

GUARDIANS OF THE VEIL™

MAGE
THE AWAKENING™

the world of
darkness

The Final Temptation of the Saint of Shippenn Street

If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill the Buddha... the sacred teachings are only lists of ghosts, sheets of paper fit for wiping the pus from your boils.

— Linji Yixuan

EVIDENCE FILE: Case # 7345.34

EXHIBIT D: At-length freeform statement by JB induced by hypnotic recall on 10-27-XX. Present during recording: JB (subject), KG, PN, GRS (MD).

TRANSCRIPT BEGINS:

“Are you here for the miracle also?”

His accent suggests a Middle Eastern origin, consistent with his skin tone, his hair color, his facial features and the Arabic writing just visible on a piece of folded notepaper jutting from his shirt pocket. He’s dressed in a denim shirt and paint-stained work pants; the calluses and scars on his fingers betray that he works with his hands.

“Miracle?” I ask. We’re in the back room on the third floor of a fourth-rate bookstore on Shippenn Street. The kind that manages to survive the encroachment of megalithic chain booksellers by sheer inertia: the building’s paid off, taxes are low here and it’s close enough to the university to attract academic types interested in exploring a seedy neighborhood. The rooms all smell vaguely of mold and wood, and beneath the cheap carpeting, the floorboards creak like the deck of a ship whenever someone walks from one cramped room to the next. For the past 20 minutes, I’ve been sitting in a ratty old armchair, pretending to sort through the pile of dog-eared paperbacks on the table next to me, while the only other person in the room paced nervously from one shelf to the next. Now he’s talking to me, apparently unable to keep silent any longer.

“Miracle?” I repeat. “What do you mean?”

The man steps closer to my chair. “They say,” he tells me, in a low voice, “that miracles happen in this room. If —” He glances around nervously. “If one is here at the right moment.”

“Really. This doesn’t seem like a miraculous kind of place.” It’s a dark and rainy Saturday, late in the afternoon. This little room is lined with bookshelves, of course. There’s a single large window, made of

stained glass that’s so dirty it might as well be brick. The yellow lightbulb overhead gives off feeble light, and occasionally sputters and flickers like a candle flame. “What kind of miracles?”

He opens his mouth to answer, then backs away as an overdressed, elderly couple wanders into the room. I take note of the worn spots and loose stitches on their clothes, the scuffs and scratches on their shoes. The oldsters have fallen on hard times, but are trying to keep their dignity. They walk slowly, shuffling really, leaning on each other as they peer at the bookshelves. I wonder how they managed to carry themselves up the two flights of stairs. Perhaps they’ve also come hoping for a miracle, for stronger limbs, a cure for arthritis or a financial windfall. But I don’t think so. They seem intent on the books, on each other. They don’t show any signs of nervousness or impatience. Unlike my new friend, who walks behind my chair, and as he passes by, whispers, “Big ones.”

Some minutes pass. I stand and stretch. The old couple has left the room; now a few college kids are poking at a shelf of ragged hardcovers. A girl with a nose ring, a tall guy wearing eyeliner and rouge.

“My name is Michael,” the man with the accent tells me, offering his hand to shake.

"Jack," I answer. The college kids are engrossed in their own loud conversation, seemingly oblivious to us. "Pleased to meet you." His shake is firm and honest, perhaps too much so. The perfect disguise is never exactly perfect.

I'm thinking about the question Michael asked me. Am I here for a miracle? The answer should be an easy one. But it's not. I feel that I've come here for an important reason, and that it does have something to do with miracles. Yet I can't be certain. I rummage through my thoughts the way you fumble through that one drawer in the kitchen that's full of a bit of everything: scotch tape, thumbtacks, matches, string – but I can't grab hold of what I'm looking for. I not only can't recall why I've come here, I'm not certain why I don't walk away right now.

I'm looking at the students. I don't see anything unusual about them. I don't know what that means, though, not really. It's not just their physical appearance I'm evaluating, their clothes or their gestures. Somehow I think I could see their true natures if I wanted to. I look at Michael. He seems normal. There's some inner light, some hidden nature I should be seeing – if I could just remember what it is. How to look for it. I don't let my confusion show on my face. You can't be too careful. You can't be too subtle. Especially regarding miracles.

We smile politely at each other for an awkward moment. Then I say, "Were you serious about the miracles, Michael?"

His eyes narrow. "I should maybe not be talking about it," he answers. "But . . . for me, not talking is a hard thing when I am nervous. You see . . . " The floors creak as the kids walk out, and he relaxes a bit. "There is a saint, Jack. One who appears in this very room to work miracles." He sees the puzzled look on my face and adds, "I know this to be true."

I'm nodding. "Go on."

"There was a man, a plumber. His eyes were very bad. Cataract. He walked with a guide dog. One day, he comes here. The next morning, his eyes are perfect 20-20. Another time, a professor from the college. Lost his job, soon to be evicted from his house. He comes home from this place, he digs up a certain spot in his lawn and there he finds this old box of rare coins, worth . . . " Michael waves his hands, "I don't know how much."

"Well – " I start to say.

"Wait." He cuts me off. "And again. The third miracle. A secretary, very bad hooked on drugs. She came here, by the time she got home, her cravings for drugs were gone and her body healed. And also, but two weeks ago: one of the sisters, a nun I mean. She has breast cancer. But after this – " he gestures around the room, "the cancer . . . gone."

Michael is silent now. I see the conviction in his eyes. He's daring me to talk him out of his belief. I decide not to try. These tales should be making me skeptical. That's the kind of person I am. But instead I'm grappling with a sense of familiarity. I've heard the stories he's just told, heard them before, more than once. The details are familiar. I'm not sure why.

"There is more, friend," he says to me. "In each case, the people – the plumber and the others – they say they saw the saint in this room. They say they saw a tall man – well, some say woman – with long, brown hair and eyes like fire. A tranquil face, a glow about his head. The saint's light filled the room, and he touched their forehead. He smiled and granted them their wishes." Michael is practically glowing himself, now,

almost rapturous as he imagines the scene. "They are filled with happiness, they go home as if sleepwalking and, when the trance is broken, their deepest dream has come true."

"Their deepest dream," I say, giving my voice enough of a sharp edge to break his reverie.

"Well, yes." He glances at his wristwatch. "Why do you sound so angry, friend? Wouldn't you want such a miracle?"

I would. But I wouldn't. The holes in my memory are disorienting. But if there's one thing I'm sure of, it's that miracles don't mix very well with the real world. A saint as Michael describes . . . it might be better to murder him than to accept his gift.

I don't know why I think that.

More time passes. Michael paces, checking his watch once per minute. I flip through a trashy paperback, a thriller with a lurid cover: the corpse of a beautiful woman lying in a pool of blood. I stare at the artwork, the vulgar smear of blood — real blood's not so bright, so vivid. In my memory, I see myself crouched in an alley. It's night. I'm in some other city, years ago, and it's very hot, at least 90, even at one in the morning. I'm working homicide — that's the phrase that clicks into my head, working homicide. I'm crouched in an alley where two

drug dealers and their crews had gone at it with guns, knives, baseball bats. I see the half-dozen corpses, the blood, various chunks of flesh, strewn across an alley like they'd fallen from a plane. I know that ordinarily I'd be feeling some satisfaction — a handful of social parasites have wiped each other out, and managed to do it without catching some unlucky bag lady in the crossfire.

But that night — maybe I was tired, maybe I was strung out on caffeine and nicotine. That night, I stared at the crime scene and just wondered at the meaning of it all. What was the point of people killing each other over who gets to peddle poison on which street corner? What was the point of cleaning up one slaughter when the next one was already happening somewhere? Ordinarily, I wasn't the kind of guy to ask these kinds of questions. But that night, that alley, I had to know. I needed to know. I traced the scene with my eyes, moving from body to body, connecting pools of blood with invisible lines, thinking somehow there was a pattern to be read, meaning to be found. That the curl of a broken limb or the splatter of brain on brick were letters in some hidden alphabet, fragments of words that could explain everything.

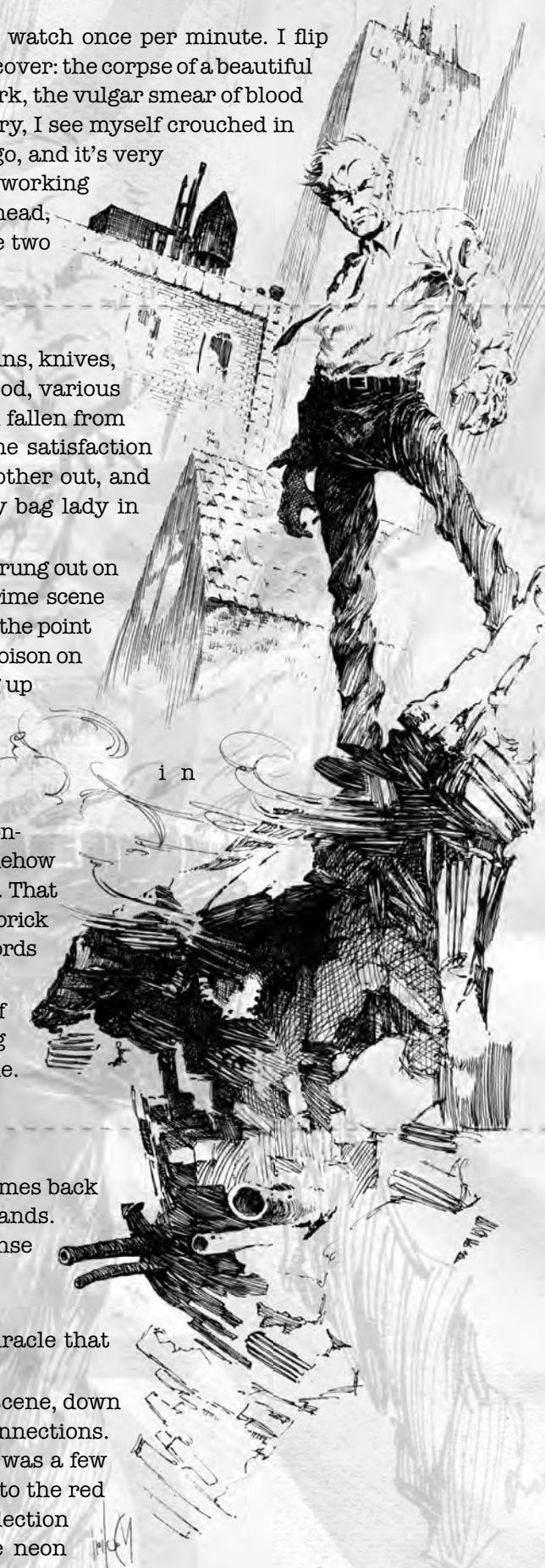
At some point, I walked away. I remember one of the uniformed officers asking me if I needed anything else. I waved him off. Kathy had already gone home.

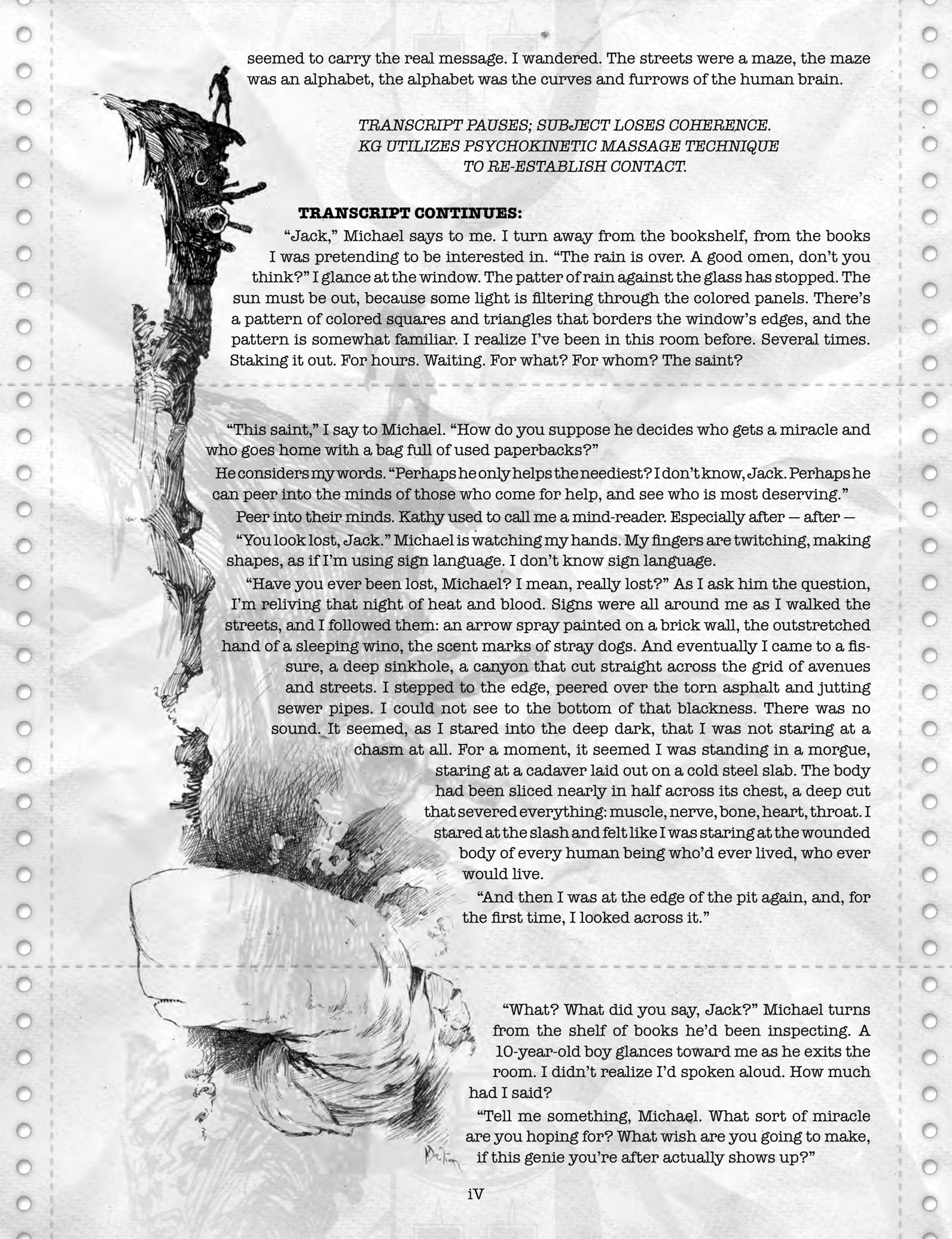
Kathy — poor Kathy. She was my partner. That comes back to me as I turn the trashy paperback over in my hands. She was a square-jawed single mother with an intense stare and a built-in bullshit detector.

Something bad happened to Kathy.

Is that why I'm in this bookstore? To find a miracle that will save her?

I remember that I walked away from the crime scene, down the street, past my car. I kept walking. Patterns, connections. They seemed all around me. The red of the blood was a few shades darker than the red of a stop sign, cousin to the red of a stoplight. I passed a neon sign, stared at its reflection in a storefront window. The spaces between the neon





seemed to carry the real message. I wandered. The streets were a maze, the maze was an alphabet, the alphabet was the curves and furrows of the human brain.

*TRANSCRIPT PAUSES; SUBJECT LOSES COHERENCE.
KG UTILIZES PSYCHOKINETIC MASSAGE TECHNIQUE
TO RE-ESTABLISH CONTACT.*

TRANSCRIPT CONTINUES:

"Jack," Michael says to me. I turn away from the bookshelf, from the books I was pretending to be interested in. "The rain is over. A good omen, don't you think?" I glance at the window. The patter of rain against the glass has stopped. The sun must be out, because some light is filtering through the colored panels. There's a pattern of colored squares and triangles that borders the window's edges, and the pattern is somewhat familiar. I realize I've been in this room before. Several times. Staking it out. For hours. Waiting. For what? For whom? The saint?

"This saint," I say to Michael. "How do you suppose he decides who gets a miracle and who goes home with a bag full of used paperbacks?"

He considers my words. "Perhaps he only helps the neediest? I don't know, Jack. Perhaps he can peer into the minds of those who come for help, and see who is most deserving."

Peer into their minds. Kathy used to call me a mind-reader. Especially after — after —

"You look lost, Jack." Michael is watching my hands. My fingers are twitching, making shapes, as if I'm using sign language. I don't know sign language.

"Have you ever been lost, Michael? I mean, really lost?" As I ask him the question, I'm reliving that night of heat and blood. Signs were all around me as I walked the streets, and I followed them: an arrow spray painted on a brick wall, the outstretched hand of a sleeping wino, the scent marks of stray dogs. And eventually I came to a fissure, a deep sinkhole, a canyon that cut straight across the grid of avenues and streets. I stepped to the edge, peered over the torn asphalt and jutting sewer pipes. I could not see to the bottom of that blackness. There was no sound. It seemed, as I stared into the deep dark, that I was not staring at a chasm at all. For a moment, it seemed I was standing in a morgue, staring at a cadaver laid out on a cold steel slab. The body had been sliced nearly in half across its chest, a deep cut that severed everything: muscle, nerve, bone, heart, throat. I stared at the slash and felt like I was staring at the wounded body of every human being who'd ever lived, who ever would live.

"And then I was at the edge of the pit again, and, for the first time, I looked across it."

"What? What did you say, Jack?" Michael turns from the shelf of books he'd been inspecting. A 10-year-old boy glances toward me as he exits the room. I didn't realize I'd spoken aloud. How much had I said?

"Tell me something, Michael. What sort of miracle are you hoping for? What wish are you going to make, if this genie you're after actually shows up?"

He smiles, like a child who knows Christmas is coming. "Oh, I shouldn't tell, should I? If you share your wish, it doesn't come through, isn't that how it goes?"

I don't know how it goes. I'm not certain I know anything. I turn from Michael and stare at the window. With some light from the setting sun, more of the pattern is becoming apparent. The mosaic of glass, the way the little bits of color fit into each other — they remind me of the city I saw across the chasm. The city was like a chaotic abstraction of the real thing. A mishmash of urban shapes and angles. Industrial nightmare, Blake's dark satanic mills. But that night I could see, on the dim and jagged horizon, a pinpoint of steady light. A spot of white brightness atop some spire or skyscraper. Though it was far, though it was small, it seemed as if I could feel its radiance on my face, as a shower of icy, invigorating particles. Cold water waking me from a

deep sleep. I wanted, in that moment, nothing more than to move closer to that light, to reach it, to immerse myself in it, whatever the cost. But to do so, I'd have to cross the bottomless pit at my feet.

Time seemed to pass very slowly there. I stared down into that darkness, and my vision seemed to telescope, as if I could see miles downward. I saw huge shapes — like whales crossed with subway trains. They glided on metal bat-wings, and I could see through glass windows set into their bodies. The arms of a thousand tiny people stretched from between the monsters' ribs, and they seemed to be waving to me, beckoning me to join them. I saw some of their faces. They smiled like blissed-out idiots.

I tore my attention from the darkness and stared up, and across, to the white light on the tower. It's too far away, I thought to myself. And then there was a second voice in my head, like but unlike my own. There is no distance, it said. There is only Here. I tried to make the tower closer to me, the way the chasm-monsters had been magnified just moments, hours before. I imagined the point of light as an unblinking eye, and myself being magnified in its vision.

And I jumped.

I was arcing through space — but there is no space, I told myself. Jumping is the same as stepping. Stepping is the same as standing still.

And then I was across.

"And what happened then?" Michael's voice is in my head. His voice shouldn't be there. I know ways to push it out. But they're not working. So I burrow further into my memory, hoping he can't follow.

I walked through a twisted cityscape, a maze of stitched-together concrete slabs, chain-link fences, taxi-cab doors and sewer grates. I saw machines that oozed blood and cried like babies, walls made of flesh and animals embedded within brick and metal. I climbed a bone fence that sliced my hands open like gutted fish. I waded through a mirror of liquid glass and seared my lungs on its vapors. Things came out of the crevices in the nightmare landscape, and they called me by name. More than once, I stopped walking, threw myself to the ground and wept.

But each time I felt lost, I looked up, and I saw the tower with its steady pinprick of light. Each time it was a little closer.

There came a moment when the light from the tower was directly overhead, impossibly high. And before me stood a tired old precinct house, an abandoned station like the ones that dotted my real-world city. The precinct house was dignified and stately, despite its boarded-up windows and faded brickwork. I walked up the steps; the lettering over the door was in a language I couldn't read, but somehow I knew it meant "Here We Make Law from Lawlessness" or maybe "Here We Make Order from Chaos." I entered the building; no doors hung in the doorway.

Inside, the building seemed to be an empty shell. There was only one vast chamber, and, in the center, a spiral staircase that led upwards into shadows. By the time I thought to look down, I'd already climbed the equivalent of several stories. Soon I could tell that the walls of the building were growing closer to the staircase, as if the building was tapered inward like an inverted cone. After several more turns of the stairs, I saw that the walls were set with bars, lined with prison cells. And the prisoners were calling to me.

I kept climbing. I saw lovers I'd betrayed, innocents I'd helped to frame, crime victims I'd shortchanged, loved ones I'd abandoned. Each of them pushed his hands, her face through the bars, mouthing one word, "Why?" It became harder to keep walking. My legs were like lead. The walls were so close now that the prisoners could reach out and brush my face, my legs with their fingertips. "Why?" each of them called, again and again. I had to stop. I knelt on the cold metal steps, gripping the railing. "Why?" the voices called, louder and louder, until the force of their shouts threatened to push me off the stairs. "Why, why, why why . . ." It was a chant that was shaking the staircase like a tree in a hurricane. I wrapped my arms around the railing, certain I'd be thrown off and dropped into the chasm I'd crossed so long ago.

"Why?" I sobbed. "Why? Why?" My voice fell into patter with theirs. "Why?" I was screaming now, screaming until my throat ran with blood. "WHY!"

The stairway was no longer rocking. The voices had grown silent. I heard only the echoes of my own, pained cry. I stood, my legs shaking. I turned slowly, regarding the prisoners in their cages, around me, below me. And I realized they were not whom they seemed to be. They were wearing carefully crafted masks to make them look like people from my past. And as I realized this, the prisoners slipped the masks from their faces, and revealed that each of them was me.

The roof of the building was smooth and featureless, like blue glass. I walked to the edge without fear. Far below, I could see the crooked paths and angled trenches of the maze I'd navigated. Its byways were not random, I knew now, though I also knew I wasn't ready to decipher the formula they spelled out. I walked the periphery of the rooftop, scanning the horizon as I did. I saw the black gash of the chasm. And I saw other places. My vision jumped vast distances as I looked. A forest-jungle thick with steaming life. A somber valley of shadows and bone. A borderless plain of shifting, flickering energy. A seductive country of restful glades and mysterious foxfire.

Finally, I was ready. I turned to face the center of the rooftop. A battered, old desk stood there, tall as a lectern, the kind I'd seen in dozens of courthouses and precincts. No duty officer sat in the empty chair behind it. I approached the desk. I opened the duty log that rested on its surface — a leather-bound book as thick as three King James bibles. The pages rustled like dry leaves as I rifled them; I saw names written in hundreds of alphabets, in thousands of hands. Finally, I reached the end of the roster, found the blank space there. I took up the pen that had been sitting unnoticed next to the book, and I wrote my name in a single fluid motion.

Then I looked up.

The light, the great sphere of white-white light, had been hidden from me as I'd walked the rooftop, but now the light filled my vision. The light seemed to grow until I could see nothing but an infinite sea of whiteness. Not whiteness, though, but an all-color of which white is a dim reflection. And I was falling into the whiteness, upwards, downwards. It pulled me in. And somewhere, deep in the center of the white, there was a presence. A being. One who'd been waiting there for me, for others like me, calling us to come and claim the light that was our birthright. I couldn't see his face, her face, but I seemed to make out a pair of hands gesturing toward me, making a greeting. WELCOME, the presence seemed to say. AND FAREWELL.

I only had time to mouth "THANK YOU" — "to barely begin to express what I felt — before I realized I was standing on the dirty, bird-shit-crusted roof of the old courthouse at 56th and Grand, the one that had been condemned seven years ago and was now a haven for rats, pigeons and drug dealers. I had to close my eyes and turn away; I was staring right at the rising sun.

"Jack," Michael says to me. I turn away from the window. He isn't in my head anymore, I tell myself. Probably he never was. Probably. "Have you ever imagined what it would be like to work miracles?"

"I — "

"I'm not kidding, Jack." Down the hall, someone's laughing. A book falls to the floor. "What would it be like to grant people's wishes?" Michael continues. "What would happen to someone whose deepest wish came true?"

"I don't suppose I — " His words are sarcastic. They sound like an accusation.

"What would happen to the person granting the wish?" Michael is staring at my hands, which are twitching again. "You know what I'm talking about, don't you, Jack?"

I sense a certainty in him. It's a confidence I felt in the days after my experience beyond the chasm, when I was heady with my power. I felt I'd been given the gifts needed to bring justice and order to a sick and wounded world. I learned I could see into people's minds without effort — their thoughts were just outside of my reach, but I could tell who was hiding guilt, who was telling lies, who was planning betrayal. With a twitch of my mind, I could get a witness or perpetrator to tell me anything. I could pick up a cigarette at a crime scene, or a bullet, and trace its connection back to its owner by pure intuition.

My partner. Kathy Green. Poor, doomed Kathy. She knew something had changed in me. But she'd

learned, as cops do, not to ask questions until you're ready for the answers. So she kept silent as I used my new talents to nail perp after perp. She let me send her home early so she could spend time with her kids and I could follow my strange new instincts. I stopped smoking, drinking. I worked cases like I was Sherlock Holmes crossed with Stephen Hawking.

Until the West End Massacre.

Kathy and I would not normally have been put on the case. But I put the idea into the captain's head, and so it was. The killer had broken into the home of a middle-class family on the west side of town. He'd butch-ered the mother and her two kids, then waited for the father to come home, and killed him as well. The killer had done his work with a large knife, and left blood and body parts everywhere. Nothing was stolen, there were no suspects and the whole town was in a panic. By the time we got to the crime scene, it had mostly been cleaned up. But there were plenty of traces still visible to my eyes.

The trouble was, those traces didn't lead anywhere. They turned back on themselves, like an escaped convict who crosses his own trail to throw off the bloodhounds. What's worse, the whole scene was flooded with some kind of weird energy, a smoky miasma I'd never seen before. These two things should have made me cautious, but, of course, they didn't. Instead, I became obsessed with the case. I partitioned off part of my mind so it could work the case nonstop. I returned to the house again and again. I pushed my way into the minds of the neighbors, the paper boy, the mailman. Kathy was on the verge of reporting me to Internal Affairs and requesting a transfer.

Then, early one morning, I had a breakthrough. It was a button and a single thread that I found not in the house, but in the gutter down the street. The button was vibrating with bloodlust and violence. Whatever had been hiding the killer's trail didn't extend to this bit of detritus. I should have waited until Kathy got off shift, but I was overconfident. I let the button lead us to its owner. We took a circuitous drive through the city, then found ourselves at a decrepit motel just outside of town. I homed in on Room 27, upper level. I sensed Kathy's nervousness, knew she wanted to call for backup.

Motel doors make a satisfying sound when you kick them in. I'd been expecting the room to be dark and

shadowy, but it was bright, with sunlight streaming in and reflecting off mirrors that had been hung on all the walls. I could see our guy standing in one corner of the room, arms folded, smiling. I had an intuition that he'd been waiting for us. I raised my gun and the improbable happened — my fingers turned to rubber and the weapon slipped from my hands. I heard it hit the ground with a muffled thud. I didn't care. I rushed the guy, and at the same time did something I'd never done before: I gathered up the anger, the disgust, the thirst for justice I was feeling, and I hurled it at his mind like a storm of nails.

I felt the edges of his thoughts at the same time that I saw him pull a short-handled knife from under his shirt. I felt my mental assault ripping into his consciousness. I felt his panic, and then I felt him pushing back. Incredibly, he was targeting my mind with his, reflecting some of my attack against me. I reached for his throat, he jabbed at me with the knife. Our minds became entangled, ripping at each other like frenzied sharks. I twisted space around me so the knife would miss my skin; the knife seemed to bend of its own volition to undo the effects of my will. And then everything went crazy.

It was like a hurricane of thoughts. I collapsed to the floor; I saw the killer's body jerk back against a wall. He was clutching his head, screaming. I had glimpses into his mind: he'd been raised out west, on

a cattle ranch. He hated children. His name was Malcolm Yee, though that wasn't his real name. He was leaving footprints on my brain. And then I couldn't think anymore. Pain flashed up and down my spine like lightning. The room seemed to be closing in on me. I watched him stagger away, out the door. He tumbled off the balcony, and I heard his neck snap, as if he'd landed inside my ears. I vomited. I lay there, twitching, until reality reasserted itself. And then I saw Kathy, lying sprawled between the room's two beds, her eyes rolled so far back in her head that I could only see the whites.

I spent the next six months wandering the streets as a vagrant, until this guy named Pan Nemo found me and set me straight on a few things. By the time I was in my right mind again, Kathy had endured treatment with increasingly potent antipsychotic drugs, electroshock treatments and intense behavior modification therapy. But her psychosis only grew worse. I had her transferred to a private hospital where she could be comfortable. On her good days, she forgives me for what I did to her.



TRANSCRIPT PAUSES.

SUBJECT BECOMES EMOTIONAL. KG REQUESTS 10 MINUTES ALONE WITH SUBJECT.
GRS CONCURS. SESSION RESUMES, SUBJECT REGAINS COMPOSURE.

TRANSCRIPT CONTINUES:

Now Michael is sitting calmly in the chair while I pace nervously from one side of the room to the other. I wonder about him. It occurs to me that for all his talk, he's told me very little about himself. And I know that sometimes the best place to hide something is in plain sight.

Someone else has walked into the room. A woman. She's fair, dressed in slacks, a pastel blouse, a sweater. She's holding an infant in her arms. She glances around the room, not making eye contact with either of us. She stands near a corner and whispers to the baby. The child is not right, I can see that. His cheeks are too puffy. He wheezes as he breathes. His lips have a blue cast to them. And I know exactly what miracle his mother hopes to receive.

"Maybe she's the one," Michael is whispering. "Maybe she's the one who deserves a miracle."

