their hearts too.

Inspiration-wise, the shows *Luke Cage*, *Jessica Jones*, *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black*, *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad*, *Profit*, and *The Sopranos* make essential viewing for a Storyteller who wants to go to the dark street-side of their **Mage**. Some of the more ridiculous moments of the *Sin City* films and comics are possible only with a bit of magick, and so – alongside *Angel Heart*, *The Crow*, *Hobo with a Shotgun*, *Martyrs*, *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, *Repo Man*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Tokyo Gore Police* – they make fine inspirations for a noir-style game as well.

Mystery

It's hard to keep secrets from a mage unless you're Awakened too. And so, the mystery subgenre involves major challenges for a **Mage** Storyteller. Defined by the need to solve a crime whose solution isn't as obvious as it might seem, this type of story demands the ability to hide clues and suspects from the peering eyes of the Mind and Time Spheres. Even so, it's possible to do it anyway, especially if your perp has paranormal powers of his own.

Mystery tropes involve "red herrings" dragged across the scent of a crime, flamboyant acts of heinous behavior, intellectual challenges and dead-end leads, covert agendas and interested parties. The reasons behind a mystery are never obvious – if they were, there'd be no mystery. And so, from a Storyteller's perspective, a mystery scenario for **Mage** demands advance planning, tangled webs, and a cast of suspects who've got reasons to keep their business hidden even if they're not guilty of the crime at hand.

Horror

Further into the inner and outer darkness, we find the many variations on *horror*: a genre dedicated to vicarious dread. Although its tropes often verge into crime, SF, and action-adventure territory (as shown especially in the first two *Alien* and *Terminator* films), horror's overriding theme involves the sharp teeth of mortality and the anxiety so many of us feel about our inevitable ends. Horror's tropes – ghosts, monsters, darkness and the dead – often serve other genres too, and so it's vital to recall the following observation if and when you wish to run a horror-centric **Mage** tale: *Horror is about helplessness, dread, and the loss of control.* Without those elements, you've got Supernatural Action Theatre, not real horror.

The range of horror is the range of fear. Almost anything that can inspire fear has an associated horror genre. Giant spiders? Check. Death by torture? Yep. Creeping paranoia? Mutation and decay? Madness? Dismemberment? The gang's all here. Horror tropes get tied into an implacable sense of our mortality, either literal death or the more insidious (and often more frightening) death of what we think we know and who we think we are. Because such certainties are vital to a mage, the horror-driven Storyteller must think of ways to derange that mage's power. Sometimes that'll involve limiting her magickal powers, destroying her magickal focus, removing her from places and people that help her feel secure. Best of all, of course, is when you can *make the player do that for you* without spilling your true agenda until it's too late. And so, misdirection is your friend. Horror, ideally, begins with the illusion of something safe... a safety stripped away until the horror is revealed.

Because mages understand so *very* much about ***Things That Man Was Not Meant to Know***, it's fun and easy to turn that understanding against them. The system of that name (inspired, we admit, by the classic horror RPG *Call of Cthulhu*) provides you with a lever with which to flip a mage's sanity. The Vidare Mortem, Jhor, Morbidity Quiets, fearsome Echoes and certain Flaws all serve to unmoor a mage's apparent security by assuring that she sees and comprehends too much. At the end of a Technocrat's tether, Room 101 awaits in all its forms, with the mental cruelty of Social Programming and its aftermath an ever-present possibility. Spheres like Entropy, Life, and Time unleash unfathomable agonies when they're used with malignant purpose, and Freddy Kruger himself would cower from a mage who chose to use Correspondence and Mind with terrible effect. The Fallen wait at the fringes of power and pride, ready to push and pull unsuspecting mages off the edge. And at the end of every mage's potential Path lies the specter of Marauder-style madness, where Enlightenment bites its own tail until Reality itself screams in fear.

Uncertainty is the key to fear, so do everything you can to describing things in comforting, familiar terms. Avoid game-system phraseology except when absolutely necessary. Effective horror depends heavily upon ***Atmosphere and Description***, ***Theme***, and ***Mood*** (as detailed in **Mage 20, pp. 357-358 and 363-366**), so employ disconcerting descriptions and stress ominous ambiguities. Mages don't tend to fear monsters very much, so dispense with the usual tropes of vampires and so forth unless you can make them mysterious again. The moment that *leprous sadistic corpse-thing* becomes *a 10th Generation Tzimisce prince*, you've lost the element of fear.

Mage isn't the place for *Friday the 13th*-style banality. Instead, **Mage** works best when coupled with grotesque body horror (as in *The Thing*, *American Mary* or *The Machine Girl*), social terrors (*Carrie*, *Get Out*, *The Stepford Wives*), malignant magic (*The Witch*, *Warlock*, *The Craft*), psychological malformation (*Repulsion*, *The Cell*, *American Psycho*), Otherworldly incursions (*The Exorcist*, *Hellraiser*, *The Evil Dead*), existential dread (*π*, *Dark City*, *Under the Skin*), gag-inducing splatter (*Dead Alive*, *Hostel*, *Tokyo Gore Police*), human depravity (*Funny Games*, *Closetland*, *The Devil Knows His Own*), disconcerting strangeness (*The Others*, *Holy Mountain*, *Eraserhead*), implacable nature (*Jaws*, *127 Hours*, Herzog's *Nosferatu*), grotesque alienation (*Under the Skin*, *It Follows*, *Repulsion*), or – best of all – combinations of most or all of these elements which, when handled well, can truly fuck you up (*Martyrs*, *Candyman*, *Antichrist*).

Just be warned: *Horror stories can be Trigger City*, and a Storyteller is advised to talk things out beforehand and afterward, keep an eye on his players' reactions, and be ready to call a *blackout* if the players appear to be suffering real distress. (See ***Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries*, Mage 20, p. 345**.) Sure, you're going for horror, but this is still supposed to be fun.

Consent Matters

Horror and Romance, far more than other genres, have the potential to raise problems in your gaming group. **Mage 20**'s **Chapter Seven** deals with the matter of triggers and boundaries, but we cannot overemphasize the importance of consent in interactive fantasy. Real-world scars from abuse and violation, coupled with phobias that might have no basis in previous experience, make a potential minefield of certain subjects. Check in with your players before exploring potentially sensitive topics or scenes, scope out potential trigger-subjects before heading down certain avenues in your stories (torture, sexuality, addiction, and so on), and *ALWAYS* be ready and willing to hear "*No, sorry – that goes too far for me*" from your players. This isn't a matter of "political correctness," but of respect for your players and friends. A person who's not willing to respect a *No* has no business running a game... or playing in one, either, for that matter.

Comedy/Satire

The apparent polar opposite of horror is comedy... or is it? Really, it's not; as a rule, comedy is tragedy and horror sped up and exaggerated to the point of farce, robbed of just enough empathy to make us laugh at its victims instead of weep for ourselves. Even mild comedy depends on situations that would be appalling in real life, and the darker kinds of satire can slide straight into outright horror. (See *Hot Fuzz* or *Very Bad Things* for some excellent examples.)

Comedy tropes go back to ancient Greece... hell, back to the *caves* for all we know: pratfalls, misunderstandings, physical grossness, pride falling on its face, social inversions, mistaken identities, ticking clocks with awful consequences, and situations where *every. Single. Fucking. Thing. Goes. WRONG*. Comedy sticks an air-pump up Reality's ass, so its passions and faceplants go way over the top. The high are brought low, and losers win big even if they're still losers by the end. Things tend to move fast, too; timing is everything in comedy, and a gag that lingers, or takes too long to arrive, kills whatever punch that line might have had.

Some folks – perhaps pretentiously – divide humor into *low comedy* and *high comedy*. Low comedy is gross-out stuff: barfs, farts, flung poop and loser dudes, ethnic slurs and sexist gaffes, dirty socks and puns and naughty bits and so forth; skillfully deployed with proper timing, such things can be funny (as in *There's Something About Mary*) ... but it's still grade-school stuff, and though Shakespeare himself wasn't above such things, that sort of dumb gets dumber fast. High comedy demands sophistication – plays on words, clever reversals, references to things only a select audience will understand, witty repartee and social critiques, surreal weirdness that makes us laugh from sheer discomfort, and other tools of brilliant satirists. At best, this is *Being John Malkovich* material, mining existential laughter from mortal discomfiture. It's challenging to do well, however, and most audiences still won't get it if you do. The best balance for **Mage** Storytellers, then, involves an absurdist tightwire between the two extremes – the sort of humor Monty Python's best work provides. Considering that Python included six geniuses at the height of their powers who *still* didn't always hit the mark shows how difficult that sort of thing can be.

Comedy is hard. And so, some folks default to silliness instead. Don't go there. Really. Don't. With the occasional exception, goofy stuff in **Mage** will backfire like a bat-winged Chihuahua eating Taco Bell. Yeah, it might seem amusing to make the Forces Master summon storms of piss, or to dunk the HIT Mark in raw sewage, but in large doses that sort of thing gets tiresome. Now, if you can infuse a low-comedic situation with hints of cosmic weirdness, as Kevin Smith does with the Golgothan shit-demon in *Dogma*, a bit of silliness or gross physical repugnance can wring cringing laughter from your audience. And that is the stuff of godhood.

(Oh, yeah; like horror, comedy can become Trigger City if you're not careful deploying those n-bombs and retard jokes. What worked for Richard Pryor in 1976 won't play at gaming tables now. It's really easy to offend people by pressing the wrong button, so leave the ethnic slurs and dumb-blonde jokes for social maladjusts who prefer *FATAL* over **Mage**.)

Mage is inherently satirical. That satire, though, depends more on inverted expectations and barbed parodies, livened by the occasional splash of excrement, than on trying to be funny. If you're *trying* to be funny, you probably won't be. So if, as a Storyteller, you choose to run comedic **Mage** tales, expect to faceplant hard unless you're really fucking good at it.

Romance

Mages need love too. And sex. And romance. Is that gagging I hear? Stop. Romance isn't hearts and flowers and all that Hallmark shit. The origin of the term comes from drugged-out malcontents writing absinthe poetry about Roman ruins and primal passions run amuck. And so, when we talk of **Mage**-style romance, think Lord Byron and Emily Brontë, not *Pretty Woman* with Paradox Flaws (which, admittedly, would be kinda awesome...).

Inescapable attraction is the beating heart of the romance genre. And that attraction drives us crazy. In the grand tradition of the original Romantics – some of whom adopted the proud title *the Satanics* to reflect their defiant carnality – the romance genre throws previously contented people under the wheels of passions which cannot be denied. Those passions turn their old lives upside-down, alienating family and spurring rivals to conniving depths. Although the modern romance market generally demands a happy ending, that's not a sure thing even now... and old-school romances were as apt to end like *Wuthering Heights* as they were to wrap things up happily ever after. The "Roman" part of *romance* comes from poetic fascination with ancient ruins, and so while modern romances usually end well, personal, and social ruin are certainly at stake if things go poorly. Romance-struck characters attain a sort of madness, often losing their previous impressions of identity in the surge of new attraction. The promise of such love is enough to shatter us, and tends to leave wreckage along the primrose path. If that sounds like Awakening, that's because it is... and a mage in the current of such love can feel like everything they knew before was a lie before they met the person who has remade their world.

(Speaking of making someone else's world, always get a player's permission before springing a romantic plot on them. If they're not interested, or feel uncomfortable with the idea, then *don't fucking do it*. This author has heard more than enough bad-gaming stories that involved players whose characters were seduced or violated against their players' will. That shit is vicarious rape, and it has no place at your table.)

Other essential romance tropes include rival lovers (who want the lovers for themselves), emotional scars (which must at least begin to heal before love can truly flower), bitter miscommunications (which throw stones in the path of love), and the sheer panic each lover feels when passion grabs them by the heart and refuses to let go. There must be chemistry of a sort the lovers can't deny, and obstacles both social and physical – disapproving families, disparate social classes, clashing nations, warring cultures, mental and emotional impediments, and often poor behavior on the part of lovers who don't want to admit that what they feel is true, or shared, or liable to last. Romances tend to take place against dramatic backdrops, and may involve frightening challenges, like the autistic loner faced with deep attractions (as in Christine Feehan's novel *Water Bound*) or the poor hooker planted in a rich tycoon's world (okay, so maybe *Pretty Woman* wasn't all that bad...). Such fear adds an edge to love, and the Awakened have plenty to fear. What if that inescapable attraction bonds a Black Suit to a Reality Deviant, a wizard to a werewolf, or a Chorister to the Nephandus he'd give anything to save? The path of true love never did run smooth, indeed...

The **Wraith** sourcebook **Love Beyond Death** offers plenty of suggestions for supernatural romance, and films like *Ghost*, *Time After Time* (an Etherite vs Jack the Ripper, with a working time machine!), *Practical Magic*, and Cronenberg's *The Fly* explore the fierce chemistries of preternatural attraction. (Yes, gods help us, the *Twilight* series counts as well.) There's an entire genre called *paranormal romance* which deals with matters of the heart when the hearts in question don't belong to normal human beings; Anita Blake, Kitty Norville, Mercy Thompson, Rachel Morgan, Ciara Griffin, Verity Price, Louis and Lestat, Cas Lowood and his ghostly lover Mary Dressed in Blood... their name is legion, and their inspiration can drive all thoughts of Hallmark screaming from your mind. In this book, **Chapter One** features an array of Merits and Flaws that can twist characters around Love's thorny paw and make 'em weep for a happy ending... if such a thing, in the World of Darkness, is possible at all.

Tragedy

When the mighty fall – as they often do – their collapse shakes the world. Certain mages call such falls *Descent*, the opposite of Ascension. Tragedy, then, is what happens when a powerful person descends from greatness to oblivion. And when such people go down, they tend to bring a lot of other folks down with them.

As a genre, tragedy (named for *tragoidia*, "goat song" or *trygodia*, "wine song") deals in vicarious human suffering, typically of exalted people who fell to pride. According to Aristotle, such stories provide *catharsis*, a purgation of pain through the excitement of seeing a well-told tale of woe. Tragedies, then, aren't just unfortunate events, but effecting tales of heroic ruin. There's more than a bit of similarity between tragedy and romance... and some bond with horror and satire, too. In all these genres, characters endure potent upheavals – upheavals that the audience enjoys even when "joy" isn't the appropriate emotion.

Being who and what they are, the Awakened make excellent tragic heroes. As **Mage 20**, **Chapter One**, describes, mages of all types follow a metaphysical Path; ideally, it leads them to Ascension; all too often, it does not. Descent can take many forms: stagnation, death, decay, corruption. When a mage fails to reach their aspired goals, the result isn't *always* tragic... but many times, it is. Drawn down by hubris, blindness or seduction, they drop off the Path – and as the saying goes, the higher you climb, the further you fall.

Tragic tropes include powerful temptations, rigid pride, a blindness to consequence, and a huge price to be paid. The hero doesn't always die, but *someone* very often does. If a tragic hero survives, that person is broken by the fall. In the process, the audience – if not the hero – learns about the cost of pride and the vengeance of the gods. The fact that the hero in question is extraordinary in some way – wealthy, beautiful, skilled in magick,

loved by all – makes the fall more resonant than it would be if that person meant nothing to anyone. Although some modernistic tragedies, like Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, deal with the "little tragedies next door," **Mage** is an epic setting where even the most intimate stories hold great weight.

Generally, it's best to run a tragic story with the full consent and cooperation of the player in question. After all, you're going to destroy their character, so springing this sort of thing on them is a real dick move. In return for that demolition, promise the player that the ruin will be memorable – the sort of thing that many roleplayers talk about forever afterward. Set sky-high stakes with the foreknowledge that things will go poorly. Whether or not you tell the other players is up to you, but the tragic player needs to be involved. Yes, the usual trigger-warnings still apply to the group as a whole; going all *Passion of the Christ* on a member of the group can still traumatize the other players, so keep an eye on things as you go along.

As far as sources go, **The Fragile Path** is a tragedy in six parts, as recalled by six mages at the heart of the Traditions. **The Bitter Road**, **The Orphans Survival Guide**, **Blood Treachery**, **Technocracy: Syndicate**, **The Book of the Fallen**, and the **Sorcerers Crusade** supplements **The Swashbuckler's Handbook** and **Infernalism: The Path of Screams** all contain plenty of material for tragic **Mage** adventures. Shakespeare's tragedies, of course, make magnificent inspirations, with *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and especially *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* (as well as their various cinematic adaptations) being especially resonant with **Mage**. Among more recent sources, *The Fountain* could be seen as a tragic romance that ends in transcendence, while *Black Swan*, *Vanilla Sky*, *Titus*, *The Devils*, and *The Doors* have far less tranquil ends. *Donnie Darko* finds a peace with death, while *Requiem for a Dream* tears apart the lives of everyone involved. It's also worth seeing *The Crucible*, if only to see what happens when Sleepers think that witches walk among them, and are wrong...

Historical

More of a mode than a genre in itself, historical stories take place in times other than our own. The Victorian era, either World War, Classical Greece, mythic China, the 1960s, the 1770s... whichever time and culture appeals to you, there's adventure to be had.

Within that period, of course, you should do extensive research before staging **Mage** adventures there. Your setting might not be exactly *realistic* – films like *The Man with the Iron Fist*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and the *Detective D* series take massive liberties with historical fact – but you'll want to get the flavor right. Little details go a long way toward establishing the mood, and every period and culture has a flavor all its own.

An essential part of that setting, for **Mage**, involves the nature of magick, Reality, and focus. What's vulgar there? What fits in? What's on the edge? The paradigms for Classical India won't match those of the American Wild West, so base your limitations on what people believed then and there, how they did things, and what they might consider "impossible." Contrary to impressions of the "the Mythic Age," no time and place existed where all forms of magick were "coincidental." The **Sorcerers Crusade** series features guidelines for the European Renaissance, but each setting has its own mystique. Set your ***Reality Zones*** accordingly, as detailed in the section of that name, **Mage 20**, **pp. 611-617**.

The World of Darkness already contains time-based sourcebooks and series: the **Dark Ages** line, **Werewolf: The Wild West**, **Wraith: The Great War**, and the aforementioned **Sorcerers Crusade** all feature material that can be adapted to **Mage** if a given line doesn't already include such material. The *GURPS* series from Steve Jackson Games has an excellent array of historical sourcebooks, and many other RPGs have useful books for this sort of thing as well. **The Book of Mirrors**, as already noted, features suggestions for various time-periods of **Mage**, and the **Mage 20** rulebook has its own ***Awakened History***. Many settings have suitable films, novels, and reference books, and the Internet provides goodies might be hard to find on paper. All of the genres above, with some tweaking, can apply to any time or place you might imagine. The human condition, Awakened or not, regardless of our differences, remains essentially the same.

Illuminations and Restless Rambles



Mage has, with good reason, been called "the thinking gamer's game." Underneath the trench coats and katanas, **Mage**'s world features hard questions, intriguing concepts, and tons of real-world history and esoterica dressed up with imaginary colors. As an author and designer, I've always trusted our audience to bring their brains with them to the table. And given the endless discussions about philosophy, metaphysics, psychology, and more that I've seen on **Mage** forums over the years, that trust remains stronger than ever.

Y'all make me proud. Thank you for that.