It would be easy — somehow, I'm certain it would be easy to lay hands on the child and put right what's wrong.

"Tell me," Michael is whispering. He's come up behind me as I stare at the woman. "Tell me magic should be kept to the magicians. Tell me miracles should be hidden behind a veil of secrecy." He licks his lips. "You don't believe that. Not really. Admit it." He's standing so close now. "Admit why you've come here."

The woman kisses her child on the forehead. And what Michael's saying is resonating with my own thoughts. It's me, I'm thinking, it's me who's the miracle worker. The saint. It makes so much sense. How else do I know so much about the other miracles? Why else would I be hanging around this place? I could look like a saint if I wanted to. The long hair, the beatific glow. I could look like anything. It would be easy. If I could remember how. It must be why I'm here. It must be.

But why is Michael here? To watch me? To stop me?

I raise my hands.

What's happening?

The room is changing. The floor tilting. Something's happening. I see Michael walk past the stained glass window, and it seems to flicker as he passes. He walks toward the woman and the infant. She looks at him, and her face lights up, her smile is luminous. "Oh," she says. "You're real. It's true. It's true."

"Yes it is," Michael tells her. It's the same Michael, but I know she's seeing something different. I can tell by the way her eyes are glazed over, by the way she takes a hesitant step toward him. "Tell me," Michael says to her, with no accent now. "What is it you desire?"

She lifts her son towards him. I feel a little sick. Like that time in the motel, when I found Kathy curled up on the floor ...

"Stop it." When I place a hand on Michael's shoulder, he's actually startled. He'd forgotten about me completely. "Stop what you're doing."

He turns sideways to glare at me. "Don't interfere in what you don't understand," he tells me.

"I'm here to stop you," I say. "And that's what I'm going to do."

"You're going to stop me?" He throws his head back, laughs. "You? Don't be an idiot. I can look into your head like it's a fishbowl. I can see your thoughts swimming around and know what you're going to do before you do it."

"Get out!" I bark over his shoulder to the woman. "Get out! What you're looking for isn't here. Go away and don't come back!"

The woman's expression shifts from eagerness to confusion to shock. Michael steps in front of her. "What do you think you're going to accomplish here?"

"The plumber," I say. "When he could see the squalor, the ugliness he'd been living in all those years, he took his own life. The professor — he tried to bribe his way back into academia. Ruined his reputation forever." Michael blinks at me, his eyes narrowed in anger. "The secretary was arrested," I say, "for selling those drugs she didn't need any more. And the nun, she left the church. She couldn't reconcile her cure with the deaths of so many others whom she felt were worthier." I lean in toward him. "Your magic resonates with the bitter self-knowledge of Pandemonium," I say. "You make dreams come true, but the dreamers aren't prepared for what that does to them." I pause, then add, "And I think you like that."

Michael holds his hands in front of me, palms up. It's a threatening gesture that looks like a peaceful one. "You work for the Dragon's Eye, is that it? Some kind of acolyte. It doesn't matter. You were interesting for a while, but you don't frighten me. I've seen inside your head, and there's no power there. You're less than nothing." The air around me seems to be getting thick. It's pressing against me, slowly getting tighter. Space itself is getting tighter. I should have some defense against this. Why isn't it working? Why . . .

Michael's eyes roll back in his head, and when he collapses, I see the woman catch him. Her child is gone. Her clothes are the same, but her face has changed.

She's Kathy.

"You did good, Jack," she tells me. "Real good."

"I think I'd like to go home now," I answer. I hope she knows the way. No, I'm sure she does.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS

Closing notes: Case # 7345.34 "Shippen Street Saint"

Using Jack B___ was the best way, the only way to draw out the Shippen Street Saint (a.k.a. the 50th Street Healer, the Spirit of Greenmont Park, the Subway Jesus — see the rest of the case file to get an idea of how long we've been after this one). The Saint was very skilled and very cautious; I personally got close to him on two previous occasions, only to have him sniff me out despite the extraordinary precautions I took. I knew Jack would only read as completely normal to the Saint's perceptions, but that Jack's delusions would arouse his curiosity. As I hoped, the Saint was distracted enough for me to observe from a distance, suss out his defenses and come in under his radar. The so-called Saint is currently undergoing psychic autopsy; with him no longer at large, a standard misinformation campaign [see Case File Addendum 3: Clean-Up] will quickly degrade the various rumors and urban legends that were triggered by his activities.

If the closure of this long-standing and difficult case has earned me any favors, I request continued forbearance on the matter of Jack's status. I'm aware that there are some among the order who have called for his termination. It's true that because of the Paradox I foolishly triggered soon after I found my Path, Jack possesses an array of memories of my Awakening and the time after. He believes them to be his own, with his role and mine reversed. I acknowledge that technically this could be considered a threat to the Veil. But the truth is, the burden of those recollections, and the damage done to his mind when they were imposed upon him, has rendered him unable to function in normal society. Were he to try and disseminate what he thinks he knows, his mental state would make it unlikely that he'd be considered anything but delusional.

I've returned Jack to the private facility where his damaged psyche can be soothed and, perhaps some day, healed. This is not the first time Jack has been useful to me in advancing the cause of the order. I

maintain that he's valuable not in spite of his injuries, but because of them. He remains a keen observer and an excellent detective, and the combination of knowledge and ignorance he carries often leads him to startling insights. Of course, I plead his case because of the history we shared when I was Kathy Green, and out of a sense of personal responsibility. But more than that, I consider his existence a valuable window into what can happen when the Veil is not upheld. The Shippen Street Saint used his power on unwitting Sleepers to bolster his self-image as a wonder worker and granter of wishes — heedless of the consequences. When I look at Jack, I'm reminded that I, that all of us, are just one overconfident moment away from turning wishes into nightmares.

— Kione Gray

GUARDIANS OF THE VEIL



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GUARDIANS OF THE VEILTM

Table of Contents

<i>The Final Temptation of the Saint of Shippen Street</i>	1
Introduction	14
<i>Chapter One: From the Reign of Atlantis</i>	18
<i>Chapter Two: Masque and Veil</i>	38
<i>Chapter Three: Of Secrets and Spies</i>	82
<i>Chapter Four: Factions and Legacies</i>	130
<i>Chapter Five: Magic</i>	166
<i>Appendix: Allies and Antagonists</i>	211

INTRODUCTION

It is much more secure to be feared than to be loved.
— Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

When a mage has walked his Path for the first time and engraved his name in one of the Supernal Realms, he is confronted with a reality far different from the one he just left behind. A reality in which, for the first time since his childhood, magic is true and the world can be changed with a whim and a will. Fantastic new sensations hover just beyond the edge of his senses, waiting for him to let them in. Every fresh-faced mage wonders what to do with such power, and many wish for guidance in their new life. Guidance comes quickly.

The magical orders are no longer as comfortable with one another as idealists think they were on the island of Atlantis, and some orders are like callow youths beside the venerable age of others. The competition for new Awakened recruits is fierce, if subtle. Were a new mage to somehow Awaken with an innate knowledge of the frenzy to come, he could play the five orders against each other as a desirable young athlete does colleges, drawing out the offers of mentorship and duties that most appeal to him. Instead, the mage usually finds himself choosing between the idealized, biased descriptions of the orders given him by their representatives, driven to a decision by teasing offers of knowledge and the unsubtle hints that an offer is soon to be rescinded. Sometimes, if the order's representative decides the candidate is of the right sort, he is never allowed to know there is a choice.

The propaganda delivered to a potential recruit differs from order to order, and even from mage to mage. Some representatives toe the party line, giving the official mission statement and avoiding any extraneous description. Others try to describe what their orders mean to them personally or, more ambitiously, try to describe their orders in the light most attractive to the new mage.

Guardians of the Veil describe their order in various ways. One member might play up the subtlety, the lies and deceit, explaining the pure joy (or personal challenge) of knowing secrets and keeping them. Others may choose to draw the young mage in with the lure of popular conception: a Guardian of the Veil is James Bond with magic instead of gadgets or, better, magical gadgets. One thinking of eliciting excitement could highlight the danger of being, effectively, an operative in foreign lands no matter where one goes, always seeking targets for a tactical strike from "high command." But the fruit that attracts the most flies is the sweetest: the Guardians protect magic, forever working to defend the diminishing influence of the Supernal Realms on our lonely, debased World of Darkness. It is this, the thought of preventing the world from becoming the monotonous place the mage once believed it was, that draws many of the order's students to it.

Once behind the Veils, a Guardian is almost forced to look upon the world through a new filter. He sees the world clearly for what may be the first time, a delicate pointillism masterpiece that looks whole from afar, but resolves into disparate, conflicting truths when inspected closely. Each secret he learns, sparingly given though it may be, skews his view further until he can no longer remember the beliefs he once held. They are too unpalatable for him to have ever thought them to be true.

Every step a Guardian takes draws her deeper behind the Veils, distancing her from the world of Sleepers even more than did the original satori that Awoke her. Awakening separated her from the Sleeping world; being a Guardian separates her from the rest of the magical world. The prejudice is a barrier that keeps her apart from other mages, but it doesn't act alone. Every secret entrusted to her strengthens that barrier. The secrecy causes the mage to grow heavy with distrust, of herself and of others. Each person the Guardian meets is another person who cannot be told. Every person is one who might be seeking to steal what must not be shared. Who knows better than a spy that no one can be trusted?

Theme

Secrecy and sacrifice. Hiding truths is a game that all Guardians play with deadly seriousness. They give of themselves so that the status quo – not any government, but a tenuous law of reality – may survive. Some play this game with the belief that things will one day be set right. Others expect and ask for no relief, because they believe that the Veil is forever. But they all give and suffer, if not silently, willingly.

A child sees his mother in the embrace of a man who is not his father. The child quietly closes the door and tells no one, suffering to protect his family. Likewise, a woman may stay with a man who cheats because she loves him and, despite the pain, wants to love him forever. The criminal keeps his mouth shut about his partners, knowing that he earns a longer prison sentence in order to do the right thing. A reporter finds shame in the past of a politician that his country needs, and the story that would catapult the journalist to fame never sees print so that some good can occur in the world.

All these things are important to the spirit of playing a Guardian of the Veil. A Guardian has given up his personal life, because friends and family are cracks in his armor where enemies can hammer a wedge. If he hasn't, the friends and family must be lied to, because they are most likely Sleepers who cannot know or understand the truth. The mage must weigh matters carefully if he wants to wed, or even take a lover,

for only an Awakened spouse can hear most of what a Guardian has to say, and only a Guardian can hear anything worth sharing.

The dedicated Guardian has forsaken her personal aspirations, all the more painful because she can finally make a difference. Healing the sick of cancers and growing strong grains of wheat in Africa are laudable, but each person cured and each child fed through wondrous magic risks drawing the Fallen World closer to the Abyss and eternal hopelessness. Giving the residents of the tenements where the mage grew up a hand out of the gutter is an admirable goal, but one that ultimately demands too much of her resources and risks too much exposure. Creating one's own wealth is a vulgar action that risks judgment by one's superiors, and manipulating one's way to the top of a massive corporation calls attention from other orders. The only true path is through the shadow.

Guardians of the Veil know that only a world guided by the wise can rise above its current, pitiful state, and they understand even more keenly that they themselves cannot achieve that wisdom. It is the Guardians' fate to ruin themselves to raise up others, to be a step on the ladder to greatness but not the ones who climb that ladder. The Guardians' ideal world, the one they strive for but may never achieve, is one in which they cannot exist.

Mood

Look around. You may be reading this in the privacy of your own home. Where are the windows? Someone could be watching you from the apartment, house or park across the street. In fact, somebody probably is. Your phone might not be tapped, but it's safer to assume it is. Did you buy this book with a credit card? Or with a check?

There are a lot of people in the street. Any one of them could be watching you. Or maybe it's a miserable night and there's only one soul braving the frigid weather. He's *probably* watching you. The girl who's on the bus every time you take it might be watching you, but she might also be a decoy. The ones who are really watching are less obvious.

It gets worse. A mage doesn't need to be across the street to watch you, and he doesn't need to touch your phone to hear your conversations. All he needs is a name. Or an eyelash or a drop of blood. Or an audio recording. Or the strap you held on the subway. That's all he needs to know exactly where you are and



what you're doing, assuming he's smart and you're not.

He might just be watching because he wants to keep track of you, the same way you're probably watching someone like him. But there's a chance he's there on behalf of a larger conspiracy, the conspiracy, that wants to eliminate you and everyone like you and leave nothing but a timid slave of a world behind. Or, he could just be one of your own checking up on you, and you're safe. Do you want to take that chance?

It's the feeling when you walk into a room and everybody suddenly hushes. Do they know something, or do they think you know something? Worse, you do know something. Are they waiting for you to trip up, or are they testing to see if you'll lie?

It's when you go to school, to work, to the club, wherever you go to be with your peers, and you know that none of them wants anything to do with you. They hate you and don't bother to hide it, because everyone whose opinion matters hates you, too. They only smile when they need something, and then they don't bother to fake it very well. Part of them knows they'd miss you if you were gone, but not because they secretly like you. It's because they're afraid of the alternative but refuse to admit it.

A Guardian is paranoid. A Guardian is a pariah. Because if you relax, or if they accept you, everyone loses.

How to Use This Book

There is no mage so righteous as one who knows she is saving the world. Every Guardian of the Veil knows that her efforts are working toward the good of society; she recognizes that villainy is justified if used to fight villainy, and defeating the efforts of others to let the Mysteries dwindle away to nothing is the ultimate cause, worthy of any sacrifice. Her order and its cause are just, and nothing will convince her otherwise.

Chapter One: From the Reign of Atlantis

With the birth of Atlantis came the need for mages to police themselves. Madmen, demons and subtle, unnamed shadows all threatened the Awakened City and required a softer touch than a war mage could provide. So was born the Eye of the Dragon, composed of mages who sacrificed their identities and selves for the good of the people. When the isle and the World Fell, the Eye reshaped itself, becoming the Guardians of the Veil in order to fit the new world, but the Eye never strayed from its primary mission: to defend magic and mages from the unAwakened, the monsters — and themselves.

Chapter Two: Masque and Veil

All magical orders are secretive and jealous of their Mysteries, but the Guardians of the Veil are among the most protective of their ways. According to their enemies, the Guardians are paranoiacs among the persecuted. The Guardians are, of course, rightfully concerned. The core tenets behind the order, beyond the most general, are known only to those allowed beyond the Veils. The Guardians' methods and practices are secrets of utmost importance, concealed to preserve their advantage as they work. Any disagreements within the order, however divisive, stay within the order, because displaying weakness would summon the baying packs of mages who have been slighted — and who have long memories. Even the offices and functions of mages from different

Paths are not widely known outside the order. These and many other secrets are explored in this chapter, giving the reader a rare glance into the culture of the Guardians of the Veil.

Chapter Three: Of Secrets and Spies

From Sleepers and Sleepwalkers to mages new and old, the initiation of new blood into the order is an arduous and exacting practice. The Guardians of the Veil refuse to accept any initiate who does not feel strongly about protecting magic from the unwise. Strongly enough to kill, strongly enough to die. The Guardians are harsh to their initiates. But once among the accepted, a mage is part of a brotherhood, one reinforced by the disgust that almost all other mages bear for the order and its members. This only drives the mages of the Veil more strongly together, and the Guardians find great friendships in the ranks of the only liars, thieves and assassins they know can be trusted.

Chapter Four: Factions and Legacies

Even the Guardians of the Veil, driven close in ideology by the universal opposition of other orders, are unique at their core. They express these differences through the manner in which they bring justice and safety to the Awakened world and the goals that earn their true focus. Like-minded mages form loose alliances that, over time, either earn an unofficial name or fade into historical footnotes. These alliances are the various factions that prevail in Guardian politics. Some mages choose to express their individuality by crafting their souls, giving them shapes that manifest the mages' goals in the Fallen World. These Legacies are handed down from Guardian tutors to their pupils.

Chapter Five: Magic

Every order has its own specialties, tools or spells that are distinct to the order's use. The Guardians code their rotes with special mudras to make the rotes more effective. This chapter reveals the Guardians' magical habits and training, as well as new spells and magical equipment that focus on subterfuge and protecting the Veil.

Appendix: Allies and Antagonists

There are many people behind the Veil. Each has a story and, if so inclined, can either be a help or a hindrance to a young mage who's just trying to save the world. These are just a few of the mages who may choose to get involved when your cabal comes sauntering — or skulking, as the case may be — into their sights.

Sources and Inspiration

The sense that mystery and wonderment are out there, but forever out of our reach. Coincidence found in the blinking letters of a motel's neon, and the fact that the demolition crew gets there before you can buy a camera. The unnamed stranger who answers all of your questions, then disappears, his office building apparently empty for years. The American Association of Abductees, which claims that the Automobile Association was invested with the mission and the acronym to debunk the Abductees Association's theories. There are a hundred organizations out there devoted to seeking out and uncovering the truth, whether it be aliens, conspiracy or magic, and each posits that a dozen groups trying to hide it. The theme has found its way

into film and literature, and the recommendations below are just some of many resources for the interested.

Books

Foucault's Pendulum by Umberto Eco. An account that so closely fits one man's experience of being run through the Labyrinth, the story could almost have been written by a Guardian of the Veil. Maybe it was.

Stalin's Spy by Robert Whymant. The detailed story of one legendary spy's life, his position as the head of a Tokyo espionage ring and his eventual downfall.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy by John le Carré. This engaging piece of work can add a level of detail and inspiration to the espionage in any game.

Film and Television

Alias. Because they really are secret agents seeking occult mysteries in order to keep them from the wrong hands, and Jack Bristow is a Guardian, giving up his morality to protect what he holds dear.

The Game. Everyone's an actor; no one's what he seems.

Men in Black. Despite the film's humorous tone, the movie provides a good example of people who sacrifice their own dreams and desires in order to protect important secrets.

The Recruit. A spot-on rendition of the Gray and Black Veils.

Lexicon

The following terms are those that see common usage within the ranks and writings of the Guardians of the Veil. Some terms refer to historical factions, ideals, events or people, others are more contemporary, relevant to operational realities in the structure and execution of the order today. A few terms are slang that developed among the Guardians' agents but are rarely heard outside of those circles, and some are common pass-phrases that allow the Guardians' disparate operatives to recognize each other in the field. All of these terms are universal to the order, or nearly so, and can be used in any game featuring the Guardians of the Veil.

Diamond Wheel, the: An expression of the second Exoteric Tenet, describing the cycle of Awakened souls.

Esoteric Tenets, the: The hidden doctrines of the Guardians of the Veil.

Exoteric Tenets, the: The philosophies of the order taught to initiates past the first Veil and known to the public.

Eye of the Dragon: The name of the Atlantean incarnation of the Guardians of the Veil. Originally tasked with protecting the isle from the depredations of monstrous creatures and the foreign, unwashed masses, what was left of the order after the Fall was forced to reshape its principles.

Faceless: A Guardian of the Veil faction that challenges the order's identity by having none. Members practice the *Masques* in order to suborn their egos to a false identity, a process that leads them to their true selves. The Faceless often serve the order as assassins, killing those who have fallen too far into hubris.

Hieromagus: A mage Guardians believe will one day appear, lead the Pentacle in defeating the Exarchs and re-establish Atlantis.

Inheritors: A Guardian of the Veil faction that seeks and hoards knowledge in the belief that it should be kept from the unworthy. Members tend their own wisdom, but they also attempt to tease it out of others by withholding information until it is "earned." The Inheritors oppose all attempts to prematurely Awaken Sleepers.

Law of the Mask: Guardian of the Veil praxis that holds the Guardians to an oral tradition, passing down history and lessons through parables.

Masque, the: 49 archetypal identities sometimes adopted by Guardians as learning tools or even disguises.

Mazed, the: An in-order term for Sleepers trapped within the Labyrinth. "To maze" means to introduce Sleepers to the Labyrinth. Also "mazer(s)."

Messianics: A Guardian of the Veil faction that defends the integrity of magic until the arrival of the foreordained Hieromagus, who will cast the Exarchs from the higher realms. Members accept, even more so than most Guardians, that their own actions may damn them for hubris and are willing to accept that fate in order to accomplish their goal.

New Constructionists: A historical Guardian of the Veil faction that, Guardians believe, strongly influenced the direction and progression of the Roman Republic.

Ordeal Keepers: A Guardian of the Veil faction that believes that mages should be constantly challenged to maintain the right to their enlightenment. Members are martially trained and believe in reincarnation toward a more enlightened end.

Prophets: A Guardian of the Veil faction that watches the strands of Fate for important connections between people and events. Members interact more easily with other orders than most Guardians and share more often and more willingly. Prophets tend to have political heft.

Quiet, the: The only name by which the founding cabal of the Eye of the Dragon is remembered, applied after the Fall to the group of cabals who ran the order. This term is still used in some places today, in reference to the most authoritative cabal in the local caucus.

red brothers: Mages who have passed the Gray Veil (see *Veils*) but not yet achieved full admission into the order.

True: A term for mages of other orders who are considered trustworthy.

Veil, the (singular): The secrecy that surrounds the Mysteries and that must be protected and maintained by the Guardians.

Veils, the (plural): The levels of initiation within the order, beginning with the Gray Veil, progressing to the Crimson Veil and ending with the Black Veil.

Visionaries: A historical Guardian of the Veil faction that, Guardians believe, supported the Silver Ladder in an early attempt to physically recreate the island of Atlantis. Members of this faction evolved into the Prophets.

Visus Draconis: "Eye of the Dragon."



CHAPTER ONE: FROM THE REIGN OF ATLANTIS

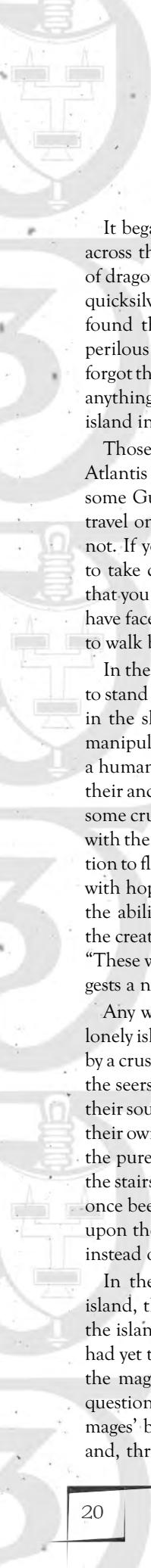
Black Maria carefully brushed dirt from the marble wall. As the images on its surface cleared and resolved, she smiled to herself. "See," her whisper carried in night breeze of the Mediterranean, "I told you this Roman villa hid a Guardian vault." Her finger tapped the fresco she'd just uncovered, touching the sigil she and her partner had agreed last month represented an old Guardians of the Veil cabal. Kinachtus grunted.

Motes of dust floated in the light of her partner's heavy flashlight. In its powerful beam, Black Maria deftly touched pieces of the fresco, pushing certain ceramic squares into the wall according to the pattern she'd figured out after long study, the same pattern that had worked on similar ruins over the last year. Each had revealed a tantalizing piece of the greater puzzle: what exactly the first Guardians had said to those who would carry on the Guardians legacy when they sank with Atlantis.

And each clue pointed to the promise of an eventual return. The clues gave credence to her theory of the order's history, and debunked Kinachtus', which is why he was in a sour mood at the discovery of this, what should be the final proof. Eagerly, she pressed the final square, and heard the hiss of ancient air escape as the wall slid to the side.

She stifled a scream, stumbling backwards away from the unsealed passage. Kinachtus' grunt was now the growl of a cornered beast, the light from his flashlight sending frantic shadows across the night as he struggled to free a weapon.

Her theory had been correct. Something had returned. She wished she could take it all back.



History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.
— James Joyce, *Ulysses*

It began, as all things do, with a dream. Men and women across the world dreamed of the ocean spire and the flights of dragons. Those who stayed at home, letting the visions slip quicksilver from their minds, vastly outnumbered those who found themselves inspired to uproot their lives and make perilous journeys to an imagined place. The former quickly forgot that they had experienced an awareness more clear than anything they had seen before, and the latter set sail for an island in unknown waters.

Those first travelers who departed for what would become Atlantis were following the promise of control. This is what some Guardians tell their students. "Self is a road. You can travel only two ways on this path: controlling one's self and not. If you do not control yourself, others do, and in order to take control, you must control others. But do not think that you travel the wrong path as my student; all your life, you have faced the wrong way on this road. I am just teaching you to walk backwards."

In the world as it was, they claim, no human had the power to stand before the monsters, the inhuman things that lurked in the shadows and pulled at strange, invisible strings that manipulated the world. Only capitulation and obeisance saved a human tribe from being devoured, tormented by shades of their ancestors or slowly siphoned of all joy for the satiation of some cruel god. The dreams of Atlantis provided humankind with the first taste of self-control, the opportunity and inspiration to flee its undeserved punishment not in desperation, but with hope. Traveling across the ocean, these humans sought the ability to forge their own futures and, one day, control the creatures that once wrought upon humankind such pain. "These were the souls who, today, would join our order," suggests a nervous disciple, speaking of things he oughtn't.

Any who survived the journey found that the dream of a lonely island was more than a pleasant and vivid vision caused by a crust of moldy bread. And the dreams continued, leading the seers into the Dragon's Tomb and teaching them to send their souls on the mystical trials. Thus did the first mages work their own souls, scraping away the soft, malleable clay to reveal the pure granite underneath. They fashioned for themselves the stairs to ascend from the dark valleys where humanity had once been contained and stand in the light. They could look upon the world as it truly was and, for the first time, change instead of being changed.

In the beginning, before any had thought to name the island, there were only a few mages among the populace on the island. Their wisdom and inner strength gave those who had yet to visit the Realms Supernal enough reason to follow the mages' guidance with little question, and any who did question soon repented, finding themselves excluded from the mages' beneficence. The mages had control over the people and, through them, the island. It was the only true time of

peace that magic ever had after the first bright soul returned from the Realms Supernal.

As time passed, the population of Atlantis grew. More seekers came from the lands beyond the sea, and the inhabitants of the island created yet more inhabitants, as humans do. The government of the island by the mages began informally, as those who could not travel the astral Paths naturally deferred to those who had. The nature of humanity to affirm and crystallize the paths of power drove them to formalize the rule of the Awakened. And the mages considered it fair and just that the wise among them become kings and queens among men, guiding the young in that wisdom. But as time passed and the mages' numbers grew, the mages created innumerable offices and appointments, giving temporal power to those mages who sought such advancement instead of those who, more wisely, gave their time and concern to the study of the Mysteries. "Soon," grumbles a master deep in his cups, "only the royals had the honor and understanding necessary to lead, and even some of them"

Quiet Fall

Sovereigns of all kinds act to protect their positions, and Guardians paint the ruling mages of Atlantis as no exception. The Ungula Draconis had already formed naturally for the isle's protection, though the sparkle in some willworkers' eyes suggested that the Ungula Draconis would one day turn to the domination of those lands that the mages had once fled. But the Talon was not yet sufficient to the task. One cannot slay a shadow with a sword, and some of the mages' enemies were little more than dangerous, poisonous shadows. The rulers of the city on the sea were anxious for an unblinking Eye that would watch over the rest of the Dragon, missing nothing.

It was the right time for the birth of the Visus Draconis. Most histories remember the first masters of the order as volunteers, a single cabal that understood that the Awakened City needed a subtle guardian, a conscience. Some believe that the Guardians' progenitors were assembled by an Atlantean king. Each mage in the founding cabal had previously been a member of another order and, forswearing that membership in the name of neutrality, knew much sensitive information. The orders, none too pleased with this, were forced to swallow their displeasure when the cabal's members performed a public ceremony, swearing to the skeins of Fate to only act on behalf of the island's security.

At the same event, legend states, the members of the cabal disavowed their own names. Not just taking shadow names, already a standard practice, but denying any appellations whatsoever. And they worked a powerful spell around giving up their names, shrouding themselves in mystery even to those who knew them well. Those who met these mages later reported that speaking with one was indistinguishable from

speaking with another; their faces blurred and their voices became indistinct whispers. The spell was never duplicated. The cabal became known as “the Quiet,” though whether this was through a witty pundit or the cabal’s own device changes with the teller.

Although mages outside the order rarely observed the Eye directly, they knew it was there. They watched as new mages and old alike defected to the Eye, choosing to devote themselves to the ideals of the Quiet. As more and more willworkers and cabals began to identify as Eyes of the Dragon, it took little time before the mages of Atlantis recognized the group as an order in its own right. Not all conversions were public: some Eyes retained their old affiliations, the rumor of which disturbed the other orders all the more. The Guardians say that their order became a web of moral conspirators integrated throughout mage society, and the Quiet sat at the center of the web, listening to the vibrations and pulling the strings. The Eye of the Dragon was soon heralded as a success. The Eyes uncovered the invisible enemies of the spire, the clever changelings and the mad, plotting mages, and destroyed them. As the Atlanteans began to cast their nets for enlightenment farther abroad, exploring the lands across the seas, the Quiet planted agents among the explorers and, through them, in the foreign lands.

Everything found its way to the Eye and the Quiet, and they assisted the other orders even as they were scorned, sharing any information they deemed was not confidential. Some masters refer to the Eye of the Dragon then as the ocean spire’s avians. The Eyes were the proverbial little birds on a nearby branch when the Alae Draconis lost an excursion to brigands and beasts, able to whisper the occult wisdom into their ears when they thought it lost. The Eyes were the albatross that flew above the ocean, following and preceding the invasion fleet that the Talons had not seen before they were told of it. Yet, most mages considered the flock to be composed of crows, rather than songbirds. The Voices of the Dragon were pleased by the increased safety and stability brought to the island, but the price — suffering the scrutiny of an independent order that refused to be influenced — was sour to them. “Then,” warns a weary Guardian, “the Eye had a patron among the royalty. It was her belief in the cause and public support that prevented anyone from kicking the order’s ass. The Guardians have no such thing now, and the others all still hate us. That just means that our survival only depends on us. And yes, that should scare you.”