The following entries unpack some concepts that tend to show up in **Mage** discussions. Most of them were originally written as **Mage 20** sidebars, illuminating subjects that were mentioned in the text, or adding a bit of information about topics like transhumanism or Al-Andalus, which are not exactly common knowledge among the general population. Several of those sidebars stayed in **Mage 20** (the ***Left-Hand /Right-Hand Paths sidebar*** on **p. 574** comes to mind), but the majority of them were cut, and appear here for the first time.

Many of these entries were cut from the ***Awakened History*** in **Chapter Five**, and ***Focus and the Arts*** in **Chapter Ten**. ***Do You Believe in Magick?*** was initially written for **Chapter One**, ***The Math of Mortal Metaphysics*** began as part of **Chapter Four**, and the remainder were eliminated before I even finished writing them, when it became obvious that the book was going to need to be cut down to a manageable size.

I'm certain that a few of these essays will piss people off, but that's life.

Enjoy!

Do You Believe in Magic(k)?

Nobody *really* believes in magic anymore, do they? Well... um, most folks *do*, actually, especially if by "most folks," you count *the majority of the entire human species*. Maybe we're not subscribing to *High Wizard Weekly*... but do we accept the existence of angels? Devils? Faeries, curses, and gods? Yeah, proportionately speaking, most of us do. The Technocratic boast about convincing "the whole world" that atheistic materialism is the only viable view of reality is true only if you count certain segments of the United States and Europe... and it's not even really true then, either. Just ask anyone from Rome, Lourdes, or the Bible Belt.

In Africa – the world's second-largest continent, home to over 1.2 billion people, and the heartland to three out of five of humanity's dominant religions – what folks might call "magic" is a part of everyday life. Asia – two-thirds of the single largest landmass on earth, home to 4.5 billion human beings, and the heartland of the other two major religions as well as earth's largest Muslim population – has managed to hold both technology and mysticism close to its collective breast for over 4000 years, with no end in sight. Even officially "atheist" nations like Russia and China retain deep traditions of "folk magic" in addition to the Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Christian, and Confucian creeds that outlasted the communist crackdowns which drove them briefly underground. South America is near-universally Catholic, aside from the regions where indigenous beliefs still hold sway. Even the supposedly "rationalized" cultures of Europe and North America contain mystic Catholicism, fundamentalist Protestantism, and Pagan cultures both new and traditional. When you look at human beliefs, it's actually far harder to find people who *don't* believe in gods, spirits, and magic than it is to find people who do.

Does this mean that people don't "believe in science"? Of course not. Human belief is flexible; folks can hold faith in both modern science and so-called "superstitions." Throughout most of human history, that hasn't even been an issue. What we now call "science" emerged from deeply mystical cultures, and has commonly been considered proof of God's magnificence, not evidence that "god" cannot exist. The split between atheistic rationalism and belief in higher (and lower) powers is a very recent development – a development that began in Western Europe during the mid-1700s but didn't really become a dominant cultural belief in Western cultures until over a century later. Throughout most of the world, that belief never took hold at all... and anyone wondering how mysticism and twenty-first century technology can coexist should look at the cultures of tech-industry giants like India, Japan, and the United States.

So no, the Technocracy did not somehow manage to convince the majority of human beings that rationalistic materialism is the only viable form of reality. That idea is itself Technocratic propaganda. The best way to win a war for people's hearts and minds, after all, is to convince them that you won it a long time ago.

Al-Andalus

Where did Isabella's conquistadors get all those marvelous ships? Those magnificent horses? That state-of-the-art armor? From one of the best-kept secrets in western history: *Al-Andalus*, better known in the United States as "Moorish Spain." Perhaps the most progressive and technologically advanced region in medieval Europe, the region named "to become green at the end of the summer" has become a footnote despite having been ruled largely by African Muslims for almost 800 years. How did that happen? A combination of whitewashing from British, French, and American historians, combined with the "heroic narratives" of Spain and Portugal, which emerged from a 400-year war with the Muslim kingdoms as two of the most powerful nations of their age... in no small part because of the technologies, wealth, and scholarship they "inherited" from Al-Andalus.

The full history of this region is obviously too complex to explore in a sidebar. The short version of it, though, begins with North African incursions in 711, following the collapse of the old Roman Empire. Intervening in a war instigated by Visigoth King Roderic, Berber forces from the Umayyad Caliphate – led by Tariq ibn-Ziyad and Arabian Governor Musa ibn Nusayr of Ifriqiya (that is, the Arabic name for the Latin territory of *Africa*) – quickly consolidated the entire Iberian region and parts of Southern France before being decisively halted by the Carolingian Franks in 739. Despite infighting between Berbers and Arabs, most of the region remained a territory of the Umayyad Caliphate in one form or another – first as a province, later as a kingdom-in-exile. For well over a century, the Umayyad Prince Abd al-Rahman I (called *al-Dakhil*, "the Immigrant") and his descendants led Al-Andalus in a golden age governed by the Caliphate of Córdoba, following the fall of that caliphate in Africa. Until 1031, when Córdoba fragmented into a collection of Muslim kingdoms called *taifas*, the Caliphate's achievements in art, science, philosophy, and scholarship dwarfed the squabbling upstarts in France, Deutschland, Scandinavia, and the British Isles. Technology reached its European peak for that era in Tulaytulah (Toledo), Madrid, and Córdoba, where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived in relative harmony and prosperity under Muslim governance. (Things were, of course, *far* more complicated than that... but aren't they always?)

Following Córdoba's collapse, the region became a shifting landscape of warring Christian and Muslim kingdoms reaching from the edges of Northern Africa to the borders of France. Even so, the legacy of Al-Andalus continued to enrich the Muslim *taifas*, the African kingdom of Morocco (hence, the name *Moors*), and the Christian kingdoms of Portugal, Aragon, and Castile. Gradually, plague and warfare reduced Muslim dominion within the region until 1492, when the united monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile successfully besieged the Emirate of Granada... a siege that included, on both sides, the use of effective medieval artillery. Granada's capitulation consolidated the kingdom of Spain and prefaced – in all the best and worst respects – the world as we know it today.

Although Christianized Portugal, Castile, and Aragon dominated the last quarter of the Al-Andalus period, the civil and technological legacies of Muslim rule in that region cannot be overestimated. Everything Spain and Portugal had, as nations, they secured through their history as parts of Al-Andalus. Medieval France and Italy played defining roles in the final defeat of Muslim rule, but the cultural makeup of the Iberian kingdoms was... and remains... distinctly Afro-European. Five centuries later, the national characters of Spain and Portugal – and of the many lands they conquered – bear the stamp of Al-Andalus.

Many mages remember this. It's a pity that so few modern people do.

Weird Science, High Adventure

The era between Victoria's ascent and World War II provides a wild time for the Awakened world. With the emergence of the Etherites and Difference Engineers, the resurgence of the Traditions, the struggles for the Wild West, China, and the Middle East, global Depression, and several wars, this age of two-fisted magick provides grand adventures for some mages and high tragedy for others.

Among European mages, there's a sense of giddy possibility. The world is their oyster. Strange machines and Hollow Earth gateways, lost cities and fisticuffs... this is the heyday of Czar Vargo and Inspector Rathbone. In the later years, a pulp-age sensibility takes over, with Doc Eon battling Nazis and their Shadowed Sun Society for the future of humanity. The Roaring '20s feature gangland-style showdowns and Jazz Age hijinks, reaching toward film-noir ambiguity as the century wears on.

For mages from conquered cultures, the age is far less sanguine. Native Americans, Indians, Chinese, African Americans, and the people of Africa itself find themselves backed against the walls of White Man's Progress. Fighting for what little they have left, they use defiant forms of magick. Too often seen as strange savages or exotic companions to the European adventurers,



these people refuse to be assimilated. If and when they *do* slip between the cracks of the industrial machines, however, their ancestral Arts prove surprisingly effective...

The weight of history comes down hard in favor of industrial technology. Even so, this era provides a wide range of possible futures. If the Lakota Thunder Society can win the West, if Akashics drive back the blue-eyed devils, if the Bata'a overthrow the American slave system, then maybe later years will see a very different... and perhaps a far *better*... world.

Ascended Masters?

Does a tiny sect of mages control the world? According to occult lore and conspiracy theories, there's at least one group that does. Toward the end of the colonial age, rumors spread of a secret cluster of mysterious wizards – sometimes called the *White Lodge*, *Ascended Masters, Mahatmas*, *Secret Chiefs* or *Illuminati* – whose arcane powers and godlike influence manage the expanding governments and trade guilds. Early sources consider these powers to be essentially benevolent; later on, however, they're reputed to be malevolent conspiracies.

What's the truth?

Whatever you want it to be.

Perhaps these Ascended Masters are the Oracles spoken of by the Council of Nine – mages who've become so enlightened that they rise beyond human limitations, yet stay behind to help the rest of humanity transcend. These bodhisattvas embody all that's best in Awakening and employ their compassionate powers to divert Earth's worst catastrophes. Sure, the world's a mess as far as we can see, but the Ascended Masters keep it from becoming even worse. Thanks to them, humanity continues to live, prosper, and work toward an inevitable Ascension.

Or perhaps the conspiracy theories are correct: this secret cabal is a conclave of selfish, malignant fiends who drive humanity towards consolidation and dominion under their rule. What mortals call the Illuminati is a shadow-face of the Technocracy, the Nephandi, or both. Or perhaps there's a greater force behind those organizations, making puppets even of the Awakened.

It could be that both views are right. Behind the rumors, Oracles, Technocrats, and Nephandi jockey for control. Bits of the truth leak out to the Sleepers in phrases like "Hermetic lodge" and "New World Order," but the facts get garbled in translation. It's a given in **Mage** that many of the secret orders and initiatory societies that flourish from the Renaissance onward are elements of, or fronts for, various Awakened factions. Perhaps the lore about Ascended Masters or sinister cabals managing the global domination movement reflects glimpses of the awesome powers behind the Ascension War's struggles on Earth.

Or perhaps there's something even *bigger* that not even the Awakened folk see clearly enough to understand...

Magick and the Fascist Urge

Modern fantasy aficionados tend to think to think of the folks with the magic as the good guys; in real-life occult history, though, that's often not true. The urge to dominate other people through mystic arts is a popular goal, and while such occultists rationalize their aims with the usual "for the common good" refrain, groups like La Santa Muerte or the Black Sun Society (a Nazi sect which still exists, and now bills itself as "*A secret society seeking stewardship over the world*"... on its website) do not, shall we say, act with the most benevolent of intentions.

Drawn from the Latin word *fasces* ("bundle") – which also refers to a symbol-laden Etruscan /Roman ceremonial axe that was used as both a badge of office and an instrument of pain – the term *fascism* refers to an authoritarian culture in which the individual and all institutions serve the needs of the state as defined by an elite. In occult groups, of course, the elite in question come from the upper levels of a secret society. Lower-ranking members serve the higher ranks, but maintain authority over non-members. The society consolidates the political, social, and metaphysical resources of its members, teaching "degrees" and other secrets that supposedly confer magical powers to members of the appropriate ranks. Those powers and resources – at least in theory – grant dominion over human affairs to the members of that sect. And when the elites decide that force is necessary, the gloves come off and violence ensues. If this is starting to sound familiar to you, congratulations! You've found the dirty secret at the heart of the Ascension War: an essentially fascist desire to control reality through occult means... "for the greater good," of course!

A perfect example of the tyranny of "enlightened mystic" despots can be found in the real-life history of Tibet under the theocratic governance of the Grand Lamas and their associates. Regarded as a paradise by sympathetic western myths, lama-run Tibet was a veritable hell for the common people, who were traditionally ruled through torture, slavery, grotesque executions, and a spiritual doctrine that blamed those people for the miseries endured in their current incarnations. The similar atrocities of Hebrew patriarchs, medieval churches, and modern Islamic extremists demonstrate the ruthless nature of wizard-priests whose vision of enlightenment exalts them at the cost of the many people they oppress, and it's not hard to see how **Mage**'s Traditions could become similarly monstrous if and when their supposed Ascensions come to pass.

It is the struggle of principled visionaries to remain compassionate of others and conscious of their own flaws. The dominating ethnic behind many mystic practices – especially those which exalt "the One True Way" – dogs any visionary who dares to pursue the proverbial "better tomorrow." It's not unusual, then, to find supposedly enlightened people who refuse to accept their own shortcomings, or the shortcomings of their governing philosophy, at all... people for whom compassion is a weakness, "the other" is an enemy, and "the Sleeping Masses" are mere pawns in an endless, bloody game of chess... or, for that matter, of **Mage**.

Although it's inaccurate to say that all mystic groups are innately fascist, totalitarianism *is* a common ideal. In the view of many philosophies, arcane and otherwise, the democratic social concept is flawed, recent, and doomed to failure. When it finally crumbles, the ultimate state of human perfection will be revealed once again as dominion under the rule of an enlightened elite caste. Hell, many philosophies consider domination to be the ultimate form of Utopia – so long, of course, as you happen to be one of the people in charge. If and when those people employ arcane Arts and Sciences that elevate them above the Masses, then it stands to reason that those people *should* be running the show! And so, behind the snuggle-bunny image many people have of **Mage**'s Traditions and Crafts, they're no less totalitarian than the Technocracy in practice. The New World Order and the Order of Hermes have more in common than their propaganda (or a superficial view of **Mage: The Ascension**) would have us believe.

Anyone who pursues and achieves significant influence over other people faces the potential corruption of power and authority. It's not hard to envision an occult struggle for earthly Reality as a clash of metaphysical fascist sects. Real-world occultism has a long history of groups whose totalitarian goals were cloaked in benevolent ideals, and the people who join such sects often have darker ambitions than their lofty rhetoric would suggest. Certain groups don't even bother with the lofty-sounding façade; membership in their order automatically marks one as a superior being, so why sugar-coat something that will soon be obvious once "lesser beings" are purged and the secret masters take their rightful place at the head of worldly affairs? It's a short step, therefore, from viewing one's self as an Awakened paragon of Enlightened Ascension, to telling one's self that anything you do in the name of that Ascension is okay in the grand scheme of things. I mean, hey – Reality will be better once the Sleeping Masses all see things your way, right…?

Taking Other People's Stuff?

Cultures trade goodies. That's essential to human progress. A culture that never trades, never adopts, never assimilates elements from outside cultures, is a culture that stagnates and eventually decays. This is especially true with magick, an Art which depends upon insights focused through practical tools. Ideally, cultural exchanges enrich all parties, generally building upon the original idea by adding new elements and methods to the older one. An uglier form of exchange, however, goes down when a conquering culture plunders its enemies and takes their stuff as its own. Human progress – magickal and otherwise – is built by both forms of exchange. The second one, though, is bound to leave folks pissed off, especially if they're survivors of the culture that was plundered, faced with their conquerors' descendants claiming things that were taken away by force.

As European empires tore through Africa, Asia, and the Americas, their people took pretty much everything that wasn't nailed down. That practice didn't originate with Europeans, of course; African, Asian, and Native American warriors plundered their enemies just as thoroughly, and large swaths of what would later be called, say, Chinese or Indian culture had been "adopted" at swords' point by those empires too. The rise of mass consumer-culture in the 1700s, however, led to a brisk trade in "exotic" goodies: Persian rugs, Egyptian artifacts, and the sacred rituals of plundered peoples… often sold alongside the people themselves. Combined with the sheer scale of that era's "colonialism" (read: *mass subjugation*) of three continents' worth of people, plus an inherent sense of racial superiority later dubbed "the white man's burden" (without that phrase's initial sarcastic irony), the brisk trade in question inflicted significant harm upon the cultures involved.

What does this have to do with magick? It's simple: The shape of twentieth- and twenty-first century occult practices depend heavily upon cultural elements that were exchanged – willingly and otherwise – between the Westernized world and the so-called "exotic peoples" of its colonies and lands. The fictional mages of the Traditions and Conventions shared a far more equitable and respectful exchange of practices far earlier than the real-life historical occult figures like Crowley, Blavatsky, Gerald Gardner, and Ted Andrews did, but it's still worth noting – especially when choosing focus practices and tools – that many modern ideas about metaphysical practices (notably elements "drawn from the exotic and mysterious East™" or "the true practices of the First Americans") are based in ripping stuff off from other people and taking them as one's own. And that many of those people don't especially appreciate that.

There's still plenty of room – especially among the Awakened – for respectfully exchanging ideas between cultures, adopting elements from cultures other than one's own, and finding a true and sacred way that resonates with a person far deeper than the traditions of that person's ancestry. It's also worth noting that European cultures also have their own traditions of shamanism, animal-mysticism, martial arts, and so forth. Although "cultural appropriation" actually *is* a real thing, especially where metaphysical practices are concerned, such concepts did not originate entirely with lore swiped from Asian and Native American practices. That said, many current perceptions about them did, and it *is* kind of obnoxious to take sacred elements of another culture and "adopt" them against the wishes of the people involved, especially without a context of, knowledge about, understanding of, or respect for, the cultural origins of those elements. People *do* it, all the time, especially in New Age and postmodernist chaos magick circles. But adopting "spirit animals" and feathered regalia from other people without their consent really isn't cool. And so, if an Anglo-Nordic Ecstatic shows up at the Chantry wearing a Kali T-shirt and a mock-Lakota eagle-feather, that person may catch some serious side-eye from her Chantry mates… most especially the ones of Hindu and Lakota ancestry!

Thankfully, the twenty-first century allows mages (and **Mage** players) a far greater ability to connect with folks and learn about other cultures in a more respectful and egalitarian way than those methods used by earlier generations. You can always play characters from cultures not your own, too – just don't be a dick when doing so. When choosing tools, beliefs,

and practices from so-called "exotic" cultures, treat those cultures, their people, and their associated beliefs with respect (see ***Roleplaying the Other*** in **Mage 20, p. 258**), and provide your mage with a deeper understanding of those subjects than the old attitude of "*I liked it, so now it's mine*."

Gender, Sex, and Magick

As one of the greatest human mysteries, sex plays a prominent role in metaphysical practices. Whether it's fucking in the fields to stimulate fertility, abstaining from sex as ascetic devotion, dressing as a different gender so as to confound expectations, transitioning from one's established gender in order to assume a more truthful identity, sharing intercourse as a ritual engagement of gendered energies, giving head to an incarnated god, or otherwise mingling sweaty flesh with mystic intentions, sexuality focuses intense power no matter how it gets employed.

Gender – the social definition of sexual identities – has a more nebulous position, though still a significant one. Many cultures, both modern and "traditional," restrict certain roles and practices to a single defined gender. That's as true of technological practices as it is of metaphysical ones; some Polynesian societies, for example, assert taboos forbidding women from working with metal, while Euro-American academia remained closed to women for centuries and discriminates against women even now. Law and custom assign rigid roles to "masculine" and "feminine" genders, and people who don't fit into clear binaries have had few "officially approved" roles until quite recently. Hell, in many places, nonbinary people often have no officially approved role in society even now!

And yet, other cultures have maintained a place – sometimes a place of honor – for cross-gender, genderqueer, or intergender people; Indian *hijra* ("transgender") and Ojibwe *niizh manidoowag* ("two-spirited") people, to name only two examples, are considered by some folks to have mystical associations with otherworldly forces because they transcend the expected cultural roles... and when mainstream culture rejects such people from acceptance, the arcane and artistic corners of most societies retain some degree of safe space for them anyway. As a result, even in societies where gender roles remain inflexible, the occult underworld has welcomed people who can't or won't fit in with established conventions. That said, even the most supposedly rebellious subcultures can get really bent out of shape when someone steps out of expected gender roles – witness the backlash against trans women in certain segments of Goddess culture, the rigid genderism and proud transphobia within the Asatru Folk Association, and the grotesque sexism often heaped on female and queer practitioners within supposedly "enlightened" occultist circles.