Despite this unsettlement, most Guardians maintain that things were good for the Eye. Its efforts were rewarded by the evident improvements. Insidious creatures that once snuck onto the island, and some that may have been there when the first human made landfall, were found and eradicated. Dissidents among Atlantis’ mortal inhabitants soon found their peace with their home or left for parts unknown, and their poisonous, false rhetoric reached fewer ears. Even other mages soon realized that they were not proof against the Eye of the Dragon; the other mages’ political plotting and harmful infighting decreased markedly. The Eye’s membership

continued to grow, though it never reached the size of the other orders. Mages and cabals of the order all developed the qualities necessary to properly watch over society, holding each other to the highest standards of judgment. Those with any ambition at all hoped to join the legendary Quiet, the ears at every door and the spiders at the center of it all. Whether the Quiet’s membership ever changed, either through admission of new members or naming successors to its authority and name is unknown.

Esoteriç historians argue about when, but they are certain that the nature of Atlantis eventually began to shift, and that the Quiet rightly saw the direction that Atlantean society was taking: stratification unto death. Just as a human emperor worries over the loyalty of his people and the possibility of an insurrection, the priest-lords of the Awakened City grew to fear any upset in the social order. One mage might lead a horde of the unenlightened without fear of corruption, for when a human knows he has no equals he need have no fear of being overthrown. But a mage among mages is one among equals, and only the wise can resist judging her wisdom and strength beside that of her brothers and sisters. To those without such insight, sympathy with the Realms Supernal and facility with weaving the Tapestry became a measure of status. Those were the mages drawn to mortal power and politics, who began to direct ever more of their energy into the offices, losing their drive to seek out and understand the Supernal Mysteries. The cabal at the head of the Visus Draconis recognized this, and long before they felt the tremblings in their web they placed eyes, ears and the occasional tooth among the mages of Atlantis.

When the first wizard’s war swelled on the horizon, the Eye of the Dragon had already been watching the designers of the Celestial Ladder. Whispered messages in alleyways, stray thoughts focused between towers, astral voyages coincident in time where colors unimaginable conveyed secret intentions — the Quiet knew of them all. For once, wisdom demanded that the Quiet forsake its duty. The Voices, Talons, and Wings of the Dragon were corrupted, infested. Only the Quiet knew whom to trust, and speaking would only hasten and worsen the war between the suppliants of wisdom and the adherents of power. “The flapping tongue,” intones the Inheritors faction of modern Guardians, “causes wind. The Quiet mouth bites the tongue.”

War came. Mages turned upon each other en masse for the first time, and the orders collapsed upon themselves as the wise and the ambitious clashed. Though the Talons of the Dragon proved their battle prowess in those shadowed times, slaying hundreds of mage-warriors on the field of battle, boastful Guardians claim that the foresight of the Quiet proved more effective. The Quiet’s well-placed contingencies — agents with knives or spells and assassin-automata — eliminated power-hungry generals and several integral architects of the forthcoming breach into the Supernal. In the words of a Faceless Guardian, “The best swordsman is killed with poison.” Additionally, the Quiet refused to leave Atlantis in exile. The cabal had never abandoned its home when danger threatened, and the Quiet



Magic's birthplace sinks. Fear not for us, for we go to realize the ultimate expression of this noble order's duty. Atlantis must never be found. The Celestial Ladder must never be rebuilt, lest it shatter both Worlds beyond recovery. In our last moments, we conceal this island from all sight and time. Those of you who remain must be vigilant. The Worlds shift. The Mysteries must be kept safe from those who would harm them from without or within. Defend magic. Defend Wisdom. The sacred mage will come.

did not leave with the other Exiles. Though the victorious mages searched, members of the Quiet refused to be found.

Though the valiant Visus Draconis inflicted great setbacks on the effort, the supporters of the Celestial Ladder managed to ascend into heaven. As they wove together heaven and earth and advanced upon godhood, their eyes filled with greed and lost sight of their defeated brethren. The Eye of the Dragon, however, never wavered, and sent messages to the royalty-in-exile, informing them of the Ladder's vulnerability. Through the Eye's weakened network of spies and the Eye's own investigation, the mages knew several of the Ladder's weakest points and passed that information on to the returning kings and queens of Atlantis, ensuring that the assault could do the most harm possible.

The end of the story is well-known to the Awakened. The wizard's war ended when the Celestial Ladder collapsed under the Exiles' onslaught. The Exarchs and Oracles remained in the Supernal World, and everyone else remained in what would soon be known to mages as the Fallen World. Where the Ladder had stood, the very fabric of all reality was now rent into the Abyss. It is a common legend among Western Guardians that, as Atlantis was consumed by the ocean, those mages called the Quiet sank with it. The cabal's last message to the vestiges of their noble order is still remembered.

For every Guardian today who recites this message (or one of its hundreds of variations) with inspiration and dedication, there is another Guardian whose lip curls when he hears this message mentioned. This doesn't mean that those Guardians aren't dedicated to the duties the message shares, just that they think the tale itself is a lie told by masters or

propaganda spread by the order after the Fall. Some believers spend a great deal of time interpreting the message, searching it for information on when the Hieromagus, the

prophesied mage messiah, might arrive, or seeing proof that the Quiet worked a great Time magic upon the island as it sank. Most Guardians, of course, think this is bunk. Guardians of other traditions prefer to believe that the Quiet left no final message, instead achieving parinivana (the state of nirvana), moksha (freedom from the cycle of incarnations) or another salvation from the strife of living.

Recommitment

"As birds fly from a gunshot did the mages leave sunken Atlantis." Unsurprisingly, most Guardians mark this as the end of the Eye of the Dragon as it stood during the reign of Atlantis. Many of these Guardians believe that the order, in those days, was a strictly run and measured organization, not least due to the harsh security and self-policing required to protect the order from infiltration and corruption. With the complete loss of the Eye's base of operations and leading cabal, those mages who remained were left with only bits and pieces of the information necessary to do the job. The Quiet's habit of keeping its operatives, even important ones, on a severely limited need-to-know basis was going to take its toll. Surviving cabals afforded themselves no time to be shocked by the development. They had been charged with continuing

the order's work, and the Awakened world was too much in turmoil for this to be possible. The Eye of the Dragon needed to reorganize. Claims of how long it took the disparate cabals, scattered throughout the world, to regroup vary with the teller, usually to make some sort of point.

It was the beginning of the new order. Each cabal that had worked under the Quiet's direction had its own specialties: surveillance, data analysis, assassination, cultivating moles, placing ringers, political manipulation and many more. An old haiku puts what followed thus: "Snow lies on the cock/The ground is bare and hens crow/Snow lies on the cock." All the surviving cabals had unique networks of unAwakened agents and other resources that the cabals could not – or would not – donate to the collective good. Each cabal felt too strongly that only it could effectively lead the order's remains.

Many Guardians, especially those participating in Consilii where Guardians are the distinct minority, see this as the period of history when the order's persecution began. As negotiations between the cabals of the Eye progressed only haltingly, the Guardians soon recognized that the other orders were significantly better organized than the Eye of the Dragon and, more worryingly, most of them held a grudge against the vigilant Eye. Some contemporary Guardians, less bitter with their position, consider this continuing prejudice little more than a remnant of the general attitudes from the heydays of the Awakened City that had festered into a growing need to accomplish something in the dismal period following the Fall. More Guardians, feeling entitled or upset by the treatment they receive from other willworkers, prefer to believe that the other orders felt deep resentment toward the Eye, that it had been the order to remain calm during the erection of the Celestial Ladder and to give the command that brought the Ladder down. The growing strength of the other orders and the unpleasant attention they were paying to the Eye's remnants caused even more concern. It was clear that the order had to regroup and center itself, else it would be destroyed. A version of this period common in the West suggests that the Eye of the Dragon was not ill-liked, that the Eye was tolerated well until an indefinite period near the current day. Those who subscribe to this belief tend to be alarmists, pointing at the modern state of affairs as proof of social, moral and sometimes Supernal degradation.

Rise of the Fourteen

A Swiss Guardian says, "Few mages of the order did disappear during that time; that which is not seen does not die." A Hindu sees it differently: "A dozen farmers toiled side-by-side in the field. Six died of exhaustion, six ate well. All earned what they received." It was a troubling time for the order. Some histories remember the loss of one or two cabals galvanizing the rest to act; others claim the destruction of dozens before the Eye could be moved to reorganize itself. Regardless of how many cabals disappeared in the years after the Fall, the order eventually made itself strong once again. Though the number sometimes varies, most agree that there were 14 cabals at the

meeting that finally agreed to work together for the order's good. Stationed all around the world, the 14 cabals wielded enough regional influence on other Guardians to let the council effectively set a moderate amount of policy and continue to gather intelligence from around the globe. As an homage to the lost masters of the order, the council became known as the Quiet. This served the secondary purpose of displaying a solidarity and permanence to the other orders, giving them the desired impression of strength among the Eyes.

The Quiet, now a council rather than a cabal, offered the 14 a forum for their discussions and arguments, but also a method of government for a previously stalemated order. Under the new Quiet's direction, the Eye of the Dragon once more opened and began to peer around the world. Most believe the Eye saw itself the underdog, beset by hostile mages on all sides. Though most mages claim that one councilor (usually one of their magical ancestors, and often the progenitor of their faction) moved the order to resume spying out the enemies of all mages, not just those who threatened the Eye, and to eliminate those threats to the overall well being of magic. The cabals of the order began coordinating their efforts to perform the duty they had too long forgotten.

Nets that had been left to unravel and fray were picked up and mended. Reports began to arrive along the grapevines that the Eye's cabals had almost let die but now tenderly cultivated. Agents who had long thought themselves forgotten by their contacts were returned to the fold. Soon, with information flowing up the chain of command, the Quiet began to paint for itself a picture of what the Fallen World had become during the period in which the Quiet had been lamed. The Quiet mages discovered shapeshifters who jealously guarded all contact with spirits and the Shadow Realm. Sources reported creatures of darkness and death that exercised strange powers that did not call upon the Supernal. Not all were potential dangers to the sons and daughters of Atlantis. Many of these creatures were content to perform their strange rituals and follow their individual ways. The reformed Eye of the Dragon soon acted to remove those with the motive and ability to threaten the mage community. The Quiet bought small favors from the other orders, still howling for blood, with evidence of perils defused.

In an effort to increase the order's numbers and strength, the 14 cabals encouraged their members to once more recruit Awakening mages to the cause. Several new cabals and many individuals had been carefully tested and inducted into the order and were considered, by all but the most cautious Eyes of the Dragon, to be trustworthy. It has been said: "It was the first time since the recovery from the Fall that the Quiet didn't know, if only by name, all the members of the order." Modern Guardians cite this as a point when the order should have reinforced its strict rules of membership in the hope of retaining some measure of control and effectiveness on a global scale. Others claim to understand why it was impossible for the Quiet to maintain constant communication, let alone speak often with any significant number of the newer cabals. Another view, often held by those of the Ordeal Keeper fac-

tion and Eastern philosophers, believe that it was a necessary evolutionary response to the environment, or a step along the order's karmic progression.

No matter how different mages see it, they all believe it was the beginning of something different. Located many thousands of miles from one another, the 14 cabals comprising the Quiet depended on the Space Arcanum for communication. Holding their meetings must have been an intricate and difficult affair, even if many Guardians believe that the spells necessary for the task were significantly easier to cast at the time. As a modern master relates, "Foresightful, the members of the Quiet took the precautions necessary to allow them to remain in contact. They mastered Space and looked at each other's faces, trading true names and bits of hair or blood. When the first of the 14 retired, they introduced their successors and did the same. They were good at staying in contact, and careful. If they tried, they thought, they could keep it up forever. Of course, even then members of the Eye outside the 14 were growing farther out of touch." As time went on, and sympathetic connections grew frayed or were cut by malicious magic, the order only held together thanks to the tenuous contact within the Quiet. Its members all feared that another disaster might shatter them irrevocably. They had no idea what would really break them apart in the coming centuries.

A Wounded World

In the history of magic, there has only been one Fall. But the repercussions of that collapse continue to echo through time, affecting all people. This is a history remembered by some, especially prevalent in South America, Africa and Eastern Europe: for the first time, the Quiet had the leisure to contemplate the construction of a better world. It was a silver age of men and mages. It was then that the first great aftershock of the Fall rocked the magical community. Spells that even an initiate could cast were suddenly out of reach for all but the most skilled apprentices or disciples. The great magics that had been standard since the rise of the ocean spire became too difficult for all but the mightiest archmasters to weave.

All mages knew that their power had changed since that day when the Ladder crumbled. It was evident in every spell, in every Atlantean word and in the eyes of every unAwakened soul, whom mages were now beginning to call "the Sleeping." Every mage remembered that terrible period following the Fall when magic was uncertain and sympathy with the Supernal World was nearly severed forever. Those years were the most difficult, and not even the strictly regimented Talons of the Dragon had managed to regroup before the Watchtowers called the Awakened in great numbers across the Abyss to be bound forever to one of the Supernal Realms. Though mages had reclaimed control over their power and their destinies, the intricacies of "new magic" were still difficult to grasp. There seemed to be a spiritual weight lying on the Fallen World, crushing magic; spells that were once dependable for years now faded from the Tapestry in months, if not days. Other magic, proof of the mages' true mastery over the Mysteries of the universe, caused strange anomalies, inflicting laws not

native to either the Fallen or Supernal Worlds on the already disheveled Tapestry. Though progress was slow, the orders had already begun to learn what the changes meant. This was one of the few efforts in which mages of different orders shared information.

The new Quiet, assembled in the flesh for the first time since inception, made a desperate bid to find the problem. Ignoring temporal needs, the cabals' archmasters sent their souls abroad, straining the limits of their sharply truncated power. The support of their companions sustained them as they reached beyond the Fallen World. Instead of stepping into the Supernal Realms, these masters floated between, watching the vast unbeing of the Abyss. It was not the first time these mages had done such a thing, and they were not the first to do so. But as they watched, the mages of the Eye could see the borders between Worlds rippling and, at times, seeming to grow wider. Straining their Supernal senses to the limit, they could peer through the too-thin curtain between the Abyss, where they watched, and the Fallen World, where they lived.

What they saw is one of the last near-universal beliefs among the Guardians. For every pockmark in the surface of the veil between Worlds, every slowly growing dimple, they could discern a spell being cast in the Fallen World or a Sleeper learning that which she could not understand. Using all of the Mysteries at their command, the mages could make out the sympathetic connections between spellcasting, the unAwakened and the thousands of minute defects in the curtain. The smallest impositions of the Supernal Realms on the Fallen World caused no harm, but the more strongly the laws of the higher realities were called, the more likely that the connection between the Supernal and the mage's soul would draw with it the taint of the Abyss. Faint images of the Abyss' twisted denizens were visible near the boundary, waiting for the earthbound mages to open a flaw large enough to let one through. Even as the Quiet mages watched, their eyes into the dead realm could see the sympathy between mages and their Watchtowers growing increasingly tenuous.

"The brave mages who traveled to the Abyss did not return to the meeting of the cabals unharmed," speaks an ancestor spirit through a Guardian mambo. "They bore burns and cuts of the flesh, a message from the angry things trapped in that empty land. One mage looked whole of body, but her mind was gone. The last, he was mad. I saw. He cut down his cabal days later before he cut his own heart out for eating. It is how I died."

The Quiet knew it must share what it had learned with the other orders. Because of its strained relationship with them, the Eye of the Dragon found itself at a disadvantage in bringing the other orders to understand the new dangers of using magic. The Quiet requested meetings and tried to give information freely, but every effort was met with suspicion and scorn. Willworkers across the world refused to believe that the "haven of spies and assassins" was giving of itself without any ulterior motive. They would not believe that the Eye could be straightforward. "If one will not believe one's Eyes," hints an aged adept, thinking he quotes a member of the Quiet,

"one will usually believe one's own Voice." The cabals of the Quiet returned to their homes across the globe. As a result of the other orders' stubborn refusal to see the stark truth when laid before them, these cabals shared the order's new goal, as agreed by the Quiet. They were to introduce agents into the ranks of the Talons, Voices and Wings of the long-drowned Dragon, with the aim of slowly enlightening them and helping to prevent great disasters. The Eye of the Dragon became the Guardians of the Veil.

This was the last concerted effort the order as a whole would make. With the drastically reduced efficacy of magic and the intense danger of using the more powerful spells, contact within the Quiet slowed to a halt. "Before the great storm fell," a Guardian tells his new apprentice, "the Quiet kept each other in the know. Regional news, order-wide policies, that sort of thing, even if there was no way the mages could enforce it. Afterwards, everyone kind of lost touch, and a Guardian in Africa had no way to know what a Guardian in France was doing." It took relatively little time for the Quiet's cabals to completely lose touch with each other, though accounts vary from less than a decade to several generations. The precise conditions surrounding this separation differ widely between cultures and places.

Though the Quiet no longer served to unify the disparate (and growing further apart) cabals, its last edict remained: take every action necessary to indoctrinate other orders in what the Quiet had learned and prevent them from harming the Fallen World. It was a measure that the Quiet had been avoiding. Since the Eye of the Dragon had regrouped after the Fall, the Eye's leaders had made every attempt to make safe the Fallen World without betraying their brother mages. The Eye had focused first upon the inhuman, weakening or eliminating those who wished to again enslave humanity. The Eye had then leveled its gaze on the elements of Sleeper culture that made the world unfriendly for the mages, setting into motion plans that would, over time, create hospitable environments for the mages. The Quiet's error had been to believe that the Quiet could, alone, defend all mages against the subtle dangers that threatened the legacy of Atlantis. Now, with a glimpse of how the nature of magic had changed in the Fall, the Quiet knew that all the orders had to be working with the Eye of the Dragon to prevent the Abyss between the Worlds from growing so vast that magic ceased to function at all. And since the other orders would not listen to their Eyes, the Quiet would have to believe they were listening to themselves.

The effort was far from universal. As one ghazal shared among Guardians says, "Friends must walk the road in the darkness/and Firuz turns in silence." Cabals of the Eye had always valued their individual judgments, and even when the Quiet was whole, the 14 cabals had needed all of their influence and cunning to convince other Eyes that the way of the Quiet was best. No longer a source of news and collaboration, the cabals of the Quiet lost much of their power. Exercising their freedom, the order's other mages went their own ways. Some chose to still obey the Quiet's last dictum, but on their own terms.

For those Eyes (now called Guardians in the order's historical annals) who pursued that path, all the orders were subject to their attention. "This is how we convinced them of magic's dangers," lectures a Guardian to an initiate, "Newly Awakened mages were either recruited in secret before another order 'discovered' them or were given quick, frightening and believable lessons before they joined their orders of choice. When possible, the most talented spies and plants joined other orders, surreptitiously making them more likely to believe what the Guardians said about what was now referred to as 'vulgar' magic." Different cultures remember the infiltrations in different ways. For example, a Guardian of the Lakota Sioux recalls how one of his ancestors changed his appearance and behavior to resemble a Crow warrior, and in this way assumed a new identity and joined another order. In Europe, common legends have experienced and magically adept agents insinuating themselves into the other orders, establishing themselves as respected theorists and working to gain the trust and respect of the other scholars before proposing the frightening truth. Though the Quiet was now disparate and under no central authority, the Voices of the Dragon still generally received most of the Guardians' attention. The Wings may have sheltered knowledge, but they also kept it in shadow. It was the Vox Draconis that, in the Awakened City, had possessed the most influence over the rest of the orders. Many cabals reached the same conclusion: if the Voices were made to understand the danger, they would speak until the other orders heard them.

This effort consumed a great deal of time, and few specifics are known about this period in history. The duration, especially, is in doubt and is hotly contested by those modern Guardians who find meaning in the minutiae of history. All the orders were suspicious and paranoid in the time after the Fall, seeing hostile mages or agents of the Exarchs in every shadow, so the infiltration of the magical societies progressed only slowly. Some Guardians teach the Chinese legend of Monkey, seeing in it a story of the interminable time required to perform the task; some believe the legend refers to an ancient Guardian. Western Guardians occasionally use a similar illustration with the myth of Sisyphus.

Members of the Quiet, no longer the power they once were, took different tacks after the dissolution. A few continued to pass on their responsibilities, and the title "Quiet" remained even as the 14 cabals passed into history. In these regions, the title's meaning changed over time. "The Quiet" might be used as an epithet for those using their power unjustly or as an honorary term bestowed on the cabal who can command it (much as Hierarch is a title for the mage who can command influence). Due to divisions throughout history, there were eventually many cabals that claimed the Quiet title, especially in the areas that maintained the legend with the most intensity, such as Europe. More commonly, the Quiet became little more than a memory. Most of Asia, the Americas and Australia followed that pattern, though various "Quiet traditions" have since been reintroduced by the spreading Western thought.

New Atlantis

Variations on this tale have since spread among Sleepers throughout the world, slowly at first, and more rapidly during the past two centuries, but the Aegean Guardians insist that they recall the truth. According to their legends, a most learned and subtle mage called Medes joined a Silver Ladder cabal as a spy. His skills quickly earned him a misplaced trust, and through Medes other Guardians learned of these Ladder intentions: to recreate the ocean spire and the Awakened City in its entirety. Word of such an ambitious project spread far and wide, until there was not a Guardian in the region unaware of the "New Atlantis project." It would return mages to the glory they once had, and attracted cabals from other orders to the cause. The idea was attractive, one that resonated with many of the Guardian's mages who, up until now, had been too focused on surviving to consider such an ambitious project. Many Guardians, forgetting the final message from the Quiet at the moment of the Fall, found themselves taken with the concept that the ocean spire could once again rise above the water.

The issue became divisive, and mages chose sides: A faction of Guardians called Inheritors felt that the order's mandate to keep dangerous knowledge from the unworthy and protect unwise mages from their own actions was inherent in the statement handed down by the order's founders. The Inheritors were against assisting the Ladder's efforts to reform the utopian society that had been lost, believing that it would again invite collapse. Another faction, called Visionaries, found the idea of a new Atlantis too tempting. They fooled themselves into believing that such a place could function in this new world, despite the danger, as long as the right people — themselves — were at the helm. Arguments erupted between the cabals of the order. The two factions began to give their agents contradictory orders. Inheritors continued the work that the order had been doing for centuries and continued to gather information about the growing New Atlantis movement. Visionaries also gauged the project while taking the steps necessary to move agents already within those cabals joining the movement into positions where the agents could make decisions or influence those who did.

Over the decades required for the project to come to fruition, allegiance to these two factions spread outward from the source of the conflict. The polarization affected even Guardians who had never heard of the New Atlantis movement. Some Guardians believed that they should watch and protect, keeping magic subtle and the world safe. Others felt that they should be guiding the Fallen World to a loftier future, one with the Guardians in a strong position to continue guiding the Fallen World.

Ambitious and controversial as the project was, the Aegeans say, the wise among them knew it was doomed to fail. As the time grew near, the Guardians of the Veil waged a bitter, secret war on themselves. The Visionaries had more agents afield and more control over the proceedings, but they supported the Silver Ladder cabal that led the movement. The Inheritors

had a greater degree of control over the Guardians in general and could leverage more influence, but the Inheritors were unable to dispel the momentum that the New Atlantis movement had gathered. Agents of the same order spied on and betrayed one another as the two factions each maneuvered for the means to bring their goals to pass. But the Visionaries had the advantage. They were able to work with other supporters of the project, if only covertly, while the Inheritors had no outside allies. When the zero hour approached, the Visionaries were on hand to guide the effort from behind their curtain. The rest of the Guardians were certain that the attempt would invite catastrophe, opening the Fallen World to the Abyss and shattering the fragile sympathies the Awakened had with their Supernal Realms. Desperate, these Guardians took desperate actions. Mages known to be involved with the forthcoming ritual were roughly ensorcelled, and accomplished mage-assassins, whom the order had only rarely before unleashed on other mages, were given orders to kill. Some Guardians today quote this as a proper precedent for performing vulgar magic to prevent a greater disaster.

Morning light struck the Aegean Sea to reveal hundreds of mages in boats mundane and enchanted. With the coming of the dawn, the mages combined their powers to summon all five Supernal Realms, calling upon all the higher laws to create a new island in the middle of the Aegean. The magic was also intended to carve a vast Hallow, larger than any before seen, and infuse the island with soul stones to make it a powerful Demesne where magic could be free. At the same time, spirits were forged from air and stone to become the guiding essences of the island, and clever mages instilled in the spirits subordination to the Awakened. Mages were working to ward New Atlantis against the spirits of the dead and build inherent defenses against intrusion: Time itself would slow for those with fell intent and Space would trap them forever in the depths. The second ocean spire would bestow great clarity of thought upon all who wandered its streets, and great varieties of life were designed to provide bountiful nourishment to the island's inhabitants. The sun was made to focus on crops but not burn the skin, and fires would dim themselves rather than consume the elegant architecture. The crowning glory would be a Fate forged by six archmasters in tandem, ensuring that the Awakened City would last the rest of time.

Disaster. Mages lost control of their spells or saw their effects reversed completely. Some mages began to rot from within as the casting reached a climax, and others were struck by intense flames from the sky. The vast weave of Making faltered and, as more and more Supernal energy began to run wild, took on a life of its own. The focal point of the magic thrashed, creating and destroying matter and channeling molten rock from the earth's core into the sky. Time magic went wild, freezing the entire disaster within a few square miles for most of an hour and aging some mages uncontrollably. Most willworkers recognized the lucky opportunity to leave before the uncontrolled energy devastated the region, and all who could, departed. When the energy finally burst free, great waves crashed upon all the shores of the Aegean Sea. The waves were



accompanied by an enormous wash of Supernal energy that evoked massive Disbelief in the Sleeping populace even as the energy tore their society to shreds. Some mages claim an entire civilization died that day, and centuries passed before the Greek civilization recovered.

Mages across the world felt the lights of the Watchtowers dim. The magic of the Fallen World visibly thinned. The few willworkers the Inheritors had spared to monitor the Abyss saw the great strain placed on the boundary between Worlds when the casting began and watched the denizens of that dark realm slaver hungrily at the gap they foresaw. The disruption of the ritual snapped the awful rent shut – mostly. The Inheritors felt the widening of the gap more than other mages: the strain the Inheritors placed on their souls to visit this place was suddenly too great to bear, and their essences snapped back into the Fallen World. Only one of those Inheritors survived the night.

Failure to create New Atlantis and the collateral damage that had resulted greatly chastened the Visionaries, reducing their standing and power among the Guardians. Visionaries capable of humility returned to the order, penitent, ready to repair the damage done and the trust lost. Many did not return, using the unsurpassed tradecraft taught by the order to disappear. Some were later found in other orders, particularly the Silver Ladder, unable to abandon the dream of one day recreating a better world. Other Visionaries were never seen again. The Visionaries who did return could not eliminate their desire to share information and wisdom with the other Awakened – not every fact, only those that would not threaten the Fallen

World. The Visionaries faction would eventually be called the Prophets, for the mages' profound new respect for foresight.

Despite some Guardians' insistence that they know the truth of the matter, this doesn't prevent others, even Sleepers, from telling their own versions of the event. A similar disaster, placed in near-prehistory, takes place in multiple other legends. The Aegeans claim that Guardians adapted the event to create cautionary fables appropriate to various cultures.

Opening the Eye

A rare written text, enchanted to be read only by those Guardians who pass the Black Veil, reads (in old High German): "Change was on the wind after the fall of New Atlantis. Debate wracked the surviving Guardians, arguing about their right to ignore all accepted facets of the Lex Magica in order to prevent or mitigate disaster. The differences of opinion led to petty internal politics while the most influential Guardians of the Aegean region maintained a calm façade. When the dust cleared, an accord had been reached. Defending the integrity of magic was the most important task the order could perform, whether by preventing vulgar spells from being cast or keeping Sleepers from detecting the pure truth of magic beneath the shimmering Veil that obscured it." After this catastrophe, most Guardians ceased trying to surreptitiously educate the other mages. If they had not learned the dangers of what they were capable of by now, there was nothing the Guardians could do but accept the greater task of protecting the ignorant. Those Guardians who were already hidden in other orders and who had not disappeared after the disaster changed their focus. They began observing, recording and reporting.

Learning From History

Guardians firmly believe in not repeating past mistakes. They pass on their history orally, so, not surprisingly, some of their historical object lessons have been transformed into idiom. Calling someone a "Visionary" carries the insinuation that her ambitions are too strong and her caution too limited. Mentioning "New Atlantis" in reference to an endeavor suggests that it is incredibly foolish or beyond hubris.

As part of the Guardians' new effort to most effectively conceal truths from the populace of the world, the Guardians of the Veil began a program of study, examining the best ways to hide what must be hidden from the Sleepers around them. "One discovery," teaches a Guardian, "was that greater civilization makes hiding magic easier. A people of disparate tribes must spend most of its time seeking shelter and food, the very basic elements of survival. When that people grows into an interwoven culture, sharing communication, beliefs and common laws, the people are able to stratify their society into laborers and thinkers. Tribes, devoting all their time to subsistence, have no opportunity to develop complex philosophies or study the natural laws of the Fallen World. Instead, the tribes ascribe things they do not understand to gods and demons and, much as it would seem otherwise, these beliefs open a door for the 'wise' among them to try to delve into the world of the supernatural. When kings and philosophers exist, they provide a drive in the other direction, toward understanding things through logic and thoughtful examination. Leaving their superstitious beliefs behind, as high civilizations tend to do, creates a society in which fewer choose to investigate the supernatural, or even believe in it." This was a popular opinion among European, Asian and North African Guardians of the time, and several insist that their order guided the development of Sleepers toward greater civilization.

Aegean Guardians are quick to claim that they raised up the peoples that the flawed New Atlantis had ravaged, but the more reasonable among these Guardians suggest that they probably did little more than take advantage of a natural phenomenon. The Greeks left their dark age and began constructing the great cities and fleets by which history remembers them. The Greeks' enlightenment birthed the city-states of Athens, Sparta and Thebes, and gave rise to philosophers and record-keepers such as Herodotus and Plato. The Greeks developed a culture with potent but human gods, incapable of hubris only by truism, and the people focused increasingly on temporal matters of politics and a sort of nascent science.

Discovering this, the Guardians subtly encouraged the analytical modes of thought trickling down from the social leaders to members of all walks of life. While the social experiment by no means eliminated superstition among the populace, the number of Sleepers within the culture who chose to pursue supernatural questions was severely reduced. At the same time,

the Greek divinities were creatures of vice with purely human, or superhuman, motivations. This minor but ingrained vision of the gods fit the description of the Awakened quite well—giving Sleepers who observed vulgar magic a framework with which to perceive it. When those Sleepers later described the vulgar magic to others, the stories would seem no more remarkable than those invented by Homer.