Regardless of the roles involved, mystic practices and cultures tend to place great emphasis upon sexual energies. Alchemy, yoga, Tantra, and certain forms of witchcraft and High Ritual Magick connect sublime energies to male and female polarities, and some (often disreputable) techniques within those practices channel sexual essence toward metaphysical goals. On the earthier side, less-rarified practitioners hump with abandon, directing the physical and metaphysical forces involved in sexual activity to seal spells and celebrate communion.

The *denial* of sex, of course, has potent ritual intentions too; most High Magick practices specify "purity" on the part of the would-be wizard. Translation: He can't fuck, jack off, or otherwise sully himself by acting on his animal urges, if only because he's spending energy that would be better off spent elsewhere. Clerical orders often demand celibacy, although that ideal tends to be observed more in the breach than in the observance. Ironically, those orders wind up having to turn a blind eye to the same-sex relationships that often develop in the shadows... especially when the "sex" in question involves the violation of children in the care of those clerical orders. (And no, it's not only the Catholic Church that has a history with that sort of thing. Not even close.)

Same-gender sexual contact has a rich magickal history too, although it's not often discussed outside of the inner circle. Degree XI of a certain famous mystic Order involves anal sex, often between male members of the Order, and Uncle Crowley himself waxed poetic about the occult pleasures of "foaming seed" and an "eye of Horus" that had nothing to do with visual acuity. The obvious element of exclusively same-sex societies and rituals goes far beyond the prurient speculations of outside voyeurs, combining the potent mingling of gendered essence, and the symbolic joining of male to male or female to female, with the emotional ties that sexuality forges between the folks who share it. Because a different person's gender can seem, at times, like a mystery, people often feel the most intimate bonds with people whose gender they share; "*no one else*," as the saying goes "*understands me like you do*," and that understanding can extend to metaphysical sexuality too. Let's be honest here, too: There's a sense of competition and often hostility between genders, too, and such opposition can be used by mystic practitioners as both a reason to perform same-sex rituals and – in rituals of a much nastier kind – to violate members of a different sex, with ritual intentions behind that rape... a violation that (as per legends of certain Amazons) women can inflict as well as men.

On that note, sexual predation can be found in any form of sex/gender contact. Sadly, mystic, religious, and occultist circles often attract sexual predators, if only because those predators can dress their violations up in pretty colors ("*Come, O nubile youth, and join your elders in the Great Rite...*"); depend upon their institutions to protect them from discovery and punishment ("*Father So-and-So would never do such a thing, you little sinner!*"); and, y'know, both ("*How dare you slut-shame Mistress Fortuna? Let go of your repressions and accept that she understands your One True Will...*"). Sexual exploitation is part of the shadow-legacy of many spiritual traditions, and there remains a vibrant controversy in the modern era between the sanctity of old rituals (and of the elders who perform them) and the safety of the people who trust in

them and wind up feeling betrayed. Many metaphysical societies strive to minimize such things by restricting membership to a single gender /sex. In practice, though, this exclusion not only doesn't work (predators are predators, regardless of their gender), it also discriminates against people who, again, can't or won't fit into the "proper" designation and who are therefore outcast from the status of that society. Yes, people and our institutions are stubbornly flawed, especially whenever sexuality is concerned.

Despite all the whining that certain mystics do regarding technological progress, advanced technology allows us to transcend previously established gender norms. Birth-control techniques (which have, until recently, been the province of occult Arts) allow women to enjoy sexuality without risking unwanted pregnancy... which, in turn, allows those women to pursue vocations in whatever field they desire while retaining sexual autonomy. Expanded communication networks – phones, mass media, the Internet, even the simple ability to talk about stuff we couldn't discuss openly before, and a broader language with which to discuss such things – have opened up discussions about sexuality, gender roles, identity, and the redefinition of all of the above... and while those discussions can get pretty heated, they've broadened the boundaries for what's possible in the twenty-first century. Although queer, trans, and intersexed people have always had a place at the mystic table whether anyone admitted it or not (and have always *existed* whether people admitted it or not), the current age lets us explore sex /gender options and identities in ways older generations found impossible. Technology, both mundane and Enlightened, helps people reshape their physical and social selves, and that reshaping process has become an inescapable element of twenty-first century reality. Although Life-based magick has always helped certain people transform their bodies, the landscape of our era's reality lets us *all* transform our minds and institutions in new and literally enchanting ways.

Not everyone is happy about that situation, of course, and religious hotheads aren't the only parties who keep trying to turn back the clock with regards to gender and sexuality. Conservative mystics insist that the polarities of male and female are intrinsic elements of the natural order, and that screwing around with those polarities brings metaphysical hazards as well as social confusion. Cultural traditionalists strive to lock sexuality back in the boxes within which it has traditionally belonged, claiming (rightly or otherwise) that gender complexities undermine social stability. Some folks, too, think sex is just plain gross – a legacy of the reeking animal meat we should have transcended by now. It's funny; the same transhumanist subcultures that seek to expand the human experience (see ***Transhumanism, Techgnosticism, and Technopaganism***, below) also contain people who want to obliterate sexuality altogether, raising humanity to a perfect sterile state beyond sex and gender. Certain Virtual Adepts find themselves agreeing with perfectionist Iterators: Sex is just too messy and raw to survive our ultimate transcendence of the flesh, and so we should disconnect from the whole idea and become something greater than our animal selves. And in that opinion, those folks wind back around to concur with ascetic monks: *Fuck this "sex" shit anyway – we're all better off without it!* Ecstatics, obviously, hold the opposite opinion, though even *they* understand the mystic potential of overcoming an urge to fuck everything that moves. And so, sex and gender occupy a vast, contentious landscape, especially when magick joins the mix. Nothing there is easy, and everything's subject to change.

For more details about this topic, see the instrument entry for ***Sex and Sensuality*** in **Mage 20, p. 598**; the sidebar ***Sex, Gender, and Shapechanging*** in **How Do You *DO* That?, p. 22**; and the ***Energy-Work*** entry in that same book, especially the heading ***What You Thought This Section Said*, p. 48**. A number of books about metaphysical sexuality can also be found at the tail-end of this chapter, listed under ***Suggested Resources*, p. 296**.

Sympathetic Magic

Like calls to like. As Above, so Below. Microcosm and macrocosm. These sayings, and others like them, reveal an innate metaphysical truth: *All things are innately connected.* And so, the ancient principle of *sympathetic magic* works through such connections, uniting the spellcaster, her target, her instruments, and her intentions together into a single working whole.

Many authorities split sympathetic magic into three divisions: *similarity* (like produces like), *contiguity* (that which is connected, stays connected), and *antipathy* (a thing repels its opposite). All three principles, however, draw upon the connection between one thing and another. And so, focus instruments often represent the "bridge" for the sympathetic-magic effect. The poppet (or "voodoo doll") – shaped to look like a person, and crafted with bits of that person's hair, clothes, and fingernails – affects that person from a distance; a sample of blood or DNA connects the subject of an enchantment with the material that once belonged to him; fire repels water, and so a spell intended to dry up a pond can be cast using a model pond whose water gets evaporated by fire. Words, gestures, symbols, even mental images without any physical form – all these tools, and many others, direct the mage's intentions through "empty space" to reach the object of her spells. Not only are such instruments associated with old practices of sympathetic magic, but they also find their way into technological practices as well... witness the connection of criminal charges to DNA.

More recently, quantum physics posits the connections between apparently disparate things. *String theory* assumes invisible molecular ties based upon vibrations of significant energies shared between them, while *psychic investment theory* connects physical reality to the energy invested in certain symbols through human consciousness, granting metaphysical reality to "egregore" thought-forms. (See **Mage 20, pp. 574** and **598-599**.) In the film *What the [BLEEP] Do We (K)now!?*, a selection of metaphysicians speculate that the apparent "space" between physical objects, intimate chemistries, conscious thought, and vitalizing energy is actually a constantly changing pool of interactions through which all things reflect one another...



"*for good and ill*," as the saying goes. And the *holographic universe concept* (see the paradigm of that name, p. 192) speculates that the entirety of human-perceived "reality" is in fact a sensory illusion drawn from a sublimely connected meta-level of cosmic Reality. All of these principles – from the traditional to the postmodernist – draw the same conclusion: *Everything's connected when you know how to find the ties.*

For an Awakened mage, that principle underscores every magickal Sphere. Because although the most obvious venue of sympathetic magick seems to be the Correspondence Sphere, all nine Spheres reflect some degree of connection between the mage's internal intentions and the external shifts in reality that she causes with those intentions. Each Sphere is a microcosm, a "small model" of the bigger picture. And so, while sympathetic magick provides the foundation of most focus instruments, you could say that "like calls to like" is the core of magick itself.

Transhumanism, Techgnosticism, and Technopaganism

Old and new collide and merge in weird postmodern synergies, most of which have many devotees in **Mage: The Ascension**. Three of the most obvious – *transhumanism, techgnosticism*, and *technopaganism* – represent potent ideologies for the twenty-first century mage. Tapping primal Arts to energize technological systems, these movements merge the realms of science and magick to bridge the gulf between mystic and scientific paths.

Posthuman Upgrades

Transhumanism redefines the human experience through technology, striving to overcome old limitations of thought and being in order to reboot and upgrade humanity. Physical and philosophical cybernetics (that is, combining actual machine /human interface with the *intellectual* fusion of human consciousness and mechanized systems) allow a transhumanist to expand her potential. Gender, identity, culture, ethnicity, physical location and capability – they all become fluid and malleable if you know what you're doing.