Natural political barriers helped keep variations in Greek culture separate, making it easier for the Guardians to keep bounds on cross-pollination, and foster or eliminate specific social traits. After some centuries of development, the Hellenes were considered a successful experiment, although the Guardians' claims of influence are perhaps less strong than the Guardians profess. With minor prompting, the ancient Greek people left their islands and began to spread. By the late fourth century BC, the Hellenistic culture had spread to the surrounding mainland behind Alexander, the great general. And behind him came several Greek Guardian cabals, working to win over Persian Guardian cabals that might otherwise oppose the conquering armies, hoping to convince the Persian Guardians that the Greek way was best for the goals of their order. When the Greek Guardians could not win their argument with words, they did so using swords and magic. For all their claims to a higher form of reason and culture, they resorted to violence with all the passion and exuberance characteristic of the Greeks.

Mystery Cults

The Greek Guardians discovered an institution that would become one of the most important and recognized efforts in the order: the Labyrinth. It is said that at Eleusis, not far from Athens, a Guardian going by the shadow name of Admeta, in search of enlightenment through hardship, took the position of nurse to a wealthy family. As she stayed there, she learned that her hosts and the king were the founders of a secret fellowship. Practicing mystic rites they believed had been given them by Demeter, they tested themselves to determine who was worthy of happiness after death. Greatly intrigued, Admeta revealed herself as a keeper of Mysteries and offered to share occult knowledge, adding to the Eleusinians' catalog of rites and wisdoms. The information she passed on was false but compelling, and it earned her initiation into the cult.

The mystery cults grew in popularity, spawning new forms, from the Dionysian to the Orphic Mysteries. They were magnets for those unsatisfied by the more common Hellenic religion and those who sought personal power or wanted to unravel occult enigmas. Guardians used what Admeta had learned at Eleusis to create their own cults, using them to attract and weed out the unworthy while also giving proven Sleepers the chance to be slowly roused from their Quiescence. The Guardians of the Veil, always kept busy seeking and distracting the world's secret-hunters, were happily surprised to see the Sleepers heading voluntarily for a ready blind. In order to prevent the mystery cults' effectiveness from waning, some Guardians would occasionally use vulgar magic to provoke intense experience in cultists, to spur the cults' spread to new lands.

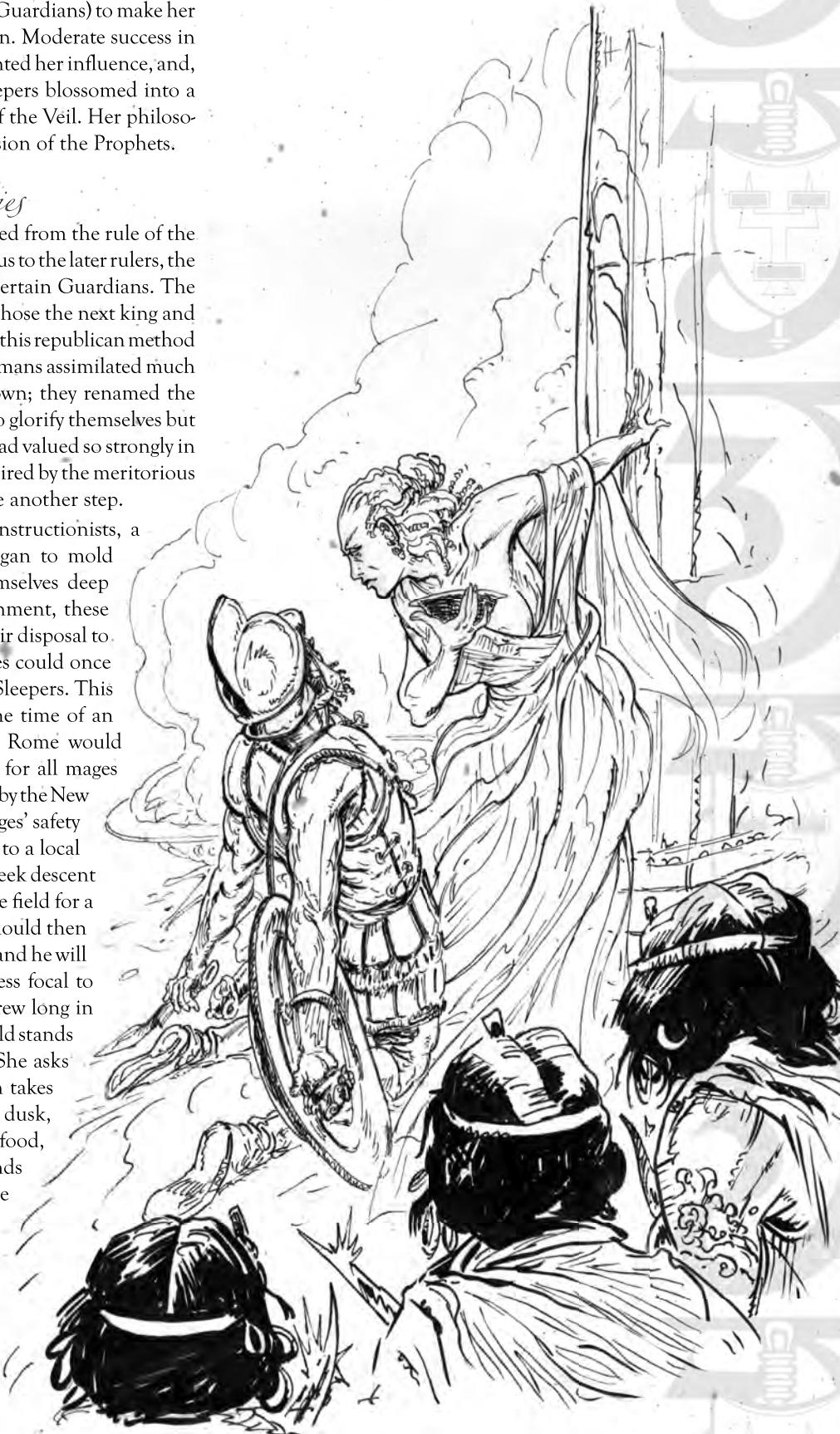
Admeta was a member of a small clique among the Guardians that believed in constantly testing themselves and others to prove worth. Her efforts within the Labyrinth gained her enough credit and fame (among other Guardians) to make her a successful advocate of that conviction. Moderate success in culling new initiates to the order cemented her influence, and, over the next century, the Ordeal Keepers blossomed into a recognized faction of the Guardians of the Veil. Her philosophies also influenced the modern version of the Prophets.

Old History, New Enemies

After Greece came Rome. As it passed from the rule of the legendary Romulus and Numa Pompilius to the later rulers, the city's unique constitution impressed certain Guardians. The Senate, representative of the citizens, chose the next king and directed the state, and something about this republican method resonated with the Guardians. The Romans assimilated much of the Hellenistic culture into their own; they renamed the various gods and reshaped the myths to glorify themselves but kept the qualities that the Guardians had valued so strongly in the Greeks. Some Guardians grew inspired by the meritorious nature of the budding republic to take another step.

Identifying themselves as New Constructionists, a group of Roman-born Guardians began to mold the city to their ends. Situating themselves deep within the burgeoning Roman government, these Guardians used all the resources at their disposal to create in Rome a land where the mages could once more rule, although unknown to the Sleepers. This would not be another Atlantis, for the time of an Awakened City had passed. Instead, Rome would become a refuge for willworkers, safe for all mages regardless of affiliation. The laws passed by the New Constructionists would ensure the mages' safety in, and control of, the city. According to a local history, the hoary old Guardians of Greek descent had this to say: "If a man must leave the field for a chamber, he will desire the field. He should then make the chamber as large as the field, and he will miss the field no more." Guardians less focal to the history of Rome, for its shadow grew long in those times, pass on these words: "A child stands upon her hill at dusk, with nothing. She asks the setting sun for water, and the sun takes pity on her. She stands upon her hill at dusk, with water. She asks the setting sun for food, and the sun blesses her again. She stands upon her hill, fed and watered, and she asks the sun for shelter. The sun boils away her water and burns her food to dust. She sits on her hill."

Accounts differ within the order. Although today Rome is generally considered by Guardians to have been a failure, most Guardians tell



that the New Constructionists, led by a mage who had taken to calling himself Fasces, acted to turn Rome from a republic-led monarchy into the first true republic. Fasces allegedly set the vulgar tone of the project when he engineered the rape and suicide that historically triggered the end of the monarchy, although other oral histories claim that Fasces and his New Constructionists did nothing more than take advantage of an opportune tragedy. Most tales usually agree that the first Consuls were Lucretia's husband and a Guardian of the Veil, and that Fasces chose to remain behind the scenes.

"Fasces was born a pleb," growls one teacher, "and the power of the plebeians constantly grew during the history of Rome. Is it any surprise, with such base motivation, that the Republic was flawed and fell?" "As a patrician," lectures another, "Fasces made an improper effort to maintain the superiority of his class. With his intentions so skewed from true, the fall of his creation was inevitable." The truth of Fasces' birth, remembered as he is only by his shadow name, is lost to time, but that doesn't prevent mages from declaring him one or the other for the purpose of their teachings. Histories prevalent among Guardians of Western cultures remember Fasces as a misguided pioneer. Rome would be special, he said, because mages would not openly rule, yet they would be free to practice the Ars Mysteriorum. Detractors of the effort claimed that it held no regard for the well-being of the Tapestry, that such an effort brought the Veil too close to the Sleepers and that Fasces was luxuriating in his fast-growing influence. The detractors were soon drowned out by the New Constructionists' increasing volume of supporters. When the plebeians unexpectedly marched out of the city and forced the patricians to grant them rights, including the right to privacy and representation, the New Constructionists took advantage of the situation. Privacy was exactly what they needed to complete the magic-friendly society they sought.

The New Constructionists supported the spread of the Romans' society. The state began to conquer as much of the world as possible and, with some help from the Guardians, Roman civilization was almost infectious. Most subjugated peoples adopted Roman practices rather easily, and since Roman citizens had proved as eager to practice the secret mystery cults as the Greeks had, the Guardians were more than satisfied with their progress. Rome itself had blossomed into a metropolitan city with a significant Awakened population. As the Republic's influence spread, cabals of every order learned of the refuge the city provided, and many moved there. Rome became home to hundreds of mages, all of whom enjoyed the freedom and safety the city provided. Mages, whether technically of the patrician or plebeian classes, all earned or were given memberships in private societies, allowing them access to theatres, baths and other recreational facilities enchanted for privacy and built upon activated soul stones, giving the mages all the opportunity to invoke vulgar spells without endangering the fabric of the Tapestry.

The mages carefully arranged to have no more and no less than one Awakened Tribune at all times, forever defending the laws and rights that allowed the mages their freedom. It seemed as though a small Atlantis had returned to the world.

All was not well with the Roman state, however. The legions of Rome had encountered the city-state of Carthage once already, during the First Punic War, and defeated the Carthaginians. After an unimaginably quick recovery, Carthage was once again ready to battle the mages' Republic. Hannibal, leader of the Carthaginians, swore an oath to destroy Rome that some say was backed with the magic of Fate. When the two nations again clashed, they warred for nearly two decades. At the Battle of Cannae, Hannibal managed to completely destroy a Roman army at small loss to his own forces. After Scipio Africanus reversed Rome's fortunes and defeated Carthage, Hannibal managed to once again put Carthage on the road to regrowth before Guardians of the Veil assassins took up his trail. Remarkably, he seemed to predict their arrival and fled to Africa where, when cornered, he took his own life rather than be questioned. A belief held by some Guardians, that Hannibal was a mage of an as-yet-hidden order, has been handed down through the years couched in this children's rhyme:

*Hannibal, Hannibal, mad monster man,
Eating all the Romans who fall into his hand.
One dead, two dead, three dead, four,
Why does not a drop of blood spill upon the land?
Sees all, hears all, builds with stone on fire,
Why is there no body on his funer' pyre?*

Only decades later, more trouble began to rear in Rome. Roman-born mages were beginning to take their turns as Tribunes, coming to the office with personal politics, rather than only the desire to defend the mages' freedom in the city (and, now, in cities subject to the Republic's rule). Mages, especially of the Silver Ladder, began to take temporal power through public office. It took little time for the Senate to become a forum for bickering mages, all but discussing the secret Mysteries in the open. A series of dictatorships severely reduced the power of the Senate, and multiple slave revolts rocked the Republic. With a number of mages influencing the Republic's governance, no single mage could rise to complete power, since he was always checked by another mage. With the mages' attention turned too often upon themselves, they failed to effectively hinder the rise to power of Augustus Caesar, who became the first emperor of Rome. Guardians could see the path their "noble experiment" would thenceforth take, and they began to question their allegiance to Rome.

The inexplicable fall from republic to empire, combined with the worrisome mystery of Hannibal, prompted local Guardians to perform some investigations into the increasingly complex city of Rome. They found several small, unregistered Demesnes, frequented by mages known to be members of no order and commonly assumed to be apostates. Taking desperate measures, the local Eopt sanctioned the acquisition and interrogation of one such mage. Once the Guardians had prevented her from killing herself, they learned of the Seers of the Throne. Though the Guardians could not learn much of the order's history, the captive's ranting taught them a great deal about the Seers' beliefs.

Before Rome, the Atlantean orders had encountered cabals that claimed to serve the Exarchs. These heretics, outlaws from Awakened society, usually lived in forsaken places. They were not believed to be working with other similar cabals in any sort

of ideological tradition or political network. The Atlantean orders were clearly wrong. Careful surveillance led the Roman Guardians to the discovery that these presumed apostates, these Seers of the Throne, had the ear of the new emperor. The Guardians knew then that Rome's time had come.

A rhyme from antiquity, still spoken among Guardians, says this:

Little boy blue
Blow on your horn
The wolf tears at sheepflesh
The crow eats the corn.
The farmer is sleeping
and will not awake
Dreaming of dinner
and blood-jelly cake.
Little boy blue
Put down your horn
Leave the dead farmer
and take up the sword.

Remembering how obstinate the other orders had been about believing bad news delivered in the past by the Guardians, they arranged for their source to be "captured" by a member of the Silver Ladder whom the Guardians considered true. He would serve to inform the other mages of the new danger and the corruption of Rome. The Guardians would already be gone, earning accusations of "leaving a sinking ship."

Legendary Figures

No matter how proud the Guardians may be of their oral records, it is impossible for anyone to maintain a perfect record throughout long periods of history. Given that the Guardians have been operating as small units with only limited contact for decidedly more than 2,000 years, not surprisingly, some of their legends contradict each other. It is also unsurprising that some Guardians claim famous figures as brethren in the order, as the Guardians' forerunners. Even (and especially) mages suffer from the very human need for the vindication that such a noble heritage might provide — or for the justification given by ascribing mighty powers and foul associations to a legendary enemy.

Some claim that Alexander was a brilliant Guardian strategist, working to spread the Greek culture that had proven so valuable to his order; some even claim a mystical or even biological heritage from him, or both. Critics of this theory suggest that its proponents only want to be able to claim noble ancestry, magical or otherwise. Others claim a more oblique honor by suggesting that he was an Adamantine Arrow whom the order manipulated. Only the humble (and, some say, the wise) admit that he was probably a charismatic Sleeper with a head for war.

Of Hannibal, on the other hand, the Guardians' legends are less complimentary. A popular theory is that the adversary of Rome was a powerful mage who belonged to the Seers of the Throne. Another history makes him a mage of one of the "barbarian" orders that existed outside of Atlantis but were believed dead even by Hannibal's time, even their names lost to most mage histories. Some say he was an Arrow or Ladder mage who opposed the spread of Rome without any other particular animosity, and other tales about the man even include hints that he was a demon or Abyssal creature of some kind. There is really no proof, however, that Hannibal was anything more or less than a man.

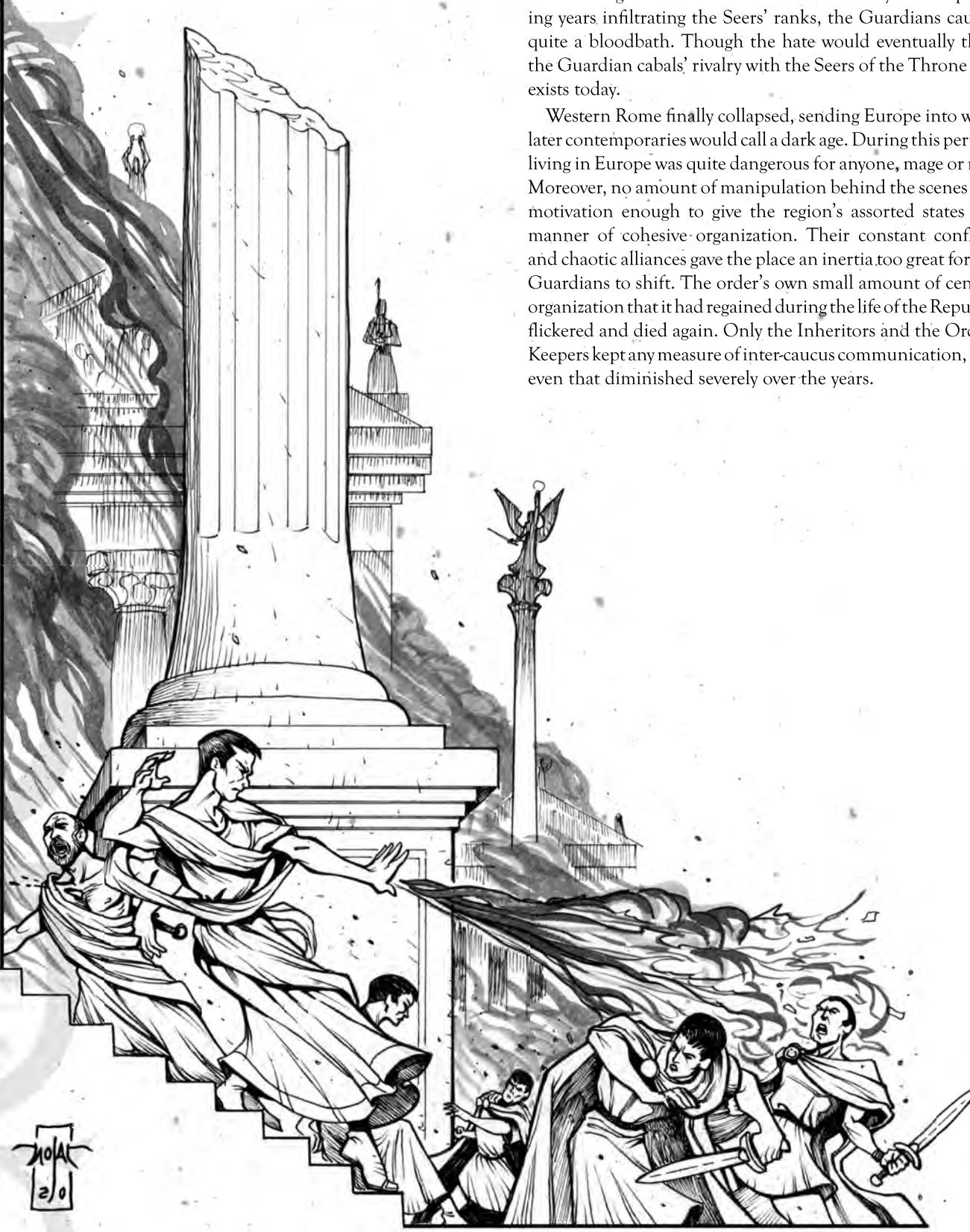
While all the Atlantean orders have a habit of claiming historical figures as their own, Guardians of the Veil prefer to believe that they successfully keep their heads down and out of history's eye.

Into the Future

The Guardians of the Veil were once more in exodus from a collapsing mage state, but this time before it truly collapsed. Roman society had spread through large portions of Europe and Asia, and Guardian caucuses in far-flung regions helped Roman Guardians disperse and establish themselves throughout the Empire and beyond. For the most part, Guardian cabals returned from Rome to the places of their ancestry, though they made some efforts not to concentrate themselves too greatly. Eventually, Christianity began to spread. Though there was an air of the supernatural about the event, those Guardians who had refused to abandon Rome could not discover any concrete evidence pointing at influence from the Seers or any other group of which they were aware. Three centuries later, when Constantine's edict declared Christianity the state religion and spread the belief like wildfire, the students of those Guardians' students again felt interference. Contrary to their suspicion, Constantine was proven not to be Awakened. Unable to detect even the residue of controlling magic, the Guardians once more let the matter drop.

Though Rome's fall was evident for some time from without, Guardians who still lived there were somewhat blinded by Rome's opulence and majesty. Their waning influence, however, prevented them from checking a rise in the popularity of magic. Charms, talismans and spells became common goods sought and traded by the populace, who sought love charms, healing cures or the promise of forbidden knowledge. Charlatans abounded, although some mages found even more freedom in this environment, and themselves profited by selling actual cures or spells, or even presided over religious cults that exalted them as gods or relied on speaking statues or animated puppets to impress the gulls.

When the Goths sacked the legendary city, the local caucuses considered it the final result of the poison the Seers had



introduced into the state's bloodstream so many years ago – and the last insult. Masters of the Guardians, seeking some form of vengeance, consummated the Republic's death with an assassination campaign against every Seer of the Throne and their agents the Guardians could identify. After spending years infiltrating the Seers' ranks, the Guardians caused quite a bloodbath. Though the hate would eventually thin, the Guardian cabals' rivalry with the Seers of the Throne still exists today.

Western Rome finally collapsed, sending Europe into what later contemporaries would call a dark age. During this period, living in Europe was quite dangerous for anyone, mage or not. Moreover, no amount of manipulation behind the scenes was motivation enough to give the region's assorted states any manner of cohesive organization. Their constant conflicts and chaotic alliances gave the place an inertia too great for the Guardians to shift. The order's own small amount of central organization that it had regained during the life of the Republic flickered and died again. Only the Inheritors and the Ordeal Keepers kept any measure of inter-caucus communication, and even that diminished severely over the years.

From that point on, the Guardians remained covert. They evolved into the form the order still bears in modern times. Guardians of the Veil watched the Awakened and supernatural communities and, when necessary, took action to prevent the Sleepers from becoming suspicious. Guardians maintained the Labyrinth and tended it while it grew from a few popular cults into dozens of interlaced secret organizations. At times, it almost seemed to grow naturally. At others, its Guardians had to prune it away (disbanding the Templars) or again encourage its evolution into other forms (some variants of Buddhism, among others). Although the order made small gestures at promoting a second growth of civilization, the Guardians were satisfied to wait while the world progressed on its own. Where other mages decided to meddle, the Guardians were always watching. And the truth of it was that little interference was required. Human persistence brought Europe out of its darkness and into the Renaissance; the recovery of high civilization spread to the other continents. The Guardians, of course, followed.

For a brief period of time, a Guardian caucus in London established an “order-wide headquarters,” inviting all Guardians of the Veil to coordinate through the “center of the world, the British Empire.” Other, foreign cabals, not nearly as infatuated with the Empire as those native to it, did not take advantage of the offer, and the caucus soon lapsed. The same caucus opposed the American Revolution in an attempt to keep the wonderfully manipulatable British Empire intact, but other forces opposed them. The secession was first in a series that dismayed British Guardians by dismantling the Empire of the Sun.

Other Histories

Eastern Guardians claim to have avoided the great mistakes of their Western counterparts. Eastern Guardians insist that their culture never created the drive for a New Atlantis and they don’t have a “travesty” like Rome in their history. Chinese Guardians also contend with the common assertion that the Labyrinth originated in the West. They claim to have been bending sects of Taoism and Confucianism to the Guardians’ purposes of concealing truth since before word of the Guardian-influenced mystery cults could have ever reached China. Western Guardians write this off as a conceit, but it is a point of pride among some of their Asian counterparts. However indeterminable the point may be, there are certainly many facets of the eastern Labyrinth. Guardians of the East have many parables that describe how their magical ancestors interfered with the direction of a society and suffered consequences. Though many believe these are no more than moralistic tales, Guardians still often debate the stories’ potential historical accuracy.

Guardians of the Americas have a variety of conflicting histories and names for themselves, but one common element is that they, unlike Guardians elsewhere, did not develop their own Labyrinth. They instead wove their magic as a part of Sleeper society, finding the Great Mystery to be the Sleepers’ expression of the Supernal World. The American Guardians

served their tribes as speakers to the gods and spirits, and avoided vulgar magic and Paradoxes while directing their communities in how to worship without “offending the Great Spirit” (harming the true Mysteries); these Guardians created sacred places (Hallows or Demesnes) where none but they were to tread. When European civilizations began to impinge on the indigenous American cultures, and Guardians from the long-sundered order on two continents met for the first time in centuries, it took a while for them to recognize one another. Only in those places where they met in peace and with enough trust to discuss their deeply held secret traditions did they realize that they shared the same ancestry in a mythic, long-lost civilization and its dying edict to protect magic from the unworthy.

Today

Not since the age of Atlantis had the order been more capable of communicating with cabals and caucuses from across the world. But the order doesn’t do so. Although various ideologies have spread throughout the order, making certain factional alignments more prevalent worldwide, the Guardians of the Veil has never coalesced into the cohesive organization that oral history suggests the order was before the Fall. Instead, the increased degree of contact just gives disparate elements of the order more opportunities to come into conflict. Epopts argue over how much to keep secret – from each other and from the other orders. The mages who follow the Prophets faction are constantly trying to loosen the stringent restrictions on sharing data, and their small victories help defuse some of the constant resentment other orders hold for the Guardians, making deals possible.

Inheritors prefer to classify information as soon as they find it, concealing anything remotely useful behind mysterious parables and unbreakable mental codes. Because many of the Awakened world’s new occult secrets are discovered by the able Mysterium, cabals make great efforts, at the Inheritors’ directions, to successfully insert agents into that order. Most of the spies are placed among the Mysterium exploration teams that delve into ancient tombs and ruins to recover lost knowledge. The spies report on the team’s progress so that another cabal, called in either by the factional higher-ups or by the local Epopt, can steal in and judge the information safe before they let the Mysterium mages at it. Sometimes, the moles must act quickly to obscure information or, in worst-case scenarios, use Mind spells to fix the incident. Some Guardians – often Inheritors, but not always – have taken positions among the Mysterium’s higher ranks, ready to intercept dangerous knowledge before it becomes too widely known. Messianic Guardians also have moles in the other orders, not in order to obscure information or gain political advantage (although they do both of those things when it is opportune) but to watch the other orders for the potential appearance of the Hieromagus.

Guardians tend to concentrate much of their resources, those they can spare from the Labyrinth and other day-to-day affairs, in tracking the Free Council, the Seers of the Throne and the dangerous Banishers. Of all the orders of the Pentacle,

the Guardians consider the Free Council the most problematic and infiltrate it in order to better track its movements. Guardians rarely need to infiltrate the Council's ranks deeper than its initiates, because even initiates are allowed to attend and speak at Assemblies. There, agents learn and report most of the Free Council's decisions, and the Guardians can begin to counter whatever foolish idea the Council comes up with. The Libertines occasionally organize specialized panels in order to more effectively determine the solution to a problem, but attendees of the Assemblies still know the panels' general goals. Profiles of the mages who compose a panel, gathered by the same method, give the Guardians further information on any decisions the panel may eventually make. Guardians also regularly arrange raids on the Council's Lorehouses through second parties, though the Guardians make a point of appropriating the knowledge and disseminating it among the wise and the true instead of simply destroying it. Stopping those leaks of the Mysteries is a satisfying success for any mage from the Guardians of the Veil.

Grudges generally have no place in espionage, and the Guardians recognize and respect that in all but one fraction of their duty. The Seers of the Throne, for serving the hated Exarchs, are the Guardians of the Veil's most hated enemies. Also, because the Seers are the Guardians' best counterparts in the world of magical espionage, the relationship between Guardians and the Seers they meet often becomes emotionally laden and full of rivalry. The Guardians are constantly trying to insinuate mages into the Panoptic Ministry, the Seers' espionage division, or subvert Seers of the Throne to the Guardians' ends. If any cabal has successfully insinuated a spy among the Panoptics, the spy's cabalmates are wisely keeping such information quiet. The few mages with Sleeper or Sleepwalker agents close to the Ministry also keep tight lips. Guardians also often target the Praetorian Ministry, the Seers of the Throne's offices of war, and trade what information the Guardians learn to the Adamantine Arrows for occasional favors. The Guardians also have eyes in the Hegemonic, Pantechicon and Paternoster Ministries, as well as several regional tetrarchies and many smaller Ministries. Guardians of the Veil are all trained to spot the telltale signs of a Seer of the Throne: a Guardian in any assignment who spots a magical tool with an odd word written on it becomes immediately suspicious.

Banishers are an oddity. They don't try to infiltrate the orders or steal and horde secrets of the Ars Mysteriorum. They spend their time killing mages and destroying hard-earned lore. The Guardians of the Veil may not always want magic to be known, but they want it to be safe. This ambition causes them to lend whatever aid possible to the hunts for mage-killers when they arise. There is usually very little espionage involved in finding and destroying Banishers, because they leave obvious trails of blood and ashes from the lives and libraries of their victims, but the Guardians' focus on investigation makes them valuable detectives in tracking the quarry.

As for the other magical orders, they all receive some manner of secret attention from the Guardians of the Veil. Adamantine Arrows, while often too blunt with their magic, are honorable

mages who attempt to live by the Lex Magica when possible. The Guardian informants among them are there to return evaluations of the order's responses and reactions to events initiated by the Silver Ladder and the Free Council. The Silver Ladder is a higher priority target than the Arrow. The order still possesses its ancient ambition and innate leadership qualities. Guardians of the Veil keep track of the Ladder's efforts to raise the standing of mages in the Fallen World to the point of ruling it. The Guardians also watch carefully the Sleepers whom the Silver Ladder attempts to Awaken; the Guardians' cause is quietly reassured every time they must sweep another misguided mortal into the designs of the Labyrinth.