As always, this movement has an array of faces worthy of a South Asian divinity. Some transhumanists idealize a "new flesh" in which mortals rebuild themselves through technological constructs: clones, computer consciousness, cybernetic implants, and so forth. Others posit a *singularity* in which techno-philosophical advancement creates an apocalyptic push toward a revolutionary new state of being. (See the paradigm entry ***Embrace the Threshold*** in this book's **Chapter Three**, p. 191-192.) Activists posit a radical metamorphosis of body and consciousness, perhaps culminating a new organism altogether, a *posthuman* upgrade in which we evolve beyond our current

flawed state and attain majestic new forms. *Techgnosticism* – a term coined by Erik Davis toward the end of the twentieth century – combines the old Gnostic paradigm described in **Mage 20 (pp. 39, 105, and 569-570)** with this posthuman ideal, seeing the singularity as a fusion of technology, enlightenment, evolution, and ultimate transcendence of our flawed socio-organic selves.

At an even more radical ideal, this posthuman state includes a total transcendence of "meat," in which the posthuman "organism" is energetic and conceptual, not physical at all. (See ***Techgnosis and Transhumanism*, Mage 20, p. 105**.) And then you've got the folks who simply enjoy the trappings of our technological world, pushing the boundaries of social and physical constrictions through intellectual and athletic disciplines like cryptography, cosplay, parkour, smart drugs, and raves. For them, posthumanism is a tech-guided evolution of human physicality and consciousness – a state of "better living through technology."

Although the idealized transcendence of human stupidity has yet to materialize (hell, if anything, the Internet allows people to act even stupider than usual...), the various transhumanist philosophies look toward a future-now in which life is at least more *entertaining*, if not more "advanced," than it has been before.

Mercurial Synergies

Technopaganism incorporates the icons and elements of pre-Christian creeds into the industrial setting of modern life. Sometimes that means using a laptop "Book of Shadows," or scoping out Pagan festivals on witchvox.com. On a broader level, though, technopaganism embraces the potential of Information Age technology and urban environments. Car-spirits, junkyard shamanism, global activism to prevent the coming eco-pocalypse... it's all part of the technopagan realm.

As Erik Davis says in his famous article about technopaganism, "*Magic is the science of imagination, the art of engineering consciousness and discovering the virtual forces that connect the body-mind with the physical world.*" A technopagan understands that scientific tools and their social applications are just as appropriate for bridging that gap as primal ones are... and are, given the vast reach of Information Age technology, far more effective than roots and branches. For better and worse, things that used to be guarded secrets are now available to anyone with a web connection. Covens may occupy cyberspace instead of secluded groves. Social media helps build festivals where people fly in from all over the world in order to craft effigies of postmodern wicker men, and in this wired wilderness Hermes and Inanna, Diana and Pan receive new devotees and virtual-culture facelifts.

Transhumanism and technopaganism often cross over. Many technopagans pursue transhuman philosophies and practices, while many transhumanists employ technopagan tools and beliefs to focus their posthuman upgrades. For obvious reasons, these movements scare the living fuck out of certain people. Biblical fundies proclaim them as signals of the End Times... but then, isn't *everything?* Cultural purists fume about the fusion of old gods and new tech, withdrawing into dour enclaves typically defined by ethnic exclusivity. Hard-nosed scientists blanch and sneer at the weird code-kiddies and their psychedelic ideals. And yet, transhumanism and technopaganism reflect the dynamic spirit of our era and the fusion of apparent opposites into fresh and vital wholes.

The Math of Mortal Metaphysics

Anyone who bothers to do the math can see that the vast numbers of apparent souls in the Otherworlds goes way beyond the number of humans who have ever lived on earth. Each heaven, hell, afterlife, Dark Empire, and so on seems to boast an infinite number of souls; certain Realms are even said to be constructed out of forged souls, and yet the number of people required to do such things is... well, *impossible*, isn't it?

As with so many mysteries attached to the Otherworlds, the answers to such questions lie within the odd tangles of consciousness. A well-established metaphysical doctrine asserts that psychic energy creates its own form of reality. Even when a concept has no *physical* existence, it still holds an *energetic* existence, and that existence is still "real" on some level. (Again, see the concept of egregores, referenced above.) Because the Otherworlds are composed of psychic energy, things that have no physical substance in the material world are still real over there. And so, the infinite souls in the Otherworlds probably come from the psychic reality invested in them; in short, they are real because the conscious thoughts that created them are real.

That potential answer may well be linked to the concept of psychic *aspects*. Each mortal human being is actually composed of many different "selves"; each self is an aspect of that person that is suited to a certain circumstance, relationship, or vision of that person's identity. Any given person can have dozens, or even hundreds, of these aspects of that person's self. Gamers, for example, construct their characters out of imaginary aspects of themselves, all of whom share elements of the "real" person's psychic identity. *Everybody* does this, by the way – not only gamers. The identity you assume around your mom is not the same identity you assume around your boss, your lover, your best friends, or total strangers. They're all You in some form or another, but they're all "someone else" as well. That's especially true for people with Dissociative Identity Disorder, which is often referred to as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) as well as (incorrectly) schizophrenia. (See ***Derangements*** **in Mage 20, p. 650**.) In such cases, the person's aspects can become radically different "selves," each with their own sense of identity. And so it could be that a single human being might wind up splitting his conscious "self" into a dozen or more places throughout the Otherworlds after death – each self thinking that it is that one individual. Stranger things, after all, have happened...

It's also worth noting that humans are not the only conscious entities in Creation. Animals, as recent science has proved, are conscious, thinking beings, most of which have some concept of identity and levels of abstract and reflective thought. Spirits

have consciousness too, of course, and several metaphysical creeds assert that "inanimate" things – elemental forces, material objects, abstract principles, even ideas – hold consciousness as well. Mages can see that level of reality whenever they summon an elemental spirit or awaken the spirit of a place or object. And so perhaps many of those souls in heaven or hell or whatever are composed of the consciousness of dogs, fire, grass, and so on.

Yes, you can go crazy thinking about stuff like this, especially if you envision your gaming character as a part of yourself writhing in hellfire or sunning herself on the foothills of heaven.

Again, no one really *knows* how or why these apparently infinite souls populate an apparently infinite number of Otherworlds. It's all theory, beyond solid proof. Merely *thinking* such things can make them real, after all, if only in the sense of psychic-form reality. And so, mages tend to accept there's a lot more going on out there than the hard numbers of physical existence can measure. Mortal lives mean little in the vast scope of ineffable reality.

Suggested Resources



Mage: The Ascension is theoretically infinite. The game, does, after all, deal with malleable reality in an endless cosmos, filtered through the lens of enlightened human experience. Given that wide range of possibilities, you could draw upon almost any source of inspiration for your **Mage** chronicle. The following films, books, musical artists and TV shows, however, exert a special kind of influence upon the creators, past, and present of **Mage**'s world.

Books

Any book, website or magazine that a **Mage** author has read at some point finds its way into the series. The following books, however, have exerted an especially potent influence on **Mage**, and should be considered "essential texts" for anyone who wants to explore the essence of the line:

Nonfiction

Robert Pirsig's books *Lila* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* were both foundational texts for **Mage**. Although they can be... challenging... to read, the bones of our Ascension came from those two books.

On a similar note, Joseph Campbell's work – especially the *Power of Myth* interviews with Bill Moyers – inspired fundamental elements of **Mage**. Campbell seems rather dated and overdone these days, but his observations in *The Power of Myth* and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* are still worth consideration by the serious **Mage** fan.

And then there's Miriam Simos, A.K.A. Starhawk, whose books *The Spiral Dance*, *Truth or Dare*, and *Dreaming the Dark* provided an essential counterpoint to the boy-thinky ponderings of Pirsig and Campbell. Starhawk gave early **Mage** an emotional center and an ethical compass that the more academic authors often lacked.

Although most of his books have come out since the series' original run, Erik Davis provides essential reading for the twenty-first century **Mage** fan. *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* – just recently reissued and back in print – receives my highest recommendation, with *Nomad Codes: Adventures in Modern Esoterica*, *Tribal Revival: West Coast Festival Culture*, the 33 1/3 series book about *Led Zeppelin IV*, and Erik's website techgnosis.com providing inspirational fun for postmodern techomystics.

These days, my favorite author of pop-cultural mystic musings is Gary Lachman. Once known as the rock star Gary Valentine, bass player for the band Blondie, Lachman keeps adding impressively researched and eminently readable books to my bookshelves. *Politics and the Occult*, *Turn Off Your Mind*, *Jung the Mystic*, *A Secret History of Consciousness*, *Revolutionaries of the Soul*, *A Dark Muse: A History of the Occult*, *The Caretaker of the Cosmos*, *The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus*, and of course *Aleister Crowley: Magick, Rock and Roll, and the Wickedest Man in the World*... really, if you're not already familiar with Lachlan's work, what the hell are you waiting for? Get thee to an Amazon page, already!

My buddy Jason Louv is gonna love this part: His website *Ultraculture* is essentially cracked.com for the metaphysical set, and his books *Generation Hex*, *Ultraculture Journal*, and *Hyperworlds, Underworlds* occupy fond places on my bookshelf. Check out the ***Websites*** entry below for the Ultraculture URL, and for other useful websites too.

On a related note, I have to give a shout-out to the late Michael Talbot and his book *The Holographic Universe*. Talbot was way ahead of the curve with regards to the "reality as a hologram" theory, and although his book is a quarter-century old (though still very much in print), *The Holographic Universe* and its ideas show up a lot these days in Internet articles that seem to think that this is some radical new idea.