Unbreakable Redoubts

Some Guardian cabals maintain sanctums distant from their region, in one of the world's million middle-of-nowhere. Most sanctums are small, little more than homes lost in a forest or huts in a desert someplace, remembered only by the landlords and the governments, or, if the Guardians can help it, by no one. In these isolated places, the Guardians practice strange and vulgar spells far from the sight of human or mage. They conceal captive Seers or Banishers in spell-forged cells that resist magical escape. Guardians test Sleepers and Sleepwalkers, probing the limits of unAwakened souls in a quest to turn the former into the latter. Mages of all the orders, even their own, suspect Guardians of performing mad experiments intended to somehow make better the Fallen World for the mages and to aid them in slowing the inevitable degradation of magic. While this is occasionally the truth, these rare redoubts are more often used for archival purposes. The dossiers in these archives may contain information that any Seer (or even a mage of the Silver Ladder) would give his teeth to possess, but the archives are still little more than vastly private, encrypted references, used only to help a Guardian's impressive memory recall the details about a Seer's Ministry or an important event.

Finance

Modern business attracts many powerful individuals, and powerful individuals sometimes attract the attention of the Guardians of the Veil. Money and merchandise once flowed along the lines of power, but, over the centuries, business has become such a powerful force in the world that power now flows along the lines dictated by money and goods. The Guardians recognize that there are many who would appreciate having a piece of that pie, including the Seers of the Throne, the Silver Ladder and the more ambitious supernatural creatures — especially those that were once human. Guardians want to keep an eye on all of them. The Guardians work to ensure that the Seers don't attain enough temporal power to overwhelm the Pentacle on that front. The Guardians give the Ladder more leeway but watch carefully for signs of an "economic Atlantis" project, and watch to make sure nothing supernatural draws too much attention to itself and the Invisible World. While Guardians working in economics claim they don't want the power for themselves, they have found that they have to be a part of the financial world in order to effectively police it. As a result, Guardians of the Veil



who watch such things have integrated themselves into financial institutions around the world so that they may understand the institutions and, through that understanding, see what they need to see. Most Guardians consider such a focus on economics misspent and hire Sleeper analysts instead.

The other way that many Guardians use business is as a front for their other needs. An illegitimate enterprise is much more likely to go unseen if there is a (supposedly) legitimate enterprise lying atop it, and the Guardians of the Veil use small businesses extensively for this purpose. They use their fronts in the same way that most Sleeper organizations do, and for the same things: laundering money, as cover for Sleeping and Awakened agents, to aid in smuggling weapons and acquiring illegal technology or just to have places in which to meet. Guardians favor mid-size businesses in uninteresting lines of work — print and copy shops, data processing offices and banks, all local or regional, are favorites. These businesses are easier to control than larger concerns and attract less attention, but they still provide enough numerical leeway to make doctoring the books a fairly simple task. Additionally, large successful businesses are eventually scrutinized by supernatural interests, either the go-getters and corporate climbers or people who think the company would be a good front or tool of their own.

Continental Divides

Different regions call for different treatments, and there are many unique sites around the world that require special attention. Guardians of the Veil in different countries have their own specific branches of the Labyrinth and curious superstitions to deal with, with unique difficulties posed by each.

North America

It would come as a surprise to the other orders that the Guardians of the Veil pay little attention to the government of what many consider to be the most powerful nation in the world. Guardians, on the other hand, are happy both to leave the politics to others and let the rest of the Pentacle believe otherwise. The Silver Ladder and the Seers of the Throne are more cautious when the Guardians pretend to involve themselves in politics. But, for the most part, the way a Guardian leans usually depends on the party or politics her family supported as she was raised.

Of course, the Guardians are heavily aware of if not actively involved in the intelligence community; they are often recruited from its ranks. While they often take an apolitical stance, uncaring of the transitory comings and goings of those who hold political office, they do take an interest in how policy affects the US intelligence community.

In many other parts of the world, Guardians focus on clearly delineable cults, traditional schisms and heresies for their work on the Labyrinth. In the United States and Canada, the method is different. It is easier to target the New Agers, Baha'i, students of Zen and other movements less related to the more traditional and prevalent religions. Guardians don't ignore the impact and sheer strength of the older faiths, though. Facets of the Catholic Opus Dei have long had hidden connections to the magical order; through them and the Stonemasons, Guardians could choose to exercise a certain amount of influence throughout the continent.

Fewer mages outside the order would suspect that some Guardians spend their entire careers living in Los Angeles, controlling what representations of magic and the occult are seen in film, or in New York, manipulating broadcast television and some of the most widely read publications in North America. Guardians work to keep mystical truths out of the vast circulation available to these corporations, but real efforts to disseminate information by way of these companies are rare. The Guardians use the powerful media outlets more than the order restricts them, turning Hollywood and the television networks into arrows and stop signs for Sleepers traversing the Labyrinth. Recognition of a cult or alternative medicinal practice by the popular media is one of the surer ways to make underground occultists throw down their theories in disgust, and an article that carefully ignores one aspect of a puzzle can convince a seeker that the cult must be the true path.

Most people of Mexico are Catholic or Protestant, but these religions have always been tempered by the local Native American beliefs. The variance in practice from region to region spawns the occasional cult and gives the Guardians an opportunity to add on to the complex Labyrinth.

Africa

Trouble comes and goes all over the world, but in the African nations trouble never seems to cease. African Adamantine Arrows often seem to revel in the constant warfare, Silver Ladders take advantage of the many opportunities for political advancement or control, Mysterium mages seek ancient wisdom and some cabals of the Free Council spend their time fomenting revolt or aiding relief efforts. The Guardians must watch them all carefully, for they are easy to lose track of in the region's chaos. The weak infrastructure means falling off the map is as simple as walking away, and the people are easier to wow with miracles.

The West African branch of the Labyrinth is largely centered around Vodoun and other spiritual traditions. There are millions of people who practice Vodoun as a religion; in regions where they are the minorities, they make good foundation for the Guardians' efforts. Some spirits enjoy interacting with the

practitioners of Vodoun, trading the spirits' powers for worship and ritual. Guardians of the Veil use bribes and threats to coerce these spirits into shedding such habits. Followers of Vodoun who pursue it into the world of the occult find dozens of entrances into the Labyrinth: ancient distortions of the Orphic mysteries are not uncommon. In the rest of Africa, Christianity (the Coptic Church) and Islam are the most prevalent facets of the Labyrinth.

Finally, there are some regions that are truly unspoiled by humanity, or nearly so, and retain some special properties. The deepest reaches of the Sahara Desert are still a useful refuge when a mage needs to escape the taint of Disbelief. Some mages return from sojourns in the desert with tales of astral journeys that seemed more natural than those made elsewhere. Most Guardians of the Veil are skeptical, but Sleepers are said to Awaken with an unsettling frequency in the region.

Europe

The many nations of Great Britain and the Continent are fertile grounds for all sorts of Labyrinthine activity. The many nations of Europe all have different facets to their daily religious life, making minor schisms, unnoticed by the main body of the faith, common. Over the centuries, many minor societies have appeared and disappeared. Some died out, and others became so secretive that history thought them gone for good. Guardians of the Veil still make good use of the opportunities provided by this environment today. The prevalence of Roman Catholicism in Europe means that many of these cults are based in some way on the Christian faith. One successful branch of the Labyrinth with a long history is the Albigenses. Some Guardians fear that the European Union will make it more difficult for them to maintain and propagate the Labyrinth by unifying the nations, but most oppose or support the EU for nationalistic and political reasons unrelated to the Ars Mysteriorum. New Age facets of the Labyrinth also find a great deal of followers in Europe, where, similar to the United States, people are looking for a new spiritualism.

Vatican City is home to at least one cabal of Guardians who claim to be tending a facet of the Labyrinth that goes straight to the top. Few other Guardians believe them. Messianic Guardians watch the Vatican, often hoping to find the Hieromagus there.

Asia

Guardians of the Veil caucuses are quite busy in Asia. Apart from merely watching Russia for Supernal or supernatural activity, the local Guardians prize the area as a breeding ground for Sleeping and Awakened recruits. Although the region around Moscow is financially strong, most of the nation is still under great economic stress. Many citizens are still suffering from disillusionment after the official failure of communism. Between the need for money and the desire for a pursuable ideal, Russia and some of the nations that broke off with the dissolution of the USSR are perfect places to find new agents.

The Orthodox Church, prevalent in Russia until the 1917 revolution, never completely disappeared. Even while atheistic propaganda spread under the Soviet government, the faith-

ful congregated in secret. Masters of hidden meetings, the Guardians of the day took advantage of the persecution to induct a host of the new cults and religious societies into the Labyrinth. Today, with the increase in personal freedoms and the resurgence of the Church, Guardians are working overtime to keep the new branches from collapsing beneath the strain or becoming too public. The Guardians will inevitably lose a few, but the increase in alternative beliefs, from Tarot readings to crystal-based "magick," is giving the Guardians an opportunity to catch many more interested individuals in their nets.

Shanghai and Hong Kong require a different sort of touch. Religion, while significantly more free than it was during the Communist Party's heyday, still suffers many restrictions. Though the traditional beliefs of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are once again accepted and practiced openly, the government continues to persecute some other faiths, including Islam, Christianity and the new Falun Gong. The last, especially, provides Guardians with a superior opportunity to integrate themselves into the popular religious movement and single out people around which splinter groups form, using them as an entrance into the Labyrinth. Nestorianism, an Orthodox group split from the core Church, has survived in China for more than 1,500 years and has long been deep in the Labyrinth. Additionally, several artifacts and mysteries from the early dynasties remain to be found throughout China, especially in the Yangtze River Delta. In order to maintain surveillance of the dangerous secrets of the world, the Guardians of the Veil must monitor Awakened and Sleeping research expeditions in the region carefully.

There are a great many mysteries to be uncovered in India. Hinduism and its offspring, yoga, give birth to many offshoots, all ripe for the Labyrinth. The Guardians tend many ancient branches of the Labyrinth here, including the Lingam Nandi, a Hindu society devoted to Shiva. Guardians constantly mine the Arya Samaj for cults or cultists; because it rejects castes, Arya Samaj attracts many of the lower castes and the untouchables. Finally, Zoroastrianism maintains a small but devoted presence in the region. This faith is closer to the Guardians than most others; the notion of the Asha and Drug are near to the Guardian conception of Wisdom and the Lie.

There are often Guardian agents in place about the Dalai Lama's monastery in Tibet. Some are Messianics, there to protect the foretold bodhisattva from the whims of the supernatural. They choose not to claim initiates from the region, despite a relative abundance of souls with a predisposition toward Awakening, and instead direct the newly Awakened to other orders, fully expecting the Hieromagus to come from these ranks. Other Guardians are there to watch other mages, such as those of the Mysterium and Free Council, as they try to derive true Supernal meaning from the symbols surrounding the Lama's office. Guardians also shunt some inquisitive monks into monasteries belonging to the Labyrinth.

In the Middle East, much of the Labyrinth is built around the sects of Shia Islam. Both the Twelvers and the Seveners have significant presences in the region's Labyrinth, and the Muslim Guardians work hard to keep Sleepers to either the true faith (whatever version the Guardian practices) or shunt them into an accepted cult. The Chalcedony Ash is a secret religious society within the Coptic Church, strongly supported over the years by the Guardians of the Veil. In Israel sits the Geonim, a hidden organization of Orthodox Jews protecting a secret, oral portion of the Torah. Some branches of the organization can be found in the United States and throughout Europe, but most of the Geonim's strength is in Jerusalem. Safedites, followers of the Kabbalah, also exist anywhere Judaism does, but are underrepresented in Israel.

South America

Guardian interests in the Americas south of the equator are varied. For one thing, the continent displays a remarkable homogeneity in its religious constitution: the vast majority of South America's inhabitants are Roman Catholic. The region's inconstant nature makes it a perfect place for small religious offshoots to take root and be exploited for the Guardians' uses. Contemporary commingling of old African beliefs with Christianity have resulted in Macumba, Umbanda and other new faiths with small but robust followings, providing good fodder for the Labyrinth. In Brazil, Pentecostal groups are gaining popularity and beginning to spread somewhat, allowing Guardians to take advantage of people joining new beliefs to pick the best people for later use. Argentinian Guardians sometimes attempt to manipulate the government through the Roman Catholic president; though the nation's current leader hasn't been mazed, past leaders have been, and there's nothing to stop the Guardians from continuing to try.

South Pacific

Australia and New Zealand are similar to Europe, in that similar religious movement create similar opportunities for the Labyrinth. The supernatural secrets hidden in the interior of the Australian continent, however, attract curious mages and even Sleepers, and the Guardians must police these seekers lest they unleash a bound spirit or other dangerous artifact from the past. Some local Guardians speak of the lost continent of Lemuria, their name for Atlantis, and claim that the first Exiles came to Australia and the South Pacific islands and hid many secrets here. The Guardians' duty is to keep others from finding out too much about this legend.

The Guardians find little reason to maintain the Labyrinth amidst the many islands, or in Indonesia or New Guinea. Strange supernatural occurrences are known in these places, but they rarely spread outwards to contaminate other places. The few Guardians from these cultures see their duty as one of defending taboos, by maintaining magical wards and ceremonies designed to keep supernatural disasters at bay; these Guardians can be quite dogmatic.



CHAPTER TWO: MASQUE AND VEIL

Saladin closed the door behind him, making sure it had sealed properly so that the automatic locks would engage and keep others from entering. He then crossed the sparse, perfectly clean room and opened the closet doors, stepping back to take in with a single glance the 49 costumes that hung from silver hangers.

He examined them all, calculating which of the Masques would be most appropriate for the task that faced him. The Bright Mantle? The enchanted red pleather jacket and pants would magically transform him into a convincing sybarite, which would get him access to where he needed to go. But once inside, what then?

The Weaver of Whispers, then? The nondescript, thrift store jacket would give him an aura of connectedness to the street, enough that others would come to him for favors. But he needed to work fast tonight, and he had no time to play the game of tit for tat.

No. Tonight it would have to be the Sceptor. He needed to give orders and have them heeded. He wouldn't have much time before the clever ones saw through the disguise, but it might be time enough.

He reached into the closet and pulled out an expensive suit. He laid it on the nearby bed and began to undress, exchanging his casual clothes for formal ones. As he buttoned the top button and cinched the tie, his face changed, melting into something fatter, older and darker. He felt his face, smiling at the bristly feel of the thin moustache and the mole by the lips.

He was ready. Johnny Luciano, cousin and captain to the local mob boss, stepped out on the town.

I have always loved truth so passionately that I have often resorted to lying as a way of introducing it into the minds which were ignorant of its charms.

— Giacomo Casanova

To lie during a mission against the Great Lie: it's an irony that's never lost on Guardians of the Veil. The mages of this order preach humble service to tame this apparent contradiction and distance themselves from ambitious counterparts in the Seers of the Throne. The Guardians of the Veil are masters of occult espionage who officially describe themselves as police, custodians and servitors of worthy mages.

Yet Guardians have a judgmental culture. They believe that the Supernal Realms are so pure, their power so vital, that merely discovering a Watchtower should not alone guarantee a mage's Awakened station. They hold that mages should prove themselves worthy to wield the Arcana for the good of other mages without deepening the Abyss. While the order theoretically accepts the political primacy of the Silver Ladder, the Guardians influence affairs before they ever reach the Consilium or any other political forum. Guardians of the Veil prefer mages to choose for themselves, yes — but only from options that the order approves.

Thus, the order clashes with mages who resent self-appointed secret police and Sleepers who want to uncover occult mysteries. Many Guardians are excellent spies, executioners and diplomats, and ply these trades using a combination of magic and the best practices of ancient and modern espionage. What others most often overlook, though, is that Guardians consider themselves prophets of a victorious age to come. They exert power cautiously because they believe that a true Awakened king will once again bring the Supernal Realms to the Fallen World, and they would not presume to usurp his rule. But before this Hieromagus comes, there are lesser lords to deal with — and their stations are not so sacrosanct.

A Note on Language

Greek and Latin are the most common traditional Fallen languages in the Atlantean orders.

Mages use these languages to allude to the High Speech because of their prestige and age. Latin and Greek have also been the traditional languages of scholars for centuries.

This does not mean that other old languages never take the place of Greek and Latin. Sanskrit is a common quasi-official language throughout India and Southeast Asia. Other languages include classical Arabic and Chinese, Gothic and Yoruba. Terms in these languages see as much use as the Greek and Latin used throughout this book, and would be more familiar to order members in different cultures. The legacy of Western colonialism has spread Greek and

Latin terms throughout the world, but outside of Europe and the Americas, they occupy a secondary place at best. In India, a Cultor (see p. 58) is called an *acarya*. In West Africa, he might be called a *gelede*.

To emphasize the adaptability of the orders and their integration into all cultures, Storytellers should note how the Western terms change to fit different regions and the characters that hail from them.

Thesis: Necessary Secrets and Sins

Mage: The Awakening provides an overview of the Guardians' philosophy. This book reexamines and expands upon the philosophy to show what an orthodox member of the order believes and why. The Guardians of the Veil prefer oral traditions, metaphors and allusions to describe their ways. Other orders will not necessarily know the depth and intellectual basis of the Law of the Mask. While other orders would know the summary provided by the Guardians' description in **Mage: The Awakening**, the deep truths may elude mages outside the Guardians order. Even initiates and apprentices learn over time, as they unlock the meaning of parables and earn enough trust to learn new secret stories.

Ideological Systems

To add flavor to the order's tenets, sidebars in this section include optional systems that allow a Guardian's beliefs to have a concrete game effect. These rules are completely optional. If the Storyteller wishes to use them, however, it's recommended that she use all of them, so that the tenets of the order are all equally important.

The Exoteric Tenets

Tales from the Law of the Mask urge the order to expound on the so-called Exoteric Tenets: philosophies that the order wishes to publicly identify itself with and promote among other mages. The Exoteric Tenets are first learned by initiates who pass the final Veil. These mages soon hear rumors of more guarded beliefs and gradually immerse themselves in the deep philosophy of the order. All the same, the Exoteric Tenets are not lies, and are the heart of the Guardians' belief system. Loyal members of the order never reject them, but might eventually learn to approach them from a new point of view.

Paradoxes strengthen the Abyss as punishment answers pride.

The Guardians of the Veil firmly believe that Paradoxes are the greatest threat the Awakened have to face. Many mages trivialize a Paradox by ascribing it to a failed magical technique or a lapse in concentration. The order argues that Paradox is far more than this.

First of all, the order holds that a Paradox is a *moral* failing made magical. Guardians note that some of the most infamous mages in history have often dealt with extended Paradoxes and that these Paradoxes reflect the victims' natures. Mages who die by their own misguided magic are victims of just deserts.

The major consequence of this tenet is that Guardians will almost never do anything to help relieve a mage of the effects of a Paradox. Guardians will not help destroy Manifestations unless they threaten bystanders. Guardians will not conceal a Brand. They will do nothing to help a mage avoid the mark of his failure unless it threatens to disrupt a more important project.

Instead, Guardians urge mages to study their own Paradoxes and ask themselves what failures the Paradoxes might represent. Did a sorcerer cast his spell during the throes of blind anger? Did he ignore subtle Arts in favor of intimidating, flashy magic? Is the Paradox the culmination of impulsive behavior?

This tenet is dual hardship for the order. Not only do other mages come to see Guardians as callous and untrustworthy, but a Guardian who attempts to ease his own Paradoxes is accused of hypocrisy. The second Exoteric Tenet answers this objection, but outsiders often find this unconvincing: Traditionally, Guardians of the Veil only mount a weak defense of their actions because the scorn of others is a part of their own spiritual practice. This helps Guardians live humbly and hinders political ambitions that might compromise the order.

The second element of the tenet holds that a Paradox is an active threat to the Fallen World. When a mage incurs a Paradox, she exposes her soul to the Abyss. Magic is a great privilege, because the power to remake the world is bought with this risk. This not only endangers individual mages, but turns the mage's soul into a portal for the Abyss itself.

Even though no mage knows the ultimate nature of the Abyss, most know enough to realize that its nature is inimical to the Fallen World on every level. Abyssal Manifestations sow confusion, temptation and raw physical destruction upon the world. Guardians of the Veil believe that just as the Abyss invades in mockery of a spell, the Abyss attempts to supplant the weak influence of the Supernal Realms themselves. During interrogation, mad Scelesti (see *Mage: The Awakening*, pp. 361–363) admit as much. Their masters want to be nothing less than the lords – and in some cases, the very supernatural laws – that influence the Fallen World. The Guardians fear that the hosts of the Abyss might even create mockeries of the Watchtowers, leading souls to the Void instead of the great truths of magic.

Consequently, a Guardian's duty is to contain the Abyss. This might seem to contradict the order's refusal to alleviate most Paradoxes, but the order believes that mages who err

must form the first line of defense by taking responsibility for their failings. After that, a Paradox must not be allowed to further affect the Fallen World. Even though a Guardian might seem to turn her back on a Paradox-wracked companion, the Guardian is usually keenly watching from the sidelines to keep things from getting out of hand.

As for the cults, twisted spirits and damned mages who willingly truck with the Abyss, the order shows no mercy. These fools have not merely failed themselves; they've chosen to be enemies of the world. They deserve extermination.

Wisdom From Suffering

At the Storyteller's option, after a Guardian has spent at least a day contemplating a Paradox that she directly witnessed or caused, yet did nothing to mitigate, her player may reroll that character's Wisdom immediately after failing the next Wisdom roll she makes. The results of the second roll are final.

Players may not accumulate this benefit to save multiple rerolls over the course of a chronicle, and only one reroll can be made per chapter.

Sins for a just end grant wisdom to the Awakened.

Paradox may be a manifestation of sin, but for the Guardians of the Veil, there's a loophole: sin is an end, not a means. "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions," may be a common Sleeper aphorism, but the order believes that the truth is much more complicated than that.

To Guardians, the primary fallacy of moral absolutism is that it doesn't take into account a mage's social role or his mystical connection to the rest of the world. A soul is more than the lifespark of an individual; a soul makes itself known by the effect it has on others. Guardians of the Veil believe that there are many roles for mages. Awakened teachers, warriors, priests and scholars all contribute to shared spiritual health. These Wise must be allowed to follow the right path and test themselves with personal ordeals in order to heal the Fallen World.

Guardians call the collected souls of mages the Diamond Wheel. It is fundamentally pure and always in motion, bringing mages to their deserved ends. Tales from the Law of the Mask say that the Wheel is always unfolding into intricate patterns, like a kaleidoscope, and, given enough care, this pattern will eventually coalesce into a new Atlantis. Mages must simply work together so that their combined souls reflect the spirit of the Awakened City. It's a matter of free debate as to whether or not this is a spiritual kingdom or will actually manifest in the Fallen World. This question is a secondary one for most mages, but more important to those who cleave closest to the Esoteric Doctrine of the Hieromagus (see p. 45).

Unfortunately, the Diamond Wheel doesn't always move

smoothly. Mages contend with many enemies: ignorant Sleepers, the work of Exarchs who profane the five Watchtowers that form the fulcrum upon which the Wheel revolves and the Abyss that seeks to shatter it. Most mages must be allowed to live moral lives, even if that means that other mages must commit terrible acts to preserve their right to do so.

These sanctified, sinning mages are Guardians of the Veil. Guardians are a part of the Diamond Wheel, but do not aid its turning by honing their own Wisdom. Instead, they are permitted to do what needs to be done to help other mages unfold the spirit of Atlantis. Guardian doctrine holds that murder, deception and even Paradoxes do not sully the collective Wisdom of the Awakened – as long as all of these are in service to a greater moral goal. The order does acknowledge that their individual souls suffer, but believes that Wisdom is not truly lost. Instead, merit – as a sort of mystical soul quality – transfers to other mages who follow the straight path of conventional morality.

Thus, Guardians working on an important project may do anything short of consorting with the Abyss to pursue it (though aiding the Exarchs would require great justification indeed). A Guardian who rots with Paradoxes and betrays her cabal is only truly evil if she acted against the mission to exalt Awakened souls. Again, Guardians of the Veil draw much hatred from the other orders for holding this tenet, but, for the most part, the order successfully justifies itself in Consilii. There, Guardians reveal that a murder victim was secretly a traitor or that a lie was needed to hide the truth until the right time. There are, however, times when the order must keep it secrets and thus, fails to explain apparent crimes. This is why the tenet is a public one; other mages can never be sure that a Guardian isn't really looking out for his best interests.

Compassion and Sin

Optionally, a Guardian's player may spend her character's own experience points to increase the Wisdom of another character that the Guardian knows. The Guardian must have first lost Wisdom as a direct result of following her order's goals.

This system tacitly accepts the Guardian tenet that Wisdom is transferable, so Storytellers should decide whether or not this is literally true or is only a dramatic element to further the story.

This can only be done once per chapter.

Merit must guide the Fallen World.

Ultimately, mages must be ruled by merit. While the Silver Ladder believes it's descended from the priest-kings of old, the Guardians of the Veil insist that they kept the royal lines virtuous (and secret stories tell of them extinguishing lines that relied on pedigree over knowledge). Awakened monarchy may have been the way Atlantis manifested itself before, but the ideal city can take any shape that is guided by merit.

This does not, of course, include democracy. Contrary to Free Council babble, not every voice is equally competent to decide who will guide mages. The 10 Arcana and the Gnosis at the heart of a mage's soul all refine themselves in increments. This journey proves that a mage is competent to judge and gives her the power to enforce her decrees. Consequently, Sleepers are fundamentally unqualified to guide their own affairs. A Guardian of the Veil may force her dominion upon Sleepers as she sees fit.

Magical knowledge isn't the only prerequisite for station. Mages can have a deep understanding of what their souls can accomplish, but have shallow motives when it comes to using that understanding to better humanity. Magic refines the soul, but mages should not seek to reject their human roots. Mages must act with compassion and foresight.

In the past, the Supernal Realms were close enough to give any true seeker the Dragons' magical lore, but did little to aid everyday morality. The Fallen World forces mage and Sleeper alike to pay attention to the trifles of gross physical existence, but conceals the higher meaning of it all. Given the reality of the situation, Guardians of the Veil must always ground magical knowledge in hardship. Though mages have the right to rule, they cannot grow disconnected from the rest of humanity. Therefore, the order makes magic harder to learn by surrounding it with ordeals. Novice mages walk with luck and survive against trials that would destroy their old selves, so Guardians created a new barrier: the Veil of magic.

The order uses the Three Veils amongst themselves, but also tries to hinder other mages from learning secrets before they are spiritually prepared. The Mysterium shares some of these concerns, but for Guardians, the raw power of an occult secret is secondary to the Wisdom a mage ought to possess. These Lesser Veils link occult lore to a moral dilemma or other trial that tests a mage's ethical stamina, will and common sense. Guarding an artifact, a member of the order may pose as a foolish sorcerer who lays claim to the artifact as an inheritance. Will the seeker respect the claim or take it to serve a higher purpose? What if the Guardian needs the artifact to save lives, but will go on to endanger other mages? The Lesser Veils rarely have set right or wrong answers. Guardians examine the seeker's intent and rationale as much as they can, employing the Masque (see p. 68) to observe him incognito.

The Lesser Veils also apply to Sleepers. The order has no patience for occult dabblers; anyone without an Awakened soul cannot even see the truth of the world, and certainly shouldn't be allowed to cobble together primitive rituals to touch it. If a Sleeper appears to be on the way to Awakening, though, Guardians use the Labyrinth to test her. If she gets caught up in the internal politics of a false cult, the order benefits twice: Guardians gain a servant and she is diverted from the Arts.

The order cannot be everywhere, so Guardians of the Veil tend to trust mages who pass through a Lesser Veil more than those who evade the Veils. Guardian slang appends the word "True" to the title of any mage who passes through a Veil to attain greater knowledge. A "True Adept" is respected even if she hails from a different order.

The order itself disclaims ambition by appealing to its own role in the Diamond Wheel. All members know that they may be called upon to sully their own morality, and thus, doctrine and tradition demand that they reject higher station. They acknowledge that their mission makes them better servants than masters. However, a Guardian could certainly twist doctrine all the way to a Hierarch's throne (where he is "merely a servant of the assembled") or to dominate politics with onerous Veils that block advancement.

True to the Art

This option benefits characters from outside the Guardians of the Veil. If any mage besides a known Banisher, Seer of the Throne or Left-Handed Legacy practitioner passes through a Lesser Veil, grant the character a +1 dice bonus to mundane Social rolls whenever she interacts with Guardians of the Veil who know of the accomplishment. She is considered a "true" representative of her rank.

This benefit lasts until the character improves her Gnosis or any Arcanum (whichever comes first), at which point it must be earned again.

The Esoteric Tenets

The Esoteric Tenets are beliefs that the order does not share with outsiders. Rumors trickle forth about the hidden doctrines, and evidence points to a cohesive, secret agenda that Guardians serve without the approval of Consilii.

The Esoteric Tenets are secrets for two reasons. First of all, practicing these Tenets openly risks the wrath of the other orders. The Guardians of the Veil are clever mages who can survive much hardship, but they know that they would never survive against the combined might of the other orders. Even if the Esoteric Tenets did not draw such unmitigated hatred, they would damage the already fragile trust of the other orders.

Secondly, the Esoteric Tenets are more sacred than their public counterparts. Guardians of the Veil revere the Esoteric Tenets. Unworthy mages would profane them just as they profane magic itself. A fool spouting a wise doctrine is little different from a fool tempting the Abyss with wild magic.

All thrones are false; all souls are flawed.

The order believes that mages are inherently unworthy to rebuild Atlantis. Paradoxes are a form of moral castigation. As all contemporary mages risk Paradoxes, no modern mages can be fit to rule. Guardians do not need to recognize the historical legitimacy of any order's claim to the Atlantean ways. Even the Silver Ladder is fundamentally impure. All orders are, except for Guardians of the Veil.

Thanks to the second Exoteric Tenet, the order believes that initiated members have a fundamentally different moral relationship with their Paradoxes. When these mages incur

Paradoxes in the service of the Diamond Wheel, they do not indicate any fundamental impurity. Some Guardians go so far as to claim that their own Paradoxes spring from the flaws of mages outside of the order. Experienced mages often notice that, in some cases, a spell fails to draw the Paradox it should. Rather than explain this as a twist of fate, a school of thought within the order thinks that, just as moral merit can move from mage to mage, Paradoxes can transfer from certain mages to Guardians willing to take on the burden. They take on the others' sins to keep the Diamond Wheel moving.

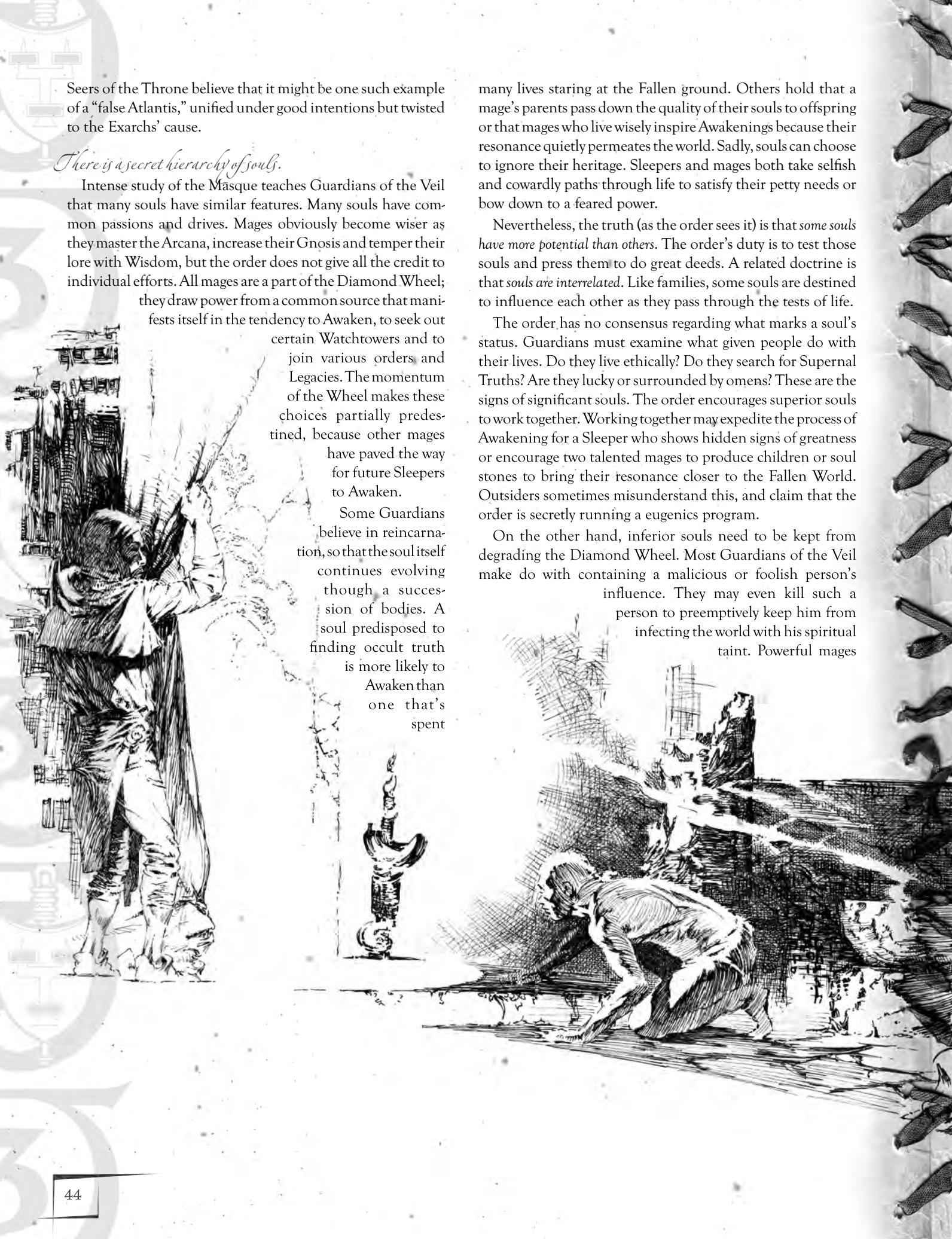
Other orders merely seek to better themselves. Even if their members claim otherwise, they lack the wisdom to transfer merit, leaving them with the primary mission of overcoming their own flawed souls.

Therefore, it's the Guardians' duty to undermine charismatic leaders, expose the faults of supposed sages and force mages to doubt each other. Even though the order refuses overt political power, Guardians may influence Awakened society from the shadows to ensure that no mage is entirely trusted to lead. Guardians of the Veil do not want anyone to follow a leader without making a conscious choice. Saints should be brought low and mages should only be valued for their actions. Mages should be strong — but not too strong.

This is why Guardians may suddenly withdraw support for a Hierarch or leak the personal flaws of influential masters to Consilii. Merit does not equal perfection, so merit must be constantly challenged. The order realizes that this might seem superficially similar to the Free Council's public propaganda, but Guardians still reject the idea that arcane power is irrelevant to a mage's standing. Furthermore, the order means to restore the Atlantean way instead of replace it with the tawdry vicissitudes of pop culture.

What is more unsettling is that the order sabotages attempts to recreate Atlantis through any path other than their own Diamond Wheel. Order mages meddle to the point of sowing a certain amount of regional strife. They even go so far as to undermine Sleeper institutions that might serve a new, unified Awakened nation. Guardians of the Veil believe that the Awakened City cannot be restored by anything less than the gradual turning of the Diamond Wheel and the ascension of the Hieromagus. The Aegean New Atlantis failed, and Rome's flaws turned it into a corrupt empire. Atlantis is an ideal that unfolds in the hearts of mages, but can only be made real through the order's mission. Guardians must prepare the way for the incarnation of the city that will come at the end of these Fallen days.

If most mages learned that Guardians of the Veil actually undermine the cause of Awakened unity, the order would be so despised as to be outcast from Awakened culture. Guardians recognize this fact, and members are quick to cover up rumors through a campaign of disinformation, including double agents and false teachings. As far as the order is concerned, the greater danger is that a charismatic cabal will forge the Wise into a false reflection of Atlantis, and that the inherent sickness in mages' souls will make this Atlantis a kingdom ruled through the Abyss or enslaved to the Exarchs. Guardians who study the



Seers of the Throne believe that it might be one such example of a “false Atlantis,” unified under good intentions but twisted to the Exarchs’ cause.

There is a secret hierarchy of souls.

Intense study of the Måsque teaches Guardians of the Veil that many souls have similar features. Many souls have common passions and drives. Mages obviously become wiser as they master the Arcana, increase their Gnosis and temper their lore with Wisdom, but the order does not give all the credit to individual efforts. All mages are a part of the Diamond Wheel; they draw power from a common source that manifests itself in the tendency to Awaken, to seek out certain Watchtowers and to join various orders and Legacies. The momentum of the Wheel makes these choices partially predetermined, because other mages have paved the way for future Sleepers to Awaken.

Some Guardians believe in reincarnation, so that the soul itself continues evolving through a succession of bodies. A soul predisposed to finding occult truth is more likely to Awaken than one that’s spent

many lives staring at the Fallen ground. Others hold that a mage’s parents pass down the quality of their souls to offspring or that mages who live wisely inspire Awakenings because their resonance quietly permeates the world. Sadly, souls can choose to ignore their heritage. Sleepers and mages both take selfish and cowardly paths through life to satisfy their petty needs or bow down to a feared power.

Nevertheless, the truth (as the order sees it) is that *some souls have more potential than others*. The order’s duty is to test those souls and press them to do great deeds. A related doctrine is that *souls are interrelated*. Like families, some souls are destined to influence each other as they pass through the tests of life.

The order has no consensus regarding what marks a soul’s status. Guardians must examine what given people do with their lives. Do they live ethically? Do they search for Supernal Truths? Are they lucky or surrounded by omens? These are the signs of significant souls. The order encourages superior souls to work together. Working together may expedite the process of Awakening for a Sleeper who shows hidden signs of greatness or encourage two talented mages to produce children or soul stones to bring their resonance closer to the Fallen World. Outsiders sometimes misunderstand this, and claim that the order is secretly running a eugenics program.

On the other hand, inferior souls need to be kept from degrading the Diamond Wheel. Most Guardians of the Veil make do with containing a malicious or foolish person’s influence. They may even kill such a person to preemptively keep him from infecting the world with his spiritual taint. Powerful mages

of the order sometimes attempt to destroy unworthy souls with powerful spells. Rumors in the upper echelons of the Guardians speak of treachery where Guardians have fed the unworthy to Tremere liches, but, even for the order, this is taking things too far.

Superior souls ought to prosper, bringing more and more of the Atlantean spirit to the world. Only then can one soul attain perfection and save the Fallen World.

The Hieromagus will fulfill the Diamond Wheel.

Even though the order does believe that every generation of cultivation makes for stronger souls and better mages, this is not the only reason Guardians work on this project. Over thousands of years, Atlantis' exiles still suffer from flaws that tempt Paradoxes and strengthen the Abyss. Virtuous and mighty mages still suffer from essential failings, and their great works cannot last. Atlantis can only be restored by a perfect mage. The order sows and reaps the destinies of mages to bring a more worthy generation into existence, but ultimately, only one mage will achieve a perfect Awakening.

Legends of this perfect master have influenced myths around the world, and these myths have, in turn informed the order's perception of what he (or she – there is no orthodox gender in Guardian doctrine) might be like. They see similarities to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven, countless messiahs and Wheel-Turning Kings of Buddhist legend. In modern times, Guardians call this mage the Hieromagus.

All members of the order agree that the Hieromagus will never suffer Paradoxes; his soul will be an indestructible bridge between Above and Below. He will manifest Supernal power so strongly that the Quiescence cannot stand before it. Gathering mages into a grand council, he will lead them to overthrow the Exarchs, and will foster five bloodlines to restore the Atlantean kings of old.

However, the Hieromagus will not be a Guardian of the Veil. The order is meant to prepare his way, not father him. He must come from another order because he must judge the Guardians of the Veil to absolve their sins committed for the Diamond Wheel and punish those who have erred. He must be in a position to command the order through merit, instead of the ties of initiation. He is the exemplar and the final guarantor of the order's credo, and must know the truth without being prompted.

Religious mages tend to combine their own faiths with belief in the Hieromagus. Buddhists sometimes characterize him as a manifestation of Vairocana, the ultimate principle of enlightenment. Western monotheists regard him as a reborn prophet or a messiah. Guardian Obrimos are by far the most interested in the Hieromagus, and the faction of Messianics (see p. 139) is often awash in doctrinal strife. Moros mages sometimes describe him as a *rebis*: a mage who has perfected the male and female alchemical potentials of the soul. Guardians of the Veil wish to disguise this tenet, so they encourage members to couch discussion in the language of Sleeper religion. This way, other orders will believe that Guardians are discussing their own religions instead of order doctrine.

Sadly, false Hieromagi have arisen throughout history, so this tenet is not as well protected as others. Other orders have a vague idea that a messianic faction exercises influence within the Guardians, but do not know its precise doctrine. Most of the false Hieromagi have been killed and their followers have either repented or died with the lie in their hearts. The only known surviving heresy is the Basilideans (see p. 56). Guardians relentlessly pursue them, so the Basilideans move through Awakened society with as much stealth as they can muster.

Praxis: The Law of the Mask

Guardians of the Veil do not really trust writing. While they do produce their own occult manuals and books of strategy, they are keenly aware that the act of writing is the sharing of a secret. Writing gives knowledge a life outside of the minds of lorekeepers, so writing is a dangerous tool. Since so many mages report that they Awakened with an act of dream-writing on their Path's Watchtower, more metaphysically minded Guardians wonder what mages actually communicate to the Watchtower – and to the Supernal Realms above – during this singular act of inspiration. Do the masters of the Realms Supernal learn the deepest secrets of mages? The Exarchs do not appear to know the words on the Watchtowers, but Exarchs move so subtly that a paranoid sorcerer might argue otherwise.

Therefore, the order's Law of the Mask is an oral tradition. Senior members tell novices the ways of the order through poems, stories and songs. There are no mandatory tales, but teachers are expected to cover every necessary procedure and precept. While members are free to make up their own elements, most Guardians use narratives passed on from their own teachers. It is considered a high honor for a mage's oral teachings to join the stories of generations.



Learning to Remember

The **World of Darkness Rulebook** says that the Eidetic Memory Merit (pp. 108–109) can only be purchased at character creation. Yet, the Guardians of the Veil are well-versed in the oral tradition, able to memorize and reproduce prodigious amounts of information. In fact, ordinary men and women have, throughout history, taught themselves to improve their memories. The Greeks used a visualization technique called the “Memory Palace” to improve their recall. Modern experts use mnemonic aids, and elders in traditional cultures use various techniques to remember inherited knowledge. This is not the same as a “photographic” memory, but is extremely useful nevertheless. Therefore, characters who use memory-enhancing techniques may purchase the following Merit at any time.

Trained Memory (•)

Prerequisite: Composure • •, Investigation •

Effect: Your character can remember the events of a single scene or a day's worth of study perfectly as long as she has a turn to concentrate. During this turn (in which she cannot engage in combat or other stressful situations), the character uses a special technique to commit what she has learned to memory. (You should write a brief note about this on the character sheet.) After that, during peaceful times, you no longer need to make dice rolls to remember details about that event or piece of knowledge, and you can ask the Storyteller to fill in details that you might have forgotten.

Drawback: Just as for any other character, you must make an Intelligence + Composure roll for the character to remember any additional details about a subject during stressful situations (such as combat). You gain no bonus to this roll; your enhanced memory is a matter of training and organized thinking, not off-the-cuff recall.

Parables and Koans

Sleeping cultures have names for two of the most common forms of oral tradition. Parables are allegorical teachings. Allegory keeps a story memorable, and gives it depth; years later, Guardians will uncover new meaning in the stories they learned as initiates. Koans differ in that they do not even have superficial meanings. Instead, koans are designed to push the student out of Quiescent modes of thought and into insights that reconcile the mage's Fallen existence with the Realms Supernal.

A parable normally has one straightforward meaning, but others exist, hidden in the metaphors of the story. For instance, in *The Wind and the Tower*, an Atlantean refugee hears voices in the wind and debates whether or not to leave the old outpost he's settled. He follows the voices through barren valleys, to encounters with demons and beasts, and finally, back to his own tower, where he discovers that the voices are nothing more than the wind, blowing through cracks in the foundation of his home. The tower collapses, the wind ceases and he must venture into the savage Fallen World with the memories of his cloistered studies to guide him.

In this case, the obvious meaning is that his search for truth outside the tower of Atlantis was foolish. It was Fallen wisdom, the echo of Supernal truth that Sleepers carry in their art and dreams. Therefore, mages should not look for occult secrets in the inconstant chatter of Fallen souls, but go straight to the original source. Later on, a student might contemplate the fact that the tower crumbles, and exists inside the protagonist's soul, or that the refugee was able to follow the Fallen “wind” back to the truth of its origin.

Parable: The Tiger and the Hunter

After the Fall, White Mask and Black Mask lived in a great jungle. They wove a hut of reeds to hide and protect themselves while they slept, hunted and studied. One day, as they hunted together, White Mask was seized by a tiger and dragged away. Black Mask took up his spear and searched for his friend and the beast.

After three moons, the jungle rotted Black Mask's clothes away. He learned to crouch in the darkness, because it was easier to feel his way through the jungle floor. After three more moons, he cast away his spear, because it caught in the vines and got in the way of his four-limbed stride. He learned to catch small creatures with his hands and teeth, and ate them raw before returning to his mission.

He saw the tiger three times. The first time, it bounded away on its powerful legs. The second time, it crept around a tree. Black Mask followed, but as he turned he fell in a pit full of sharp rocks. The pit was concealed with freshly broken leaves. The third time, the tiger did not flee. It dropped a torn flank of deer meat before Black Mask. The mage was starving and leapt for the meat. When he looked up, the tiger was gone again.

One night, Black Mask heard footsteps and dropped the bloody rabbit in his jaws. He crept up a tree to see. Was it food? An enemy? He saw black stripes and white fur, and jumped down, for he remembered that the tiger was an enemy.

The beast stood on its hind legs. It held a burning stick in one hand and a spear – Black Mask's – in the other. The fire kept Black Mask at bay, and he howled in frustration.

The tiger said, “You've chased me for six moons. On the first moon, I strained my small mind to find safety. On the second moon, I wondered what manner of beast you were. On the third moon, I sought your lair, saw its furniture and trinkets and learned how you stood

high on two legs. On the fourth moon, I imitated the roars of your companion and learned this speech. And on the fifth moon, I found your spear, and set these rags ablaze as you must have to create the charcoal traces that I found in front of your old home."

Black Mask spoke. His voice was hoarse, for he hadn't used human speech for a long time.

He said, "And what of the sixth moon?"

The white tiger said, "The sixth moon is a matter for humans, not beasts."

Koans often appear irrational; they turn the dualism of language against itself. Duality is often an element of the Lie. In its most basic form, the Lie gives rise to Sleeper religions that say that humanity can only rise above the Fallen World after death. In mages, this kind of thinking separates a mage's soul from the Supernal Realms. If she believes that the Abyss is wider than her own soul, she will surely draw the Abyss in.

Furthermore, the Arcana are as much an art as a science. They do not always conform to Fallen logic of cause and effect or the separation between objects and ideas. Koans stretch the mage's mind in order to accommodate the strange principles of magic.

Koan: Names Written on the Void

On a somber hilltop, a master and initiate discussed the ways of Death and the Lead Coin. The master said, "For years, I've carved my name deeper into that Watchtower, so that I could master the soul, command Death and send ghosts to their true destinies."

The initiate said, "I would like to carve my own name as deep, master."

The master asked, "Would you carve so much that nothing was left of the Watchtower but the space outlining your secret name?"

The initiate wished to prove his resolve and said, "Yes, until there was nothing but dust of the tower, fallen from the work of carving."

The master grabbed the initiate and threw him off the hilltop. As the initiate tumbled down, the master called out, "I wanted to see if you could climb an empty void, as you claimed!"

Oral Histories and Prophecies

The Law of the Mask includes generational accounts of the flight from Atlantis and the establishment of the order throughout the world. Guardians of the Veil do not hold every word to be literally true. Some believe that only histories

spoken in the High Speech can reveal the truth, and only the syllables of the Awakened language can be reshuffled into a perfect form.

Still, more recent histories are remarkably accurate and include details that Sleepers do not know. Of course, telling the difference between these secret details and fictional insertions of Guardians into history is sometimes difficult, since the latter are often used as a teaching method. Did a Guardian really prepare the hemlock Socrates drank? Was the feudal Japanese spy Hanzo Hattori really a proxy for a Guardian cabal? While some instances are obvious fiction, others have provided clues to ancient artifacts and buried dangers. The order does not keep a central account of every history, so reclusive mages sometimes reveal histories that prove all-too-relevant to a current crisis, or force the order to visit historical sites in search of the truth.

These stories are usually transmitted through the traditions of epic poetry. Epics normally have a set meter and a number of stock phrases (such as *The Odyssey's* "wine-dark sea") and mnemonic aids. Guardian historians supplement these methods with magic and are capable of memorizing staggering amounts of information.

Guardians of the Veil also memorize prophecies. Their origins vary, and Guardians argue long and hard about what a given prophecy really means and whether or not it's accurate. Some date from just after the fall of Atlantis. Newer prophecies often come from a mage's own Awakening; the soul journey or mystery play hints at things to come. Most often, Time magic reveals something of the future important enough to join the oral traditions. In the last case, these revelations are usually accidental; the mage looks into another time and learns something other than his original intentions. Guardians treat magically induced prophecy with caution, however, because there is always a chance that a Paradox has warped the truth.

The order's most important prophecy is that of the coming of the Hieromagus, but even that legend exists in many different forms. Almost all prophecies are shrouded in metaphors. Sometimes the Guardians themselves fear that outsiders will learn something of the future that they shouldn't, and, therefore, retell relatively straightforward prophecies in a more obscure form. The source story is forgotten, and a more mysterious telling takes its place.

The Culture of Secrecy

History and occult training are not the only uses of an oral tradition. The Law of the Mask formed out of a desire for secrecy, and spycraft forms much of the lore. Guardian rhymes talk about everything from how to move quietly to how to manage an insurgent cell in a war-torn country. While much of the Law of the Mask supposedly dates back to Atlantis, the tradition does change with the times. A modern Guardian knows *The Wind and the Tower* and *The Bent Lightning of Electronic Countersurveillance* equally well.

The order runs on memory, so unlike Sleeper intelligence units, Guardians do not leave incriminating paper trails. Hid-

ing secrets from mages and Sleepers alike, Guardians do not trust the written High Speech to conceal their communications. Aside from that, the order uses many of the practices of mundane intelligence operatives. First and foremost, Guardians of the Veil institute an internal culture of secrecy that uses reliable, simple methods, leaving magic to deal with emergencies and supernatural opponents.

Anonymity and Reticence

If a Guardian brags about something, he is generally lying, trying to get the audience to do something in his interests or will eventually be disciplined by a superior. Members of the order do not share unnecessary information. This can be infuriating for those who want nothing more than a decent, trivial conversation, as their laconic Guardian conversation partner leaves awkward silences hanging. More experienced Guardians learn to divert conversations away from themselves while they cleave to social norms. A favorite tactic is to ask questions instead of making statements. Many people love to talk about themselves and sometimes drop useful information right into the listener's lap. Guardians, when forced to discuss themselves, will often pluck information from areas that they have designated as safe beforehand.

Guardians do avoid lying outright, but not because of any ethical loyalty to the truth. There are numerous magical and mundane ways to detect lying. Members of the order work to erase the traditional "tells" of a liar (such as touching one's face, changing the pitch of one's voice or providing excess details) and meditate to keep their vital signs calm in case they confront a polygraph or its magical equivalent. Even then, a Guardian's discipline might fail or a spy could use supernatural methods to detect lies. Therefore, providing little to no information is better than dissembling in a revealing fashion.

In the modern age, this applies to phone calls, e-mail, message boards and chatrooms. Some Guardians avoid the Internet completely. Others use the same security tactics as Sleepers: proxy servers and advanced firewalls are a must for any computer-literate Guardian. These mages do, however, take pains not to use so much security that it in itself becomes a noticeable trait. Order mages shy away from personal practices that involve specialized equipment or subscription services.

Habitual Surveillance

Even though the order discourages members from writing important things down, the order *does* encourage them to read. Guardians of the Veil scour newspapers, blogs and other sources of news and rumors. While an individual mage might keep tabs on a certain topic, all Guardians try to be as well-informed as possible about local, national and international politics. Even the Seers of the Throne do show their hand in the news. The presence of the occult may be absent from these stories, but a practiced eye can find clues in supposedly random warehouse fires, new legislation or even the ascendance of a pop culture icon.

The order trains its members to stay aware of the world around them. Mages are not encouraged to be more paranoid (the facts of Awakened life provide for that already), but to

develop a genuine interest in everything around them. This is something of a mental game; not only do Guardians note things as simple as the wind blowing down a country road or a store employee's nametag, but they visualize ways that they might use these observations to their advantage. In a city park, a Guardian will ask herself where she might be able to have a discreet conversation, drop off an item where others aren't likely to find it or turn the tables on pursuers. Would she have to run down the path ahead or could she leap over a nearby fence? In a Guardian's hand, these trivial details can be transformed into weapons.

Levels of Trust

Guardians do not give their trust as a sentimental gesture. They don't give away personal secrets to reward friends and don't rely on whether someone just *feels* trustworthy. Guardians apply a specific doctrine to whom should know what. Guardians of the Veil break these rules at the risk of angering their superiors, but mages can sometimes justify doing so when the need is sufficient. Although based on the Veils of initiation, the following levels of secrecy do have a subjective element, leaving individual cabals to decide in uncertain cases.

Gray (Sleeper)

Gray information can be shared at will. It consists of everything from common knowledge to the occult knowledge of most interested Sleepers. However, policy dictates that order members should twist the facts slightly even when they discuss "common" occult trivia with Sleepers. Intelligent seekers will soon see past the lies, and fools follow them out of potential danger.

Crimson (Sleeper, Labyrinth Status •••)

Crimson information consists of anything a Sleeper Retainer would need to know to carry out a mission for the order. Guardians can tell those who have passed through the Gray Veil about some of the illegal or morally questionable aspects of a Labyrinth. These Sleepers can be sent to perform illegal acts themselves or spy on areas of interest for the order. The Sleepers themselves know nothing of the Guardians of the Veil. Sleepers only know of the front Labyrinth. Sleepers who are willing to kill without question are sometimes given additional privileges; they are told enough to serve as sanctum Retainers once it is established that they are unlikely to ever Awaken. Fanatics are excellent servants, but should not be mages.

Black (Guardians of the Veil member)

A fully initiated Guardian learns the order's Exoteric Tenets, the Law of the Mask and about activities specific to his caucus. He is usually barred from learning what other caucuses are doing so that a cell structure will prevail. If he is captured, he cannot compromise mages outside of his own caucus. He does not know the Esoteric Tenets yet, but will learn them at this level as his reputation improves. These secrets are not heavily guarded. Rather, the mage seeks them out for himself by convincing others that he is worthy.

White (Guardians of the Veil Status •)

The White rank leaves behind the Veils of initiation. The mage is now trusted with all but the highest secrets of the

order. These secrets do not come free for the asking, though. Guardians must convince their co-conspirators that they need to know particular facts. Guardians of this rank are sometimes entrusted with information and missions that might imperil or even betray mages close to them, but the order prefers to avoid this whenever possible.

Colorless (Guardians of the Veil Status •••)

Colorless secrets are considered to be so dangerous that they need to be hidden from the rank and file of the order. In fact, the name of this security level is not even confirmed to exist. Some Colorless knowledge includes most secret teachings of the order. Unfortunately, the most common use involves missions to root out internal treachery and resolve power struggles between Guardian masters. If the order knows its true role in the fall of Atlantis, this would be a Colorless secret.

True

A mage from another order whom Guardians of the Veil consider to be True (see "Merit must guide the Fallen World," p. 42) is sometimes allowed to know more than most. If the order engineers the purge of this mage's cabal, he may be told how to save himself. If his talents would help resolve a sensitive matter, Guardians will give him enough information to assist the order. This privilege is almost never granted to members of the Free Council. Even if some of them are True, most of them loathe the Guardians of the Veil and have turned their backs on Atlantis.

The Divine Thread

Despite members' reserved habits, to say that Guardians never enjoy their work would be inaccurate. The business of protecting the Awakened – of guarding even magic itself – from the trials of the Fallen World is a difficult but exhilarating task. Modern Guardians have taken to using Sun Tzu's term for espionage; the aptly named "Divine Thread" is delicate enough to carry vibrations from the secret corners of the supernatural world, but strong enough to pull necessary events into place. This term reflects the grace and efficiency that Guardians hope to bring to all of their work.

Like almost all mages, Guardians are divided into local caucuses. A Guardian caucus is much more than a platform for mages from different cabals to exert pressure on the Consilium. A caucus is a spy ring, a story circle and a place for ordeals to test mages who would take up the order's duties. Secret missions are the order's stock in trade, though. Guardians have developed numerous ways to find, conceal and use secrets.

Objectives

A caucus of Guardians as a flexible unit that adapts to the prevailing Consilium, known threats and local Sleepers' habits. Guardians rarely compete over matters of status. An Epopt is usually the senior Guardian because she is best suited to the complex business of running a Labyrinth, but she may defer to a Cultor (p. 58) when it comes to devising its pecking order and ceremonies.

Guardians believe in proving themselves through actions, not words – and there is always something to do. Silver Ladder mages may compete amongst themselves and Adamantine Arrow mages are content to patrol and wait for oaths to come due, but a new Guardian is expected to "hit the ground running" by finding some way to fulfill the broader objectives of the order.

The Law of the Mask does not provide a single set of objectives, but all such teachings can be summed up as four broad goals: defend the Awakened, protect the sanctity of magic, weaken the enemies of Atlantis and prepare the way for the Hieromagus.

Defend the Awakened

The order has no desire to usurp the Adamantine Arrow's duties. Arrow mages are the greatest warriors of the Awakened, ancient and proven in battle. But some threats can't be fought with combat magic and martial strategies. Guardians of the Veil concentrate on these threats. The order will, when appropriate, expose threats for other mages to handle. Then the Arrow can strike, using the intelligence Guardians gather for maximum effect. The order gathers intelligence for allies so often that initiates from other orders sometimes come to believe that this is all that Guardians really do.

The order can't handle every danger by reporting it to the Consilium. Sometimes the Consilium is the danger. Seers of the Throne worm their way into mages' confidence; Scelesti and Tremere blackmail cabals who've hired them for unspeakable purposes. Guardians have to keep the threat hidden or else it will wreck the region's balance of power. Furthermore, Guardians secretly believe that all thrones are false, so Guardians must test unchallenged leaders and curb the ambitions of those who would try to create a false Atlantis.

Guardians know that even the distrust of others can be used to help other mages. Interfactors exemplify this by acting as politically neutral punishers. By letting the blood-debt fall on a masked Interfactor, a Hierarch directs anger away from the Consilium. This is made all the more effective because custom requires mages to scorn the office. Hate the Interfactor but love the Hierarch, and you will keep the Consilium in power.

Protect the Sanctity of Magic

Guardians of the Veil do their best to ensure that only the worthy master magic's secrets. Other orders resent the Guardians' interference, but recognize that they perform a valuable service by keeping dangerous magic from novices and fools and testing the Sleepers who would touch the Watchtowers. The Inheritors (see p. 135) and Ordeal Keepers (see p. 143) are the most enthusiastic adherents of this cause, but all Guardians do their part.

A local caucus regularly watches what other mages do. Guardians memorize extensive verbal dossiers about other local mages and argue over who needs to be tested or hindered in their pursuit of the higher Arts. In modern days, the custom is for one Guardian to act as the subject's defender, while another prosecutes. A third Guardian rules one way or

another, or decides on a compromise. All three mages (and others, as needed) then work to test the mage's worth. They do this with as much secrecy as possible. If the subject learns more of the Art despite these ordeals, she is True in the eyes of the local caucus.

The caucus makes every effort to divert Sleeper occultists into the Labyrinth, where the Veil will determine whether or not they deserve to Awaken. Naturally, Labyrinth-dwellers would find it easiest to graduate into the Guardians of the Veil — a fact that isn't lost on the other orders. Therefore, a politically astute Epopt accommodates them by redirecting a few promising initiates into the other Atlantean orders (but never the Free Council). This favor usually comes with strings attached. Unless the Epopt is already indebted to a member of another order, he may ask a favor in return.