For folks looking for easy-reference material that can help you understand your mage's focus instruments, Bill Whitcomb's books *The Magician's Companion* and *The Magician's Reflection*, provide invaluable overviews of occult symbols, languages, correspondences, and more. And on that note, *Ancient Healing: Unlocking the Mysteries of Health & Healing Through the Ages*, from Publications International Ltd., is a great reference book to guide the practices of medicine-workers of all kinds.

Although they're not "magical" by most conventional measures of that word, I find *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers* and *The Secret of the Shadow*, by post-Jungian rehab counselor

Debbie Ford, to be pretty damn relevant to, and inspirational for, **Mage**. In those books, Ford offers an easily accessible rundown of "Jung-Lite" that concentrates on self-reflection with regards to those places we're told not to look at within ourselves.

When you want to deal with C.G. Jung on his own terms, I also highly recommend *The Red Book*, *Man and His Symbols*, *The Portable Jung*, and *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, plus *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*, by Sallie Nichols, which was a major inspiration for the first chapter of **Mage 20**.

It probably sounds silly to recommend the *Complete Idiot's Guides* series in a list like this, but I have to admit that I found the CIGs to *Philosophy*, *Alchemy*, *Paganism*, *Islam*, and *Wicca and Witchcraft* to be very useful at times.

Speaking of apparently silly resources, I've got to give thanks and praise to Larry Gonick's entire *Cartoon History* series. Despite his deceptively adorable draftsmanship, Gonick's books display a deeper level of research and clarity than many textual treatments of their subjects do. Best of all, Gonick doesn't skimp on non-western cultures and history; in that regard, his histories beat most books available in North America, which marks them for essential reading on that merit alone.

With regards to understanding Islam, I give my highest regards to *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*, by Tamim Ansary. If you want to see just how much we in the West are never told about one of the most significant cultural landscapes in human history, read this book. Seriously.

Folks who want to know more about the topics discussed under ***Sex, Gender, and Magick*** are referred to the following sources: *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Wisdom*, by Rufus Camphausen; *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World*, by Anne Fausto-Sterling; *The Marriage of Sex & Spirit*, edited by Geralyn Gendreau; *Rites of Pleasure: Sexuality in Wicca and Neo-Paganism*, by Jennifer Hunter; *Pagan Polyamory*, by Raven Kaldera; *Everything You Know About Sex is Wrong*, edited by Russ Kick; *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Tantric Sex*, by Dr. Judy Kuriansky; *Sex, Sorcery, and Spirit: The Secrets of Erotic Magic*, by Jason Miller; *Sacred Sexuality*, by Michael Mirdad; *Barefoot Doctor's Handbook for Modern Lovers*, by Stephen Russell; and *Pagan Portals – Sacred Sex and Magick*, by Web PATH Center. *Witches & Pagans* magazine features a wealth of articles and columns on this topic, and this book's author also wrote a series of articles about the conflux of magick, sex, and gender roles under the title "Mad, Bad, & Dangerous," originally published in *Realms of Fantasy* magazine and now featured at my blog, which is cited below under ***Websites***.

As indicated by the ***Bloody Good Reading sidebar*** in **Chapter Two**'s ***Expanded Combat Systems*** section, Sgt. Rory Miller has several noteworthy books about real-world violence, fantasy violence, and the differences between the two. *Violence: A Writer's Guide* should be required reading for any author, Storyteller or game designer, while his books *Facing Violence*, *Meditations on Violence*, *Infighting*, and *Scaling Force* all contain lots of material of interest to fans of **Mage**. Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman's book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* features a lot of helpful and thoughtful information on the subject of deadly violence and the human condition; that said, some of his conclusions at the end of the book have been disproven with regards to his rather old-fashioned hand-wringing about video game violence.

For seekers with money to spend and brain cells to engage, Ouroboros Press, in Seattle, WA, has been releasing an impressive collection of authentic grimoires and esoteric treasures – *Zoroaster's Telescope*, *The Triangular Book of St. Germain*, the *DAEMONOLOGIE* of King James, *Magic Circles in the Grimoire Tradition*... these are not by any means cheap books for the casual reader, but for folks interested in classical Western esotericism, they're well worth the price. Check out their website too, referred to below.

Other texts that hold a special place in the heart of **Mage** creators and devotees include: *Behind the Crystal Ball*, by Anthony Aveni; *Illusions*, by Richard Bach; *T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, by Hakim Bey; *Finite and Infinite Games*, by James P. Carse; *The Book of the Law* and *Magick in Theory and Practice*, by Aleister Crowley; *A History of Secret Societies*, by Arkon Daraul; *The Tao of Pooh* and *The Te of Piglet*, by Benjamin Hoff; *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, by James W. Loewen; *Care of the Soul*, *Soul Mates*, and *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, by Thomas Moore; *Technopoly*, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, *Conscientious Objections* and *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, by Neil Postman; *Voltaire's Bastards*, by John Ralston Saul; *The Illustrated World's Religions*, by Huston Smith; *The New Magus*, by Donald Tyson; *Metapatterns*, by Tyler Volk; *A Secret History of Consciousness*, *The Occult*, *Beyond the Occult*, *Poetry and Mysticism*, *The Misfits*, and *Mysteries: An Investigation Into the Occult, the Paranormal, and the Supernatural*, by Colin Wilson; *Reality is What You Can Get Away With*, by Robert Anton Wilson; *The Seat of the Soul* and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, by Gary Zukav; *A People's History of the United States* and *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train*, by Howard Zinn; *The Element Encyclopedias of Secret Societies* (John Michael Greer), *Secret Signs and Symbols* (Adele Nozedar), and *Magical Creatures* and *Witchcraft* (both by Judika Illes); and virtually anything from Disinformation Press, RE/Search, or Megalithica Books.

Fiction

A similar list from fiction authors would take up another chapter besides. Let's just say that a short assembly of writers and books that have impressed and inspired **Mage** authors would include:

Sherman Alexie (*Reservation Blues*, *Blasphemy*, *Indian Killer*, and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*)

Clive Barker (*Imajica*, *The Scarlet Gospels*, *The Hellbound Heart*, *Weaveworld*, *The Great and Secret Show*)

Francesca Lia Block (*The Elementals*, *Rough Magick*, *The Hanged Man*, the *Weetzie Bat* series)

Carlos Castaneda (*The Teachings of Don Juan*, *The Second Ring of Power*)

Aleister Crowley (*Moonchild*, *Diary of a Drug Fiend*)

Umberto Eco (*Foucault's Pendulum*)

Harlan Ellison (*Paingod and Other Delusions*, *Stalking the Nightmare*, *Mefisto in Onyx*)

Minister Faust (*Coyote Kings of the Space-Age Bachelor Pad*, *The Alchemists of Kush*)

Neil Gaiman (*Neverwhere*, *American Gods*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, the *Sandman* and *Death* series)

William Gibson (*Neuromancer*, *Idoru*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*)

Laura Anne Gilman (*Silver on the Road*)

Mira Grant /Seanan McGuire (the *Newsflesh* trilogy, the InCryptid series, and *Every Heart a Doorway*)

Simon Hawke (*The Wizard of 4th Street*)

Alice Hoffman (*Practical Magic*, *Green Angel* and *Green Witch*, *The River King*)

Nalo Hopkinson (*Brown Girl in the Ring*)

Mercedes Lackey (*Burning Water*)

Justine Larbalestier (the *Magic or Madness* trilogy)

Arthur Machen (*The White People*, *The Great God Pan*)

Peter Milligan (*Shade, the Changing Man*)

Alan Moore (*Promethea*, *Swamp Thing*)

Christopher Moore (*Coyote Blue*)

Grant Morrison (*The Invisibles* and *Flex Mentallo, Man of Muscle Mystery*)

Ramez Naam (the *Nexus* trilogy)

Nnedi Okorafor (*Who Fears Death*)

Helen Oyeyemi (*White is for Witching*, *Mr. Fox*)

Christopher Pike (*Sati*)

Arturo Pérez-Reverte (*The Club Dumas*)

Tom Robbins (*Skinny Legs and All*, *Jitterbug Perfume*, *Still Life with Woodpecker*)

Catherynne M. Valente (*Palimpsest*, *Six-Gun Snow White*)

Robert Anton Wilson (the *Illuminatus* trilogy)

Chuck Wendig (*Zeros* and the Miriam Black and Mookie Pearl series)

Dozens, if not hundreds, of names and titles could be added to that list, but that'll do for now.

Websites

Perhaps the greatest shift between the early days of **Mage** and its current incarnation involves the growth of the Internet and its transformation from a playground of privilege to the greatest repository of knowledge in human history. Lots that knowledge is pure garbage, of course, and pretty much everything on a website should be taken with a shaker or two of salt. Still, I'd be lying if I said that I don't spend endless hours on the following websites, gathering information and inspiration for the twenty-first century iteration of **Mage**.

beliefnet.com – despite its frequent descents into pop-culture hackery, Belief.net features plenty of useful and inspiring articles about the ways in which metaphysical topics intersect with the everyday world.

cracked.com – seriously, there's no end to the useful information you can pick up on this so-called "humor" site.

drivethrurpg.com – under most circumstances, I recommend shopping for game books at your local brick-and-mortar shop. If you don't *have* any local brick-and-mortar shops, though, or you can't find what you need at any of them, this website probably has what you're looking for, in a variety of formats.

Facebook.com – yeah, I know, I know. If you want to find communities dedicated to gaming, politics, and arguing about both, though, Facebook offers one-stop shopping for that sort of thing. Plus, there are several groups dedicated to **Mage** and the other World of Darkness lines, White Wolf, Onyx Path Publishing, and tons of related subjects... several of which are frequented by the creators and authors of those publications. Just be nice if and when you visit them. No one wants to hang with a douchebag.

ouroboros-press.bookarts.org – mentioned above, Ouroboros Press features high-end commercial books for the metaphysically inclined.

satyrosphilbrucato.wordpress.com – my personal blog features tons of articles about **Mage**, writing, gaming, music, gender, mysticism, socio-political observations, and other stuff, several of which have been reposted from magazine articles I've published in Realms of Fantasy, newWitch, and other magazines.

snopes.com – when you need to shake that shaker, you can usually find a decent supply of salt right here.

techgnosis.com – Erik Davis' personal website contains dozens of podcasts and articles of interest to **Mage** fans everywhere.

tvtropes.org – "the all-devouring pop-culture wiki" may be the greatest Storyteller aid ever created.

ultraculture.org – as mentioned earlier, this site is kind of cracked.com for occultist culture. More of a love-labor than a commercial enterprise, it's got plenty of stuff to keep you reading.

whatistranshumanism.org – for some answers to this question, go here.

wikipedia.org – don't even pretend you don't check it for information too. Even though that shaker of salt may come in handy here at times, no larger source of information exists in this life.

wildhunt.org – an essential resource for info-age neopagans.

witchesandpagans.com – the Internet extension of BBI Media (one of my longtime friends and publishers) features articles, blogs, events, reviews, and similar goodies for post-modern Pagan types.

witchvox.com – longtime community for web-savvy Pagans, founded by some old friends of mine.

I also personally recommend the following webcomics for fans of **Mage**: *Gunnerkrigg Court*, *Headless Bliss*, *Shortpacked!*, *Wapsi Square*, *The Meek*, and *Sinfest*.

Films

A list of "essential **Mage** movies" would have to include the following films: *Ink*, *The Fountain*, *Rashomon*, *Strange Days*, *Doctor Strange*, *Hero*, *π*, *Inception*, *The Matrix*, *The Crow*, *The Craft*, *The Prestige*, *The Baader-Meinhoff Complex*, *The Man With the Iron Fists*, *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, *Run Lola Run*, *Repo Man*, (the original) *Robocop*, *Ghostbusters* (the original and 2016 reboot versions of the film, plus the cartoon sequel *The Original Ghostbusters*), *V for Vendetta*, *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*, *Dark City*, *The Fifth Estate*, *Frankenstein's Army*, (the original) *Ghost in the Shell*, *Practical Magic*, *Minority Report*, *Donnie Darko*, *The Doors*, *American Beauty*, *Strange Days*, *Minority Report*, *Night Watch*, *Brazil*, *Dead Man*, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Steamboy*, *Cosmopolis*, *Cloud Atlas*, *The Tree of Life*, *The Illusionist*, *The Truman Show*, *The Frame*, *Prospero's Books*, *Spirited Away*, *Liquid Sky*, *Lucy*, *The Machine Girl*, *The Re-Animator*, *Hardware*, *Renegade*, *Scanners*, *Altered States*, *City of Lost Children*, *Gothic*, *Closetland*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *A Dangerous Method*, *Journey to the West*, the *Hunger Games* series and the *Detective D* series, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Legend of Tarzan* (which plays a lot with the differences between perception and reality), Julie Taymor's *The Tempest*, the first two *Terminator* films, the (fairly terrible but very **Sorcerers Crusade**) 2011 version of *The Three Musketeers*, Marvel Entertainment's *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, and *Avengers* series, a few awful yet evocative films (*Constantine*, *Wanted*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Day Watch*, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, and *Tron*), and the documentaries *Rize*, *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Samsara*, *The Corporation*, *What the [Bleep] do We (K)now!?*, and *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*.

Most of these films are not "mage movies"; many of them have no "magic" to speak of. The themes, ideas and images within these films, however, are very true to **Mage**... and the fact that most of them have come out within the last decade or so shows just how much the concepts within **Mage** have become part of popular culture since that game first appeared.

TV Shows

In recent years, TV shows have become considerably better than they once were. And although this author personally believes that TV networks exert a pervasive sick influence upon society at large, there's no doubt that certain shows capture a certain element of **Mage**-ness, or provide an undeniable inspiration upon the line: *Profit*, *Sense8*, *Luke Cage*, *Orphan Black*, *The Prisoner*, *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files*, *Into the Badlands*, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, *Dollhouse*, *Eureka*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Spaced*, *Game of Thrones*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Veronica Mars*, *Lost*, *Deadwood*, *Torchwood*, *Carnivale*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *The Deadliest Warrior*, *Charmed* (which I don't particularly like, but it's kinda **Mage**-y), *Dark Angel* (ditto that sentiment), *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Xena*, *Angel* and *Buffy* of course, the 1990s *La Femme Nikita*, and perhaps my favorite TV show ever... the late, lamented *Firefly*. (Damn you, Fox – damn you forever!)

Music

Music – both as an element of my personal writing soundtrack, and as a subcultural touchstone for White Wolf itself – has played a significant role in **Mage**'s creative development. The dozens, if not hundreds, of musical artists who inspired the classic **Mage** era can be found throughout the sourcebooks of that time. In the twenty-first century, the Goth-industrial thunder of '90s Wolfdom has been superseded (though not entirely replaced) by worldbeat fusions and the synergized forms of new-millennium fringe music, plus the occasional mainstream artist. Even so, I revisited my old CD collection to supplement the prodigious array of MP3s that constitute my current jukebox playlist. I've name-checked a few heavy-rotation favorites below, and urge y'all to check out the artists mentioned on the ***Music for Mages*** **sidebar (Mage 20, p. 348)**, too.

Oh, and speaking of playlists, you can also find – as of this writing, anyway – a selection of **Mage 20** video playlists on YouTube. Enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBuz8zT9YeQ8GOm8C1byIew/playlists

Old Favorites That Found Their Way into Mage 20

Rush, Dead Can Dance, Kate Bush, Black Sabbath, Killing Joke, Concrete Blonde, Faith and the Muse, the Sisters of Mercy, Loreena McKennitt, Die Form, Patti Smith, Oingo Boingo, Delerium, the Changelings, Trio Nocturna, the Doors, Tool, King Crimson, Diamanda Galas, Rollins Band, Sri Lanka, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, and of course that fucking *Crow* soundtrack, which wound up back in my CD player for the first time in ages... again, and again, and again...

Heavy-Rotation M20 Artists

Killing Joke – O gods, *AllTheKillingJoke!* Seriously, they even made it into **Mage 20**'s artwork (see **p. 157**), that's how much I listened to this goddamned band while working on **M20**. No other musical artist influenced **Mage 20** as much as KJ did.

S.J. Tucker – if you don't know her music, you should. (See **Mage 20, pp. 55 and 668.**)

Miyavi – a shape-shifting master of postmodern musicality.

Florence + the Machine – a real-life Ecstasy Cultist.

Lady Gaga – ditto that too... and yes, I'm serious.

Alio Die – by far my favorite ambient-music artist, Stefano Musso manages to evoke organic spiritual states through synthesized electronic sounds.

Moby – manages the same trick, but typically by mixing organic instruments and blues vocals in with electronic beats.

Miles Davis – because few things say "Expand your sense of reality" like listening to *Bitches Brew REALLY FUCKING LOUD*.

Kan'Nal – although their studio releases come nowhere near the excitement of this band in concert (the live tracks on *Dreamwalker*, though, come about as close as anyone's gonna get), this real-life band of shamans brought ecstatic thunder in ways that I have rarely experienced with any other band. Thus, they ruled **Mage**-writing days like whoa.

Master Musicians of Bukkake – a band named in silly parody of the classic Sufi group Master Musicians of Joujouka has no right sounding this cool... but it sounds cool anyway.

My **Mage 20** listening habits also include...

Two Steps From Hell, Gothic Storm, Epic Score, the Immediate /Immediate Music, Globus, and tons of the other artists currently referred to as *epic music*. Seriously, put that phrase into YouTube, and then get ready to *swordfight pirate Viking dinosaurs – in SPAAAAAYCE!*

Blood Ceremony, Electric Wizard, Samsara Blues Experiment, Jess and the Ancient Ones, Ruby the Hatchet, Purson, Om, Monk, Earth, the Devil's Blood, the Sword, and other Sabbath-inspired artists in the genre called *stoner metal* or *mystic rock*.

Soriah, Vas, Azam Ali, Lisa Gerrard, Irfan, Rajna, Arcana, Shiva in Exile... there's a whole subgenre of this sort of thing which emerged in the wake of Dead Can Dance, and I find it to be excellent mystic writing music.

Infected Mushroom, Hilight Tribe, Cosmosis, Hallucinogen, Shpongle, 1200 Micrograms, E-Mantra, Entheogenic, and other "trippy rave shit" found its way onto my **Mage 20** playlist on a fairly regular basis.

Endura, Lustmord, Atrium Carcerai, Archon Satani, Desiderii Marginis, Caul, Raison D'être, Profane Grace, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, and other *dark atmosphere / black ambient* artists tended to inspire the more sinister passages, most especially the material about Nephandi and the gloomy overview in **Mage 20**, **Chapter Three**.

I also listened to a lot of classic blues, R&B, funk, and soul music while writing **Mage 20**. My *Classic Soul* playlist runs almost 30 hours long, and features a ton of '60s-'70s Motown and Stax singles, as well as album tracks from Funkadelic, Marvin Gaye, Sade, Seal, India.Arie, Luther Vandross, Isaac Hayes, and plenty more. Y'all might not think immediately of soul music when you think of **Mage**, but I grew up on that stuff, and so that's part of **Mage**'s DNA from the very beginning of its run.

Obviously, these influences are merely suggestions. If you're looking for material for your **Mage** chronicle, however, then the films, books, websites, TV shows, and musical artists listed above offer you a good place to start.

Have fun, keep dreaming, and remember to keep the magick going when you leave the gaming table and go back out into your world.

Every act of creation, by its mere existence, denies the world of master and slave.

- Albert Camus, The Rebel



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