Then again, there are Sleepers and mages for whom no amount of testing will suffice. Psychopaths, Scelesti and mad Banishers cannot be educated. The order tracks and kills them as quickly as possible, then looks for the root cause of the damaged soul. In some cases, this reveals conspiracies rife with corruption: cults that practice sexual abuse, nests of Left-Handed mages or the broken pawns of a ghost or spirit. Guardians then call on other orders to descend upon the nest, save whoever they can and kill whom they must. Still, the occult is not always the cause; Guardians are as likely to follow the trail back to damaged families and personal tragedies.

Finally, the order publicly preaches against the overuse of vulgar magic. It's a security threat and a potential doorway into the Abyss. Mages who constantly incur Paradoxes or overuse vulgar Arts are first in line to be tested when the caucus arranges new ordeals.

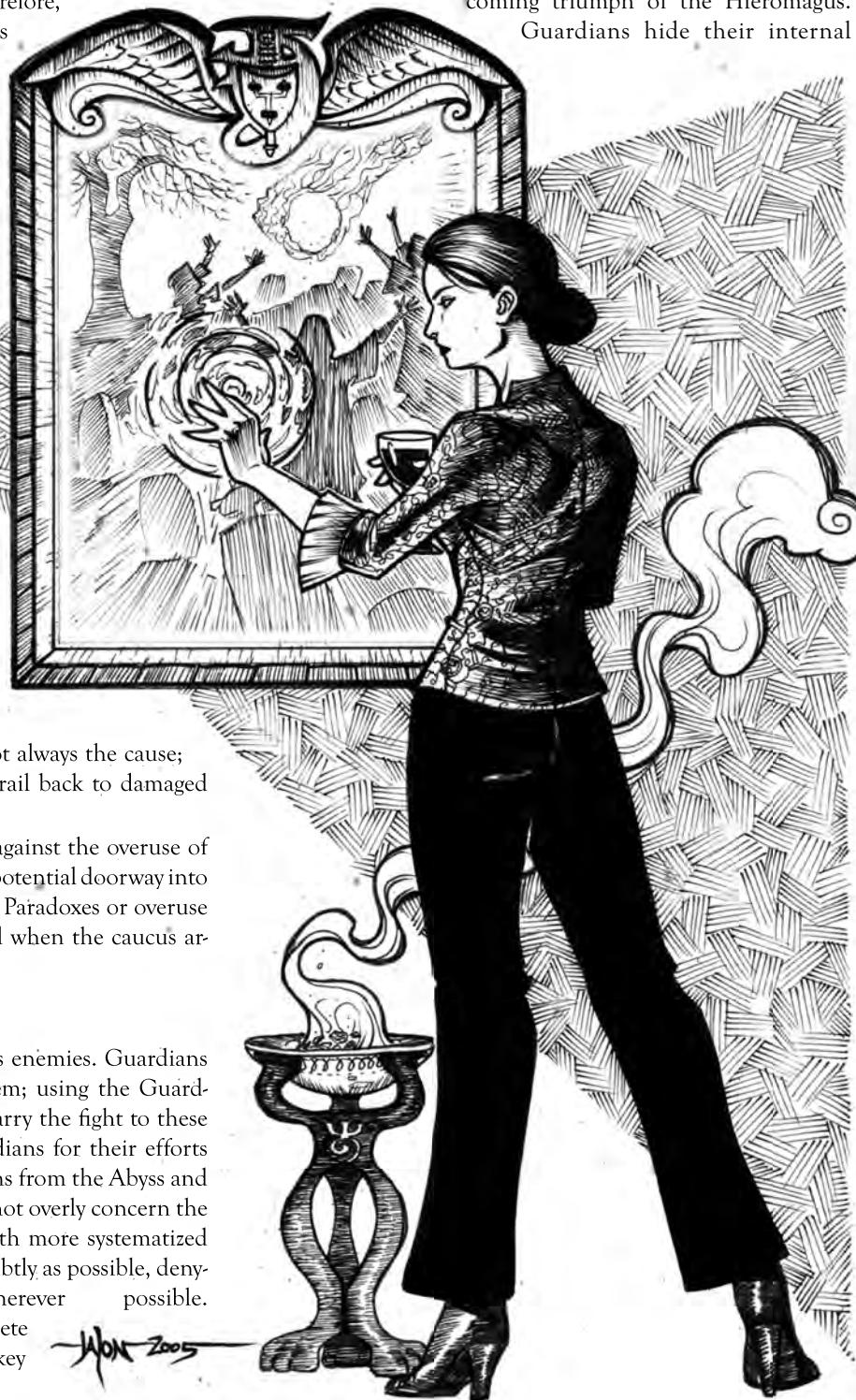
Weaken the Enemies of Atlantis

The heirs of Atlantis have numerous enemies. Guardians of the Veil do more than react to them; using the Guardians' own quiet methods, Guardians carry the fight to these enemies. Other orders laud the Guardians for their efforts against Left-Handed Legacies, incursions from the Abyss and the Seers of the Throne. Banishers do not overly concern the order; the Guardians prefer to deal with more systematized threats. The order attacks enemies as subtly as possible, denying magical resources and territory wherever possible. Guardians build Labyrinths to compete with the enemy's cults and compete for key points of mundane influence.

The Seers of the Throne are particular targets, because they use many of the same shadowy methods as the Guardians themselves. Seers infiltrate all levels of society in disguise, gather intelligence on Consilii and assassinate influential mages. Guardians do not just oppose the Seers on principle; Guardians resent — and admire — the renegade order's rival espionage.

Guardians of the Veil police their allies to root out traitors and fools. The order opposes any attempt to rebuild Atlantis outside of the gradual turn of the Diamond Wheel and the coming triumph of the Hieromagus.

Guardians hide their internal



policing, but realize that the chance of being caught always exists. Consequently, order mages habitually collect evidence of an internal enemy's wrongdoing. In cases when the order defends Esoteric Tenets, Guardians fabricate evidence of crimes that would better justify their actions if the other orders investigate.

Prepare the Way for the Hieromagus

The Hieromagus will come and turn the Diamond Wheel into reborn Atlantis. His soul will be the new spire to the Realms Supernal. He'll throw down the false gods that reign there. Guardians prepare the way for the Hieromagus in secret. They prevent false messiahs from rising and sabotage attempts to recreate Atlantis before its proper time.

Guardians believe that once enough Awakened souls are sufficiently tested, they will give birth to the Hieromagus. The order applies ordeals to mages and encourages the wisest to gather together so that, one day, their work will bring forth the greatest mage of all.

The order attacks competing Awakened messiahs (and there have been many since the Fall) and plagues mages with a certain amount of turmoil so that none will falsely claim the Hieromagus' throne. Aside from that, senior mages in the order prepare for the Hieromagus according to their own understanding of the prophecy. Occasionally, two Guardians will helm opposing operations because they disagree about the ultimate nature of the coming Perfect Master. Others cloister themselves to meditate and study because they feel that they must prepare their souls, not the Fallen World.

The Great Game

Over the centuries, the Law of the Mask has gathered numerous metaphors for Guardian espionage. One story likens it to a game of chess, full of simple moves that affect an ocean of possibilities. Other tales recommend a more organic model — the Awakened are still human, and must be manipulated by their passions, dreams and fears.

All agree that the essence of successful espionage exists within a spy's soul. Without a clear purpose, dispassionate judgment and the ability to submit one's ego to the need for secrecy, a spy will fail. When you can see the skeletons in the closet, it's easy to see everything as one crude power struggle. The order teaches all of its members that, no matter what they see, they must cleave to the Guardians' precepts. Otherwise, an enemy can prove to be too seductive. Tremere have immortality and Seers of the Throne possess temporal might, but the Guardians of the Veil resist these temptations by meditating on the rightness of their cause.

Against the Seers of the Throne

The greatest and falsest of thrones are claimed by the Exarchs. Their slaves are some of the order's greatest enemies, but not out of sheer hatred. Let the Free Council lead an angry crusade against the Throne, because Guardians of the Veil do not just fight Seers out of ideological pique. The truth is that the

Guardians *admire* this enemy. The Seers and the Guardians are the greatest players of the game of occult espionage.

This isn't to say that the order condones the Seers of the Throne. Guardians will not let a clever Seer escape to fight another day or stay their hands out of professional respect. Guardians of the Veil give no quarter and ask none. Once a captured Seer is drained of any useful information, she is dead.

Nevertheless, the Guardians and Seers of a given region developing an almost obsessive rivalry isn't unusual. As each side gathers intelligence, members begin to feel as if they know their enemies. Guardian Susceptors and Seers often refer to each other on a first name basis. They may even exchange gifts and compliments with the full knowledge that this does not in any way mitigate efforts to kill or compromise one another.

Both orders habitually disguise themselves. Some Seers of the Throne use the Profane Urim or Mind magic to walk the world in stolen bodies, while Guardians employ the Masqué to hide their true selves. Both orders employ cults and conspiracies of Sleepers to simultaneously gather worldly power and hide the truth of magic. Since these orders use such similar methods, other orders wonder whether the Guardians of the Veil are not more prone to the sway of the Exarchs.

But the Guardians will never be slaves. To them, that distinction is worth their lives.

Cold Wars

If your game focuses on the Guardians of the Veil, Seers of the Throne are the springboard for a classic espionage chronicle. Normally, Guardians face opposition from throughout the supernatural world. If you look at the real world for inspiration, this resembles the current state of intelligence operations, where agencies face off against multiple threats that may not be able to mount continuous attacks, but provide occasional, unpredictable threats. This is perfect for a more episodic chronicle, but you may want to narrow the focus to the Seers of the Throne to emulate the "classic" era of cold war espionage.

The advantage of the latter approach is that the characters gradually learn the personalities, motives and strengths of their enemies. The Seers of the Throne also learn and develop strategies to counter the players' mages. The chronicle starts to resemble the "chess game" model of espionage, in which secrets are secondary to the ability of each side to effectively marshal its resources. Every once in a while, spice the game's assumptions with a personal story, in which a character on one side doesn't follow the "rules" but acts upon personal motives. The interplay between cold strategy and emotion can be a compelling theme for your chronicle.

Other Enemies

Even though rivalries between Guardians and Seers can reach a fever pitch, the Seers of the Throne are not Guardians' most common enemies. The order fights diverse enemies wherever they can be found.

Left-Handed Legacies

Tremere, Scelesti and the Austere (see p. 172-175) are constant threats. Their agendas are threat enough, but they also tempt mages with their unusual powers. Even mages fear death; a lich's immortality can lead the old, sick and fearful away from the right path. Guardians of the Veil don't just deal with Left-Handed mages, but also destroy their works, discredit their reputations and generally disparage the dark Legacies as much as possible. The Mysterium opposes the order's policies here, because the Mysterium feels that the best way to defeat these enemies is to study their works and lives. Guardians prefer to burn their enemies' books and erase their monuments, and offer no apologies.

Allied Orders

Other orders sometimes try to spy on Guardians of the Veil. The Guardians are so reticent about their goals that this curiosity is understandable, and the order feels that would-be monitors should get something for their trouble. Unfortunately, this is usually a stream of disinformation that the local caucus has cooked up for just such an occasion. The Law of the Mask includes a game called "How Many Truths?" in which Guardian mages try to talk in a fashion such that the true meaning can only be understood through context, but the conversation can seem perfectly intelligible. To this end, Guardians adopt occult terminology, gangster slang and pop culture references.

There is one order that merits special attention. Guardians do not, as a rule, approve of the Free Council. The renegade order is the one most likely to create another false Atlantis, and its urge to recreate magic in the Fallen World's image would make any effort categorically corrupt. Guardians of the Veil subvert the Free Council more than the other orders, but realize that the opportunity to destroy it has long passed. Besides, there are occasional hints that the Nameless forebears of the Free Council represent something more ancient, and until Guardians know what that is, they are unwilling to snuff out a possible Atlantean lineage.

How Many Truths?

Here's an example of coded dialogue honed by the "How Many Truths?" game:

Know what I'm saying? I'm talking about the kitchen. The chef comes in like he was on wings of angels telling us how to run the kitchen like he knows the owners, then he fires our dishwashers and acts like he's cooking up some flashy high-fat menu for the whole restaurant. He wants his share of the tips, right? But we're a halal establishment; tenderized long pig isn't appropriate.

You don't wanna eat a dirty animal, even if you don't know what's in the meal, right? But you know people are gonna be too hungry for junk food to take my advice. Know what I'm saying?

Translation: I'm starting to speak in code (*Know what I'm saying?*) using our "kitchen" set of prearranged metaphors and allusions (*I'm talking about the kitchen*). This subject is a Theurgist with a personal Judeo-Christian praxis (*on wings of angels*). He claims to speak for the Consilium (owners) regarding the common Hallow (*kitchen*). He's gotten rid of our Sleeper moles (*fires the dishwashers*). He plans to employ human sacrifice (*tenderized long pig*) there to boost the Mana (*high fat*) he has to trade – without letting anyone know where it's coming from (*even if you don't know what's in your meal*). He wants to garner influence (*his share of the tips*) over the whole Awakened community (*restaurant*). This will be a successful strategy (*gonna be too hungry*), especially since he plans on using magic to misdirect investigations (*flashy menu*), but the resonance won't be good for anyone (*junk food*). End code (*Know what I'm saying?*).

Sleepers

The order tests and fools Sleepers with the Labyrinth whenever Guardians can, but not every Sleeper is easily tricked. From time to time, competent Sleepers have learned too much, and worse yet, they have been connected to organizations that will notice if they disappear and react with enough force or wit to threaten Guardian operations. Mundane intelligence agencies, police forces and news agencies are common sources for these meddlers, so Guardian caucuses try to keep a hand in such organizations. The order counters by isolating the Sleeper. This usually involves subverting the organization to the point that Guardians can ruin the enemy's reputation, get her fired or demote her to a position where she can't act on what she knows.

Other Supernatural Beings

Guardians judge other supernatural entities by their actions, but the needs of the Awakened are paramount. Since the other denizens of the World of Darkness are outside of Awakened society and rarely know of the true occult, the order exercises a free hand when it comes to hindering or allying with these beings. Guardians ask themselves what the benefits and dangers of a given entity are and proceed accordingly. Getting caught up in these beings' politics is, however, frowned upon.

Tradecraft

Guardians of the Veil prefer tactics that have a mundane core. These are less likely to tempt the Abyss with wild magic and provide a degree of reliability that magic alone cannot provide. A Guardian will usually never employ an invisibility spell without also breaching electronic security, avoiding sentries

and taking pains to hide normally. Magic is an added blessing, but rarely an outright necessity. The order admits that there are times where sheer magical prowess is necessary, but not until every standard method is found wanting.

Cells

Although a Guardian may know about the activities of compatriots within a given region, caucuses elsewhere are White secrets. If captured, most Guardians cannot compromise the order outside of their own cities. Even then, caucus members share information on a need-to-know basis, so an interrogator may not be able to torture a full account of local affairs out of his captive.

There are times when multiple delicate operations or the sheer number of Guardians justify splitting up a caucus into multiple cells or when caucuses in several cities work together. In both cases, an Epopt organizes a communications structure designed to minimize exposure if a single cell is compromised. The order uses modern espionage parlance here by referring to communications mechanisms (including people) as "cut-outs." Epopts are the most common "block" cut-outs and know of multiple cells and their operations. Susceptors are more likely to be "chain" cut-outs, only aware of the immediate source and destination of an order or piece of intelligence. A block cut-out can compromise the work of dozens of Guardians; Epopts monitor block cut-outs accordingly. Chain cut-outs are more disposable, since they can only endanger two or three groups.

The Caucus as Spy Ring

Guardian caucuses don't indulge in a lot of internal politicking. Ideally, they are too devoted to the order's work to jockey for prestige. In any event, the order styles itself servants, not masters, so gaining recognized power is not as important as covert influence.

Guardian titles require a certain amount of status, but again, this isn't supposed to be awarded based on personal charisma. Temporal power is an illusion that Guardians tend to see through with ease, because the Labyrinth teaches them the arbitrary rituals that lie at the roots of most organizations. They prefer to acknowledge those with ability and award responsibilities to those who are capable of handling them. The order rewards mages who act for the order through personal initiative or test themselves with severe ordeals. Raw magical ability is a factor as well, but never at the expense of wisdom.

Local Epopts direct the caucuses. They approve or suggest missions and disseminate information according to the order's levels of trust. Most Epopts are conscious of the tension between cabal loyalty and Guardian duties. While every order mage is expected to monitor his own cabal for dangers to the Awakened, Epopts normally instruct caucus members to refrain from acting against their own cabals. This minimizes stress on mages who may not want to act against friends and lets the order appear trustworthy. Some Guardians broker informal arrangements to spy on each other's cabals so that, in the event of a problem, someone they trust is poised to act.

Epopts may go as far as to split a caucus in two, so each one can operate without endangering the other. This arrangement is also useful when an Epopt suspects there's a traitor acting from inside the group.

Cryptography Versus Oral Tradition

The Guardians of the Veil don't put much trust in written communications. They prefer the oral lore of the Law of the Mask to guide their lives.

When it comes to sensitive communications, Guardians avoid writing things down whenever possible, but they do recognize that sometimes there's no sensible alternative. For instance, a Guardian would rather send a coded letter than waste magic on telepathy or use a spell to project her whisper to the recipient.

Nevertheless, the order's coders are an informal clique. While a Guardian might be an incredibly skilled cryptoanalyst, she does not benefit from a structured training regimen or an old coding tradition. The Law of the Mask is slowly incorporating teaching stories about how to use the most sophisticated ciphers, but, for the most part, the order lags slightly behind the state of the art.

Agents

Guardians are excellent operatives themselves, but they still employ others to gather information and spread deception. There are not many mages in the world, so while the order emphasizes sacrifice for the cause, Guardians are loath to put mages in unnecessary danger.

The order walks an ideological tightrope when recruiting outside mages. Although the Esoteric Tenets allow the order to sow enough strife to prevent another false Atlantis, the order still holds that it must help mages live righteous lives. Therefore, if Guardians of the Veil wish to corrupt another mage, they must be absolutely certain that the moral loss will lead to a greater good. Guardians don't want mages to be venal or impulsive, and Guardians feel some agony when they lead weak-willed mages into spiritual desolation. Nevertheless, a pragmatic Guardian will undoubtedly find a way to justify his actions.

The Law of the Mask sings of the motives of would-be agents: how to find, satisfy and if, necessary, cut them from the Divine Thread when their work is done. Guardian mages use close observation and a little Mind magic to determine which of the seven traditional motives to explore.

The following types are recorded by oral tradition:

The Crown of Roses: The Crown of Roses believes her talents go unrecognized. Often, she seeks higher station in an organization. Guardians promise to help this worthy rise

by removing a rival or creating a chance for her to display her qualities. If the agent's ambitions are dangerous, they are blackmail fodder. This agent turns if she can prove herself by exposing the order.

The Smoke of Altars: This agent has a habit that is onerous to herself or others – but not to the Guardians. The order employs these agents when they can feed their drug habits, satisfy their fetishes and so on. Hiding this agent's habit for her exerts some influence, but not as much as a steady supply of whatever she craves. This agent often takes undue risks and might barter against the order's interest to fill her need. Thus, the Smoke of Altars is suited for suicide missions.

The Ebony Palanquin: To employ this agent requires only money – though what constitutes “money” varies tremendously between mages, Sleepers and other entities. When he gets paid, he gives his services, though he will always look for ways to increase his fee. The Law of the Mask notes that this is the least reliable form of agent, but, at the same time, he has often betrayed others for profit, leaving an opportunity for blackmail.

The Pomegranate Eater: While the Smoke of Altars has a compulsive, somewhat deviant desire, the Pomegranate Eater appears normal but craves an experience many would take for granted, such as sexual intimacy, popularity or a particular body image. The Pomegranate Eater is psychologically flawed, because otherwise, he could find his desire or at least a measure of peace. Shame allows the beloved or provider to dominate the agent, even to the point of bullying. When these agents' roles are complete, these agents can be pushed to destroy themselves.

The Oubliette: This agent wants a reversal of fortune: others should fall so that she can benefit. Rising above them isn't enough, because she hates her competition. Oral tradition notes that these agents are secretly aware of deficits in their own competence. To cover them up, these agents may exaggerate their abilities to gather intelligence or omit information that puts them in a bad light. Naturally, their ill will toward their own can be used against them when it comes time to squeeze them for more service. Help the Oubliette undermine her enemy, then blackmail her with evidence that she did it.

The Battlefield Gull: The Battlefield Gull is a nihilist at heart. Some flaw gnaws within him where he wishes to destroy his surroundings, and aiding the order is a means to this end. This agent may turn against the order to increase the amount of chaos this causes, so a Guardian handler must stave off the moment when the Gull turns his destructive nature against himself. This agent is hard to blackmail, since he may call a Guardian's bluff just to help along his own fall.

The Portal Warden: This agent is so idealistic she feels compelled to betray confidence for the sake of some greater purpose. A Guardian should display sympathy for her cause. This crusader's scruples might make her withhold information. The order must account for this type's tendency toward martyrdom. Blackmail is not advised. Within these limits, she does excellent work, because she believes in her cause even as she betrays others' trust.



Penetrating the Orders

It is very hard for a mage to convincingly belong to more than one order. Keep in mind that there isn't a crowd to melt into or walk out from. Mages are rare. With the exception of those who deliberately hide themselves, the Wise usually have a general idea of who every mage in their home region is. There is never a "generic Thrysus from Chicago" to impersonate.

Furthermore, the orders' practices make membership difficult to fake. Each has initiatory secrets that make an indelible impression on how a mage uses the Art. A Guardian who pretends to be an Adamantine Arrow will seem false if she can't perform the martial order's simplest rote mudras.

Switching orders is not unheard of, but there is always a danger that the intense indoctrination of one order will wipe out loyalty to the other.

This is why Guardians of the Veil investigate other orders by proxy whenever possible. Agents are vital to Guardians' ability to monitor the Awakened.

Agent Tactics

Outside agents can be employed to gather intelligence, pass false information or sabotage the enemy organization. Each function requires an increasing level of trust, but ironically, the more treacherous the agent, the more Guardians of the Veil are liable to regard him as unworthy of Awakening. After all, if the order can lead him astray, he is too weak to turn his part of the Diamond Wheel. Therefore, the order feels little sympathy for those Guardians betray in the end.

Most agents just gather intelligence for the order. A highly placed politician passes along the secrets of city business through the Labyrinth. An Adamantine Arrow shares strategic information with a lover or cabalmate. Guardians of the Veil don't just acquire agents to respond to a problem, but continually recruit them in the hopes that an irrelevant fact now can prove useful later. If at all possible, the handler (usually a Susceptor) hides what he's actually interested in, so that interrogators will never know what the order was looking for.

The order tries to pass false intelligence through unwitting agents whenever possible. This evades magic that discovers a liar's intent and prevents the agent from confessing. These agents' willingness to report Guardian activity makes them untrustworthy, though. Only a very trusted agent is allowed to knowingly lie for the order.

Sabotage requires the highest degree of trust. An Awakened agent who will destabilize her cabal, caucus or Consilium is valued, but often, this is a suicide mission. The Awakened community is small and uses occult detection as a matter of course, so most traitors are easy to find. The one consolation

is that the order itself is most often charged with finding them. Guardians might save a saboteur on the run – but they might cut their losses and let the Interfector dispose of her, too.

Schisms and Heresies

Humility and secrecy. Ordeals. Sins for a just end. The core beliefs of the order lead to a difficult life, so, naturally, some of their mages stray from the fold. In truth, Guardians of the Veil accept many different perspectives, so that few ideas can, in and of themselves, lead to heresy. The order cares more about actions. Guardians are not only charged with some of the most critical work in Awakened society, but they claim special dispensation to perform ruthless acts. The Guardians use their Veil initiations to help keep members loyal, but also to avoid sheer fanaticism. Nevertheless, when the Guardians reject one of their own, it's usually for the following reasons.

Treachery and Disobedience

If any Guardian knowingly helps the enemies of the Wise, the penalty is death. Collaborating with Banishers, Seers of the Throne or followers of a known Left-Handed Legacy all qualify. The order removes traitors quietly and hates to reveal that any of their own would betray the Awakened.

Sometimes things aren't so clear, such as when a Guardian shares a secret with an outsider who isn't an active enemy, but might prove dangerous. Guardians have little tolerance for minor crimes that snowball into serious problems. In these cases, the punishment fits the severity of the resulting crisis, but even a "harmless" indiscretion invites censure.

Seduced by the Throne

It's an unfortunate fact that Guardians of the Veil are slightly more likely to be compromised by the Seers of the Throne. Each faction knows the other by their works, and the challenge of Awakened espionage does turn into admiration for the other side. A skilled Guardian is also in an excellent position to gain a high position in the Seers, where spying, disguises and lies are prerequisites to advancement.

When the order captures these traitors, they are given to an Interfector for an extended period of the most painful torture the caucus can devise, questioning and death. Some believe that if the soul of the traitor moves on to a new body, the soul will remember the pain and avoid future treachery, but this may be nothing more than a way to justify revenge.

Selfishness and Obsession

The order selects members who demonstrate self-discipline and loyalty, but draw the line at both fanaticism and overrid-

ing self-interest. Fanaticism is a dangerous thing for any mage, because it influences his spells and research. A cabal from a now-extinct Legacy called the Goetic Masquers became the Legion (see p. 56-57) because they were obsessed with the Masque. Conversely, Project Nightfall (see p. 57) represents selfish degeneration — a splinter group of Guardians were too tempted by the pleasures of the Fallen World to keep the order's ethos.

Twisting the Wheel

There are Guardians who are too impatient to wait for the Hieromagus and who wonder if the order has crushed genuine chances for Atlantis to come again. There are those who have lost faith in the Hieromagus completely, and worse, a few who have, over the centuries, tried to claim that they were the Perfect Master.

The order does accept those who believe that the Hieromagus is a spiritual idea instead of an actual person. But even if the Hieromagus is the spirit of an age of victory, orthodoxy dictates that the order would know that he'd arrived, even if it were in the hearts of mages. Deny the Perfect Master completely, and you deny the order itself.

On the other hand, Guardians have fallen for false messiahs before. These cults are usually small and easily expunged, but the Basilideans have managed to survive over the years thanks to their radical doctrines and strict secrecy. Victims of false Hieromagi are spared if they are willing to see and renounce their errors. The pretenders themselves do not survive a successful purging.

Basilideans

In the 2nd century, a Guardian by the shadow name of Abraxas made a Labyrinth of the Gnostic Heresy known as the Basilideans. This sect worshipped the god Abraxas; some members of its inner circle identified the mage with the god.

The Sleeper Basilideans believed that the Old Testament was composed by an evil god and that its villains were actually worthy of reverence. Therefore, the elect should seek spiritual wisdom without being encumbered by moral law. Abraxas passed Basilideans through the Veil to be Cultors by his side, but did not tell these mages that he was not a god. Instead, his followers identified him with the Hieromagus and proclaimed that Abraxas had come to restore Atlantis.

Abraxas was a powerful mage; some of his abilities appeared to transcend the known principles of magic, and he never appeared to suffer Paradoxes. The Guardians of the Veil claim that Abraxas merely learned unique Legacy Attainments and hid his Paradoxes well, but the mage's cult soon grew to attract other Guardians. The cult successfully fended off numerous assassination attempts, so Abraxas reigned over his followers for a century, spreading his doctrine. He never appeared to age or fail at a magical task.

According to Abraxas, the Realms Supernal were five eternal emanations from the Godhead. His Awakening wasn't written on any Watchtower because he was one with God. The Fallen World

was the Cosmic Seed, which in times past was meant to ripen and return to God, but had withered since the fall of Atlantis. The cult should create worldly turmoil and throw down the works of humanity. This was the true meaning of "All thrones are false." Sleepers and Awakened should ignore morality and follow their passions until they were exhausted. Abraxas said that this was the real significance of the Guardians' supposed immunity from sin, and now was the time to apply it to everyone. With the Lie broken before them, Abraxas could shape humanity into a new Cosmic Seed. Indeed, Abraxas even set the early Roman church against his own Labyrinth to scatter the Basilideans to show that even his most beloved followers might be scattered.

Eventually, the cult's propensity for spreading chaos affected the other orders, and Abraxas was cornered in his Alexandrian sanctum. The order says that Adamantine Arrows killed Abraxas with a pillar of fire, but cult lore records that he vanished and appeared in spirit to five followers. These mages carried on the cult's traditions.

Modern Basilideans are even more secretive than other Guardians. Basilideans recruit followers when they can be isolated from the rest of the order, and teach them Abraxas' doctrine as if it were a part of the orthodox Law of the Mask. Basilideans only reveal their heretical status once the new cultist has committed to the Basilidean philosophy and must hide it to move within the rest of the order. The cult still destabilizes Awakened and Sleeper institutions where it can, hoping to turn people against their own moral teachings and institutions. Once the Fallen World's teachings provide no comfort, Abraxas will reveal himself and purify all. Basilideans believe that their Perfect Master wanders the world still, and some cultists claim to have seen him in visions, or even in disguise, where he reveals himself by using cult signs. Guardians root out the cult whenever they can, but followers are attracted by the cult's total rejection of moral responsibility. They experience cathartic glee when they tear down cherished institutions.

Legion

Legion is the only schism that might be called a *virus*.

To understand humanity, build humility and hide themselves, Guardians of the Veil practice the Masque, in which they adopt identities keyed to the mystic laws of the psyche. Order mages try to replicate the passions of others to lose attachments to their own passions. Guardians often use simple visualization, props and disguises to do this, but the most dedicated Masquers prefer to use magic to immerse themselves in new perspectives.

Some goetic mages (see *Mage: The Awakening*, pp. 323-325) take the process too far. Experiencing new passions becomes an addiction, and their goetic "companions" can't be suppressed. The result is Legion: a mage aflame with several, dozens or even hundreds of personalities. Unlike mundane forms of multiple personality disorder, these selves are not fragments of the mage's psyche; they are wholly independent, hailing from the deep archetypal realms of Astral Space. They cannot be integrated through psychotherapy.

Buried under so many selves, the Legion-afflicted learn to compromise among the inward factions that want to claim her body and soul. These mages perform seemingly random acts to satisfy the Virtues and Vices they carry. Some of these are dark urges that lead to acts such as murder, theft and drug abuse. On the other hand, the mage may perform uncharacteristic acts of charity and bring justice to wrongdoers, all to satisfy the desires of his selves. All of these acts can threaten a Guardian's safety, because even good deeds can get in the way of the order's subtle duties. Most members of Legion are quickly found, healed if possible and killed if they are found to be incurable.

Acquiring the Legion disorder is one thing; joining the conspiracy is a different matter. Guardians who call personalities they can't dispel usually seek help at the early stages, so a mage must have had a reason to keep it to himself. In some cases, this is because the victim sees his condition as a superior state. He can view a problem from many sides and seek inspiration from the best personality for a given situation. The interior wars between his selves don't concern him as much as the sheer rush of multiple Virtues and Vices.

These Legion-afflicted recognize each other easily, seeing the marks others miss in chaotic habits and strange body language. These sects cover for each other's indiscretions and try to expand their range of selves even further. Members of Legion use telepathy to experience each other's personalities and even share these selves across many bodies. The cult even hunts down individuals with unique personalities and talents. Legion mages try to duplicate these psyches or even steal them from their owners, using Mind spells.

After an extended period of time, the mages in a Legion cell psychically blend into one another. Habitual telepathy is the medium by which Legion members begin to dissolve into a thousand selves traversing a handful of mages. This is not a harmonious collective; it's a psychic battleground of warring personalities, filled with factions and plots to dominate the whole.

Project Nightfall

Mages move through the Fallen World with delicate steps. Most mages take pains to hide their Awakened natures from Sleepers. Guardians of the Veil are some of the greatest exponents and enforcers of this policy. The Labyrinth exists to distract the unworthy, so that Awakened truth doesn't fall right into their laps. This keeps the Diamond Wheel pure so that the wisest souls can direct its turn toward the world's liberation.

Sometime in the late 1960s, an all-Guardian cabal in Washington, DC, decided it had learned the arts of misdirection all too well, but were tired of waiting for the Hieromagus, Atlantis' return and all of the other idealistic, distant goals of the order. They were in the right time and place to have a much more immediate effect on the world. They had occult power and a finger on the pulses of American and Soviet espionage. In short, they wanted a piece of the action for themselves.

Project Nightfall slowly insinuated itself into American intelligence agencies with no other agenda than to gather as much influence as possible. Other Guardians applauded this

bold move, and the cabal fought vicious battles with Seers of the Throne and other supernatural beings who kept an eye on the intelligence community. These enemies were almost as dangerous as the agencies themselves. The cabal assassinated FBI and CIA agents to keep the cabal members' secrets, while slowly leaking their own intelligence about Soviet infiltrators to anyone who could give the cabal a better foothold in the intelligence establishment. In time, the cabal even added some supernatural lore to these agencies' sparse, secret files on the subject. Cabal members enhanced their prestige by "turning" Soviet agents who were actually cooperative Russian Guardians. These "enemy agents" replaced themselves with brainwashed, shapeshifted Sleepers and joined the Nightfall conspiracy.

By late 1972, Project Nightfall enjoyed a salary pilfered from various "black book" discretionary funds and was thought to be one of several informal groups US intelligence turned to when the intelligence community needed to learn more about strange phenomena. At the same time, the cabal used its Arts and cunning to direct the members' own operations. Project Nightfall became a name to mention in select Washington offices; cabal members spread half-truths about UFOs and remote viewing while they meddled in affairs from Southeast Asia to Moscow. Sleeper agents stole magical artifacts and harassed cabal enemies while thinking they were fighting communism or repatriating stolen property.

Now, Project Nightfall is a Labyrinth that encompasses the CIA, FBI, NSA and Department of Homeland Security. Project Nightfall doesn't control or even significantly influence these agencies, but does have enough of a pull to send Sleepers on missions and claim a line on several black budgets. Sleepers in the Labyrinth believe that they're a cross-departmental group that shares intelligence about "fringe" threats such as the occult, UFOs and psychic phenomena. The cabal has relinquished the Guardians' high ideals in favor of wealth and political pull, but the rest of the order doesn't fully realize that cabal members have become so selfish. Project Nightfall has cut off relations with other mages; cabal members keep an eye out for potential rivals but care more about how to exploit their own gifts for material gain. Now, Nightfall has an outrageous goal: to put one of its own in a US cabinet position and become the power behind the White House.

Titles and Duties

Guardians of the Veil assign internal positions according to function instead of ritual need. Ceremonies are matters for magic and Labyrinth psychodramas, but practical secret-keeping requires clearly defined duties and the right people to carry them out. The majority of Guardians don't have formal positions at all; they are jacks-of-all-trades who perform all necessary tasks. Those who hold titles for any length of time do their best to specialize, but never at the expense of broad studies.

The following positions are filled to perform the order's most common or distinctive operations. The Law of the Mask gives these roles a variety of names, but Western Guardians are most likely to use the ones listed below.

Cultor (Status ●)

Epopts supervise the Labyrinth and direct Guardian operations as a whole, but Cultors are the ones who weave the lies that turn into secret societies and religions. A Cultor is a student of faith and psychology; he applies what he knows to create a Labyrinth and directs its affairs from within. His closest contact is the Epopt, who is less concerned with the day-to-day operation of a Labyrinth than the ability to use it to win influence and apprentices. The Cultor makes sure the torches light with blue fire and the altar stone levitates. He cashes followers' checks and studies their personalities.

Cultors have to be excellent researchers and liars. In the information age, it's easier than ever for a dedicated layperson to uncover historically shaky claims and botched translations. A Cultor has to construct a mystery that will do more than fool the naive men and women who seek out cults; she has to be able to attract scholars and disciplined wisdom-seekers too. The Labyrinth separates the spiritual wheat from the chaff, so the Labyrinth has to offer something to those who might Awaken and outgrow it.

The Law of the Mask calls the Cultor the "second-eldest office." After the fall of Atlantis, the Eyes of the Dragon reorganized itself to make its way through Fallen lands. The Eyes needed to protect magic from profane eyes and disguise itself, but needed a way to justify Awakened miracles. The first Cultors created religions by combining native beliefs with coded Atlantean insight. Guardians turned Hallows into taboo ground and sanctums into mystery temples so that outsiders would hold mages at a distance, but in proper awe.

Some of the first Labyrinths were secret warrior societies and cults, nurtured with careful miracles until they could produce Sleepers who could unwittingly further the order's interests and serve as proving grounds for those who might Awaken. Some of these societies have lived long past their founders, but remain useful. The Law of the Mask speaks of symbols that many Labyrinths might have. A Cultor doesn't just use these tools to construct her conspiracy, but to ease her way through the mystery cults and lodges that came before. If they've survived and kept the old symbols, a Cultor can use these cults and lodges to claim membership and even authority. Therefore, a Guardian on the run could bluff his way into a certain lodge, because ancient Cultors prepared the way.

Under the direction of an Epopt, the Cultor also directs cult members to act in ways that benefit the order. He produces omens and doctrines that say that a promised ascension is at hand, as long as the society does as the Epopt wishes. This could be as simple as a financial investment or as extreme as armed combat, depending on the needs of the Epopt and the Cultor's skill. Sometimes, the Epopt needs to extinguish an old Labyrinth, too. In such cases, the Cultor sows rumors of the apocalypse, fraud or inconvenient love affairs, as appropriate. The end of a secret society is a delicate time for the mages involved. Sleepers often feel betrayed and, if they can find the shadow rulers of the organization, can strike back. This is why the most ruthless Cultors prefer to end their projects with mass suicides, but most Cultors are subtle enough to tear everything apart with rumors and come away clean.

The Universal Secret Society

Cultors designed the secret rituals, code phrases and signs used by secret societies all over the world. Players who want their characters to take advantage of that legacy should consider the following Merit.

Ancient Signs (●●●)

Prerequisite: Occult •••, Guardians of the Veil Status •

Effect: Your character knows how the Guardians of the Veil implanted certain symbols and tokens of authority throughout history. These symbols still have power today, so the Guardian can use them to claim authority in secret societies that use such symbols. Make a Wits + Occult roll; each success adds one die to social dice pools used to interact with any secret society that uses Guardian symbols. This aids the character's attempts to convince the society that she is a member or pretend to hold higher status than she currently possesses. In the modern day, a vast number of organizations that do not necessarily even have an ongoing Guardian influence still use signs and tokens designed by Guardian Cultors.

Drawback: If the deception is discovered or the Wits + Occult roll fails, no other Guardian can use this Merit on the secret society the character has attempted to cheat. Its members either now consider the old signs to be unreliable or have abandoned them before your character tried to use them.

Epopt (Status ●●●●)

The Epopt is the living hub of a Guardian caucus. While her formal duty is to supervise a region's Labyrinth, she also coordinates the activities of nearby order mages and communicates with Epopts in other cities. Most Epopts are not particularly authoritarian. If a mage makes it through the Veils and into the order, he's competent enough to work on his own. Instead, the Epopt consolidates local intelligence and caucus members' concerns into a few general directions, setting priorities for each project.

Cultors help create and maintain the Labyrinth, but the Epopt uses it. When the caucus needs the Labyrinth's members to act, the Epopt makes a plan and gives the order to carry it out. Epopts also guide the newly Awakened through the Veils. Cultors may assist, but an Epopt is responsible for an honest ordeal; Cultors might get personally attached to a Labyrinth member. Furthermore, there's always a chance that the Epopt will guide the new apprentice to another order, maintaining the balance of favors that keep Guardians of the Veil respected.

There is almost always only one Epopt per caucus. Guardians protect him well because he often knows secrets that mustn't leave the stewardship of the order. As a spymaster, he makes sure the individual Guardians don't blunder into each other on conflicting missions. The Epopt is trusted to hold and disseminate information at will. Not only does he inform Guardians, he determines what they need to know. This is necessary to maintain the caucus' cell structure. Under a conservative Epopt, a caucus meeting can feel rather disjointed, as

members must avoid broaching subjects that the Epopt hasn't given them permission to talk about.

Still, Epopts trust Guardians to act on their own and keep them informed. In return, Guardians of the Veil must trust their Epopt to share what is necessary, protect mages' covers and make the best use of what they know. This can be a lonely, morally challenging duty, so it isn't unusual for an Epopt to confide in a single Guardian of equal or greater status. This mage traditionally becomes the Epopt's successor if she retires from the post or dies. It is customary to weave one lie into this confidence, so that if it gets loose, the Epopt can trace the lie back to her treacherous ally.

Epopts are always respected members of the order, but don't always have to be the greatest mages or even the highest-status Guardians of the Veil. Epopts choose successors from the best communicators and secret-keepers. This is more important than raw magical ability. If a caucus lacks an Epopt, the caucus usually chooses a new one with a vote. Such an Epopt could even have less status than is normally required, but without it, Epopts from other regions won't share information.

Emissary (Status ●)

The Emissary has a low-status job with a deceptively simple description: he relays communication between the Guardians of the Veil and other orders. Secrecy and espionage complicate matters considerably, however, and give the Emissary more dangerous duties.

The Emissary's simplest job is to relay messages from the caucus to the local Consilium. As some Guardians will not even name their Epopt or indeed, even show their true faces, the Emissary is often the first one to be interrogated by the Hierarch about the order's motives and activities.

These meetings can include blackmail, lies, bribery and threats, all delivered to order from the Guardians' caucus. Some mages get very, very upset when an order flunkie drops by to utter a secondhand threat. Emissaries risk the wrath of angry mages who might "shoot the messenger," but Guardians do let others know that they will not tolerate assaults on their chosen Emissary. The Emissary is often belittled, insulted and goaded into a challenge. Persecutors should be careful, however, because even though the Emissary is a low-status job, powerful and influential Guardians aren't barred from it, either.

A good Emissary has an excellent memory. Not only does she need to recite long messages at will, but she is expected to take note of what she encounters during the course of her duties. Later, the rest of the caucus will debrief her, squeezing out any information that the members might find relevant.

Finally, the Emissary maintains contact with Guardian agents in other orders and factions. The Emissary rarely knows the purpose of intent of a message. Instead, the caucus designs coded statements for the Emissary to recite. This way, Emissaries bring orders and information to anyone who secretly serves Guardians of the Veil. On other occasions, the Emissary has a more active role, representing the order when it comes time to pay the agent or court the services of someone new.

After consulting with the caucus, the Epopt usually gives the Emissary a specific plan: offers to make, non-negotiable items and relevant facts. Emissaries in these situations need to be able to improvise without overstepping their bounds. Even though Guardians are not above breaking promises, they do prefer to avoid the tactic as much as possible. An Epopt often gives low-status Emissaries chances to prove themselves by sending them to negotiate with agents.

Interfector (Status ●●)

Executioners, torturers and scapegoats, Interfectors are well-known to the other orders. Outsiders hate them in accordance with ritual and genuine sentiment. Masks play a prominent role in many Guardian ceremonies, but the Interfector's office is defined by his mask: an expressionless iron visage with slits for the eyes and mouth. The Interfector traditionally wears a dark, flowing garment and either gloves or stains his hands with a deep red color. In some regions, Interfectors use henna to paint Atlantean runes and the signs of local death gods on their faces and hands. In other places, Interfectors replace the dark garments with naked skin, covered with whip and burn scars.

Not all Consilii employ Interfectors; they are signs of authoritarianism and a strong Guardian influence. The Interfector is the Consilium's headsman and interrogator. The Guardians of the Veil permit her to kill or torture any mage selected by both the Hierarch and a simple majority of attending Councilors. The Interfector will even hunt other Guardians. The Consilium may employ the Interfector secretly or refuse to justify the decision to other mages. Furthermore, the Interfector is immune to normal rules against killing or offending the persons of other mages and may ignore challenges to duel. This creates a sense of uncertainty, because nobody can be sure who ordered the Interfector to act — or whether the Interfector killed for his own reasons. Guardians employ Interfectors for assassinations in situations where this uncertainty can work to their advantage.

Obviously, then, most mages despise Interfectors. This is useful, because the presence of such a loathsome figure draws attention away from the leaders of a ruthless Consilium. Atlantean tradition holds that the Interfector is unclean. Mages may not touch or even stand in the shadow of the Interfector without being symbolically tainted. Many modern mages don't believe in the position's taint, but follow custom anyway and, in any event, think that anyone who'd volunteer to kill for the Consilium is a heartless bastard anyway.

A Guardian caucus may rotate Interfector duties amongst themselves, relying on ritual garb to muddy the difference between one titleholder and the next. Sometimes, Guardians don't even let the Hierarch know that they've switched positions and let the mask and a bit of magic disguise the change. An Interfector must be able to kill and interrogate mages without flinching. This seemingly violates the rule of the Crimson Veil, save that the act does not demonstrate loyalty to the order as much as humility. The Interfector is the willing



slave of the Consilium, even at the expense of his own order. The Interfector thus symbolizes the strengths of the order as a whole, because she will do the unthinkable for other mages and by sinning, spare other sorcerers from sin.

Susceptor (Status ●●●)

Susceptors are the order's elite spies. All Guardians of the Veil learn to pluck the Divine Thread, but Susceptors don't rely on intermediate agents and Labyrinths as much as their own wits. Susceptors go straight to the field with the stealth, disguise and efficient violence needed to succeed. Susceptors are usually the most competent warriors in the order because they specialize in direct action. Long-term strategies and friends of friends are for Emissaries and Cultors; Susceptors work with knives and lock-picks in their hands and their objectives in sight.

A Susceptor needs physical ability, social skill and the ability to make snap judgments. A veteran Susceptor might appear to be the ideal Guardian until one looks outside the scope of his operations. Many Susceptors are not the best at long-term planning and have trouble looking at the larger implications of their work. As long as they stay focused on a single assignment, however, they can be formidable figures. Epopts make sure that the sharp swords of the Susceptors point in the right direction.

Susceptors develop specialties based on their aptitudes and interests. A strong, agile Susceptor trains to be a hand-to-hand fighter. A smooth talker specializes in seduction. Hackers, linguists and marksmen all have roles to play. These concentrations add to a base of competency. While caucus standards differ, the average Susceptor earns the title after she learns skills equivalent to those of a field agent in a Sleeper intelligence agency.

It's a dangerous job; smart Susceptors don't count on political advancement or long lives. If a captured Susceptor knows too much, she might have to commit suicide, and jobs such as stealing artifacts and penetrating enemy sanctums carry their own risks. Other Guardians believe that Susceptors tend to be impulsive and overly passionate, so even if they do survive, they aren't often made into Epopts. Instead, experienced Susceptors take novices under their wings to share professional insight and moral support.

Path Roles

There are two ways in which a mage's Path intersects with the goals of Guardians. On a purely practical level, the order has a use for every Arcanum. Even thunderous Forces and the numinous power of Prime have secretive uses, so Obrios can contribute as strongly to the Guardians as any other Path. Secondly, every Path has a special perspective on the nature of magic. Each Watchtower is a part of the Mystery of magic. Their Realms store the higher truths that liberate humanity from its Fallen state. Arcadia honors holy fools, so there must be a place for them in the Diamond Wheel. The

Paths remind Guardians of the Veil how comprehensive the Atlantean dream really is.

Acanthus

Acanthus mages are oracles, vagabonds and saboteurs. Followers of this Path are likened to Eris, the Greek goddess who shook nations by flinging a golden apple among the gods. Acanthus are valued Susceptors because they display chameleon-like personalities, uncommon foresight and the ability to sense the far-reaching consequences of seemingly innocuous actions. Fate and Time combine to make them quick and precise. Acanthus Guardians can indulge their love of trickery to the fullest. The Path of the Thistle leaves its thorns in the path of pursuers, setting terrible coincidences in their way while the Acanthus escapes with foresight and speed.

Acanthus tend to learn the Masque quickly, but rarely master it. To an Acanthus, a personality is a toy, a way to provoke and learn about others based on the reaction it provokes. Acanthus grow bored with long-term assignments, deep cover and anything else requiring a great deal of quiet and patience. This doesn't mean that Guardians on this Path can't have those qualities, but that exercising them often contradicts the Acanthus' instincts. An Acanthus wanders by to sow change, not to cultivate a single goal.

Although members of the Path are encouraged to become Susceptors, Acanthus can be found holding every title the order has to offer. Acanthus Emissaries spread dissent in a Consilium with a combination of outrageous statements that look random, but have actually been studied ahead of time to determine what their effects might be. Acanthus Epopts prefer simple, creative solutions to problems. Another spymaster may carefully nurture a plan for decades, but an Acanthus will try to cut the metaphorical Gordian knot with a brave gesture that others would never trust. Confronted by an elaborate plan to plant Seers of the Throne in the Consilium, an Acanthus might just assassinate a Provost and frame the enemy instead of wasting time convincing anyone else of the threat.

Acanthus Concepts

Gambler: What are the stakes? Some Acanthus Guardians like to frame their work in the form of a wager—but, of course, they cheat. Aside from the obvious uses of Fate here, the Guardian prefers to direct operations toward a set of options rather than a single solution. Against an enemy, she sets up terrible dilemmas. She might curse a Seer of the Throne's own children, but offer to lift the doom for an onerous concession. She tries to prepare for the worst, but not out of prudence. Instead, when she looks to have chosen death, her plans come through, saving her and surprising her foes. Gamblers often work in the Fallen World as stuntmen, actual professional gamblers or deceptively staid business analysts.

Pursuer: This character may have started life as a bounty hunter, undercover cop or computer hacker. He chases opponents using his instincts, letting his enemy set the plan for capture. This Acanthus plays a game of attrition; a Banisher

could suffer a dozen unfortunate accidents before the Acanthus shows up to ease his pain with capture or death. Time puts the Guardian one step ahead of his foe. He uses Fate to aggravate the enemy's mistakes. Susceptors with these habits tend to be effective, but they take quite a bit of time “playing” with their target, annoying Epopts who want missions accomplished in a specific time frame.

Saboteur: This Acanthus specializes in sheer destruction. She could be an expert with explosives, sharp words or disinformation, but, in all cases, her goal is to shatter objects, relationships and beliefs that hinder the goals of the order. When she takes a Sleeper through the Veils, she breaks down everything that the seeker thought was important and shows him that he has nothing left to turn to but the stirring in his own soul. When she attacks enemies of the order, she prefers short, sharp actions that terrorize and disorganize the opposition. In the Fallen World, she could be a demolitions expert, psychologist or militant activist.

Wandering Master: Acanthus Cultors and Epopts avoid the stereotypical Labyrinth of lodges and boardrooms. They manage their flock from a literal or allegorical wilderness, coming out of hermitage to issue orders or set ordeals before vanishing again. Sometimes, they rely on seekers to find them and prove their worth. Wisdom-seekers climb mountains and stalk back alleys looking for these mentors and deal with the obstacles Fate puts in their way. Dedicated followers can have the tables turned on them when the master decides to chase them instead, appearing at inconvenient times (family gatherings and the workplace are awkward places to meet a secret master) to test and teach. These Guardians may have Awakened as hermits, the homeless, traveling businessmen or fugitives, prepared for the wandering life.

Whistleblower: Nothing hits harder than the truth, especially when it comes out at inconvenient times and places. Journalists, disgruntled office workers, social scientists and conspiracy theorists could Awaken to blow the lid off select secrets. Acanthus Emissaries excel at blurting out awkward truths at the worst times. When the order needs to take a mage's reputation down a notch or someone calls another's bluff on a blackmail attempt, the Acanthus is there with proof of the Provost's secret addictions and the Hierarch's search for soul-stealing lore. Time magic warns of the possible consequences of loosed secrets.

Mastigos

The Guardians of the Veil sometimes say that Mastigos are born Epopts. A Mastigos has a knack for uncovering secrets across the world or in the depths of the soul, and believes in the purifying power of ordeals. A Mastigos does not have more prestige than a mage of another Path, but Guardians do believe that Mastigos have more intuitive understanding of the order's precepts. Mastigos Guardians tend to be the most intense students of the Masque. Their Awakening exposed them to the failings of their own souls, so they enjoy studying other perspectives to see which of their own emotional flaws

are individual failings and which are universal parts of the human condition.

Guardian Mastigos can be excellent Cultors, but tend to be cynical about religion. They know that religious symbols stimulate minds in ways that aren't always compatible with reason. They view the Labyrinth as a psychological mechanism without the slightest bit of spiritual validity, except where the Labyrinth filters out fools who can't override their own emotional reflexes. This attitude can actually prove to be an asset, because the Mastigos doesn't have sentimental illusions about his cult. Every sign and rite has a function. It performs that task and no other. Mastigos-run Labyrinths are efficient, with loyal followers and powerful tests for anyone who would look beyond, to the truth.

Mastigos also stand out as interrogators. Mastigos Interfactors are no better at killing than those from other orders, but Mastigos can extract information with a combination of guile and incredible emotional torture. The Mind Arcanum lets the Mastigos learn a victim's emotional weaknesses. The Mastigos' brutal Awakening teaches her the ways to scourge a mind and gives her the Arts to do it. Mastigos can pry answers out of the defiant and, when necessary, inflict horrific punishments without disturbing so much as a hair on the victim's hide.

Mastigos Concepts

Double Life: Mastigos master the secrets of minds, including how people create their identities. Creating a second (or third or fourth) completely fleshed-out identity is not a simple matter for such a mage, but it's easier than it might be for many others. Other Guardians smoothly slip from disguise to disguise, but this Mastigos is committed to at least one additional identity as much as his original self. Many of these mages were undercover cops or conmen before they Awakened, but a few started with weak personalities. After Awakening, they were re-forged into someone entirely new, and hone themselves by continuing that process.

Inquisitor: This Mastigos Guardian asks hard questions and expects honest answers. She isn't interested in trivialities about artifacts and alliances. She wants to know what the subject believes, how he came to believe it and what's necessary for him to betray his own ethos. Cultors and Susceptors can both encompass this concept. Mastigos Cultors use Mind to study belief and apply it to the Labyrinth. Susceptors learn an enemy's emotional failings so that they can persuade and destroy when required. Psychologists, priests and private eyes might gravitate toward this concept. The Guardian's questions can be obvious or subtle, but her quest to learn the secrets of others' souls never ends.

Hub: Using the Space Arcanum, a Mastigos can uncover the ties that bind the Fallen World. Similarly, this concept specializes in learning how people and things relate to each other — and how the Mastigos can put himself in the thick of it all. He makes himself a necessary point of contact between anyone and anything that concerns him. Mind enhances his role as a necessary social connection; Space lets him see and

travel to critical places such as corporate boardrooms and guarded sanctums. Mages with this concept might be socialites, fences, talent agents or anyone else who needs to know how people, places and things intersect. A Guardian who manages to become the necessary middleman learns about and influences whatever passes through, making him a perfect Eopt.

Soul Director: Religion is a machine that polishes the spirit. Mastigos Guardians often believe that a faith has no truths aside from what it does to an adherent's psyche. Their Cultors and Eopts study religion and psychology along with the Mind Arts to manipulate others. Inside the Labyrinth, the religious machine is powerful enough to create fanatics or trick unworthy occultists. Outside the Labyrinth, Mastigos can use Space to monitor those who might be made better — or, at least, more useful to the order. Susceptors secretly influence the lives of those who'd make useful agents. Emissaries plan speeches that will change lives based on weeks of covert research. These interventions resemble the mystery plays that precede some Awakenings, and, for Sleepers, might even touch off the real thing. Priests, therapists, social workers and administrators have the vision and planning skills to adopt this concept.

Tormentor: Stereotypes say that bullies are secretly weaker than their victims, but don't count on it; some bullies apply emotional anguish in precise measure to elicit a specific response. Mastigos Guardians do this to punish, interrogate and test. A Cultor may array the Labyrinth against some who seek Awakening, confronting them with their childhood traumas and hidden phobias. An Interfactor who punishes traitors with telepathic torture and studied threats also fits this concept. Mind magic is a tormentor's greatest weapon. With it, she can wrack a soul with horrific phantoms, or conjure demons out of a victim's flaws. Tormentors could start out as mob enforcers, prison guards and others who know how to incite fear, rage and other base emotions.

Moros

Guardians don't like leaving traces of their passage, so they view the Arcana of the Lead Coin with some suspicion. Alchemists uncover secrets in dust and stone; Necromancers gives the dead a voice. The order watches Moros mages outside of their control a bit more carefully and uses its own Lead Coins to remove evidence of Guardian operations. Moros Guardians are also skilled coroners and crafters, so while they might not drift to any particular position, their skills are vital to the order. Moros are not necessarily suited to social roles as Cultors or Emissaries; the chill of Stygia inhibits Moros charisma. While there's a certain social cachet attached to a Necromancer-Interfactor, the order prefers to avoid committing Moros to a single function. Moros need to be mobile, so that they can find what they need to touch and shape and raise from the grave.

The Matter Arcanum can be used to create marvelous weapons and tools. These spell-forged items are not necessarily magical, but sorcery allows a mage to produce quality at a fraction of the time and cost. Moros use these tools themselves or

distribute them among their caucus. Magic-enhanced forensics equipment senses disturbances at the scene, while the stresses to which plastic and metal have been put or the voices of the unquiet dead tell Moros Guardians what has happened. These mages can also sanitize a region by removing bullet holes, altering bodies and banishing ghosts that might spill a secret to an enemy Necromancer. Moros Guardians guarantee that the dead tell no tales. On the other hand, the fact that ghosts often see what they shouldn't can be an advantage. Moros can recruit agents from the dead, sending ghosts to spy and even attack on the order's behalf.

The Death Arcanum can corrode and kill, so the Guardians often select Moros for destructive missions. The Moros assassin is practically a cliché, but these mages destroy things as often as people. No other mage is as potentially skilled at physical sabotage. By an act of will, a powerful Moros can knock down buildings and eradicate damning evidence.

Moros Concepts

Cleaner: Moros are natural destroyers. When Guardians need to cut off all traces of their presence, they employ Moros who can eliminate physical evidence, and bodies—living and dead. Cleaning isn't gentle work, but, at its best, leaves no traces. Fingerprints vanish or bystanders' bodies appear far away, with no evidence to link them to the scene. These Guardians are used to crises, because they're normally only called when disaster strikes an operation. They are meticulous and quiet by nature; their jobs involve detail, but little socializing. This role is popular among the Inheritors factions (see p. 135). Mob enforcers, terrorists and government agents with a "black ops" background might Awaken into this role. They are used to covering their traces and dealing with calculated violence.

Coroner: These consummate investigators specialize in gathering physical and necromantic evidence. Using the Matter Arcanum, these Moros can analyze materials to determine their composition and any recent stresses. Moros combine this information with mundane forensic knowledge to let the scene tell them what happened. Moros use the Death Arcanum to discover how victims at the scene died and to interview their ghosts. These Guardians do more than observe; they construct theories to explain what happened. Despite their focus on the material, this means they often have a great deal of insight into human nature. They learn to tell whether wounds were inflicted out of passion or profit and what footprints might say about the attitude of their quarry. Obviously, professional crime scene investigators are the ones most likely to continue their work for the Guardians of the Veil, but some Moros only discover their forensic talents after they Awaken.

Counterneocromancer: From Twilight, ghosts witness things that should remain secret. They're attracted to strong emotions, and many Guardian operations arouse these. How does the order keep ghosts from telling Necromancers—or worse, Sleepers with crude rituals or special gifts—about the order's secrets? Guardians fight fire with fire, sending Moros to search for nearby ghosts, learn what they know and silence

them. Counterneocromancy isn't all brute force spells. The job requires a social touch as well. A Moros may be able to secure a ghost's silence for a few favors or threaten to wreck what it holds dear. These mages might bring skills as professional arbitrators, lawyers and criminal blackmailers to their missions.

Spymaster of the Dead: The dead are marvelous spies; this character leads them. She needs to know the Death Arcanum well enough to sway powerful, independent-minded ghosts, because they make the best spies. The Moros adapts espionage techniques to existence beyond the grave. Like the counterneocromancer, the spymaster needs to pay attention to her allies' demands. She combines bargaining with the occasional threat of Death magic to direct effective operations. These Guardians might have backgrounds as police captains, gang leaders or intelligence analysts.

Smith: Even Awakened spies use gadgets. Moros alchemists can make blades sharper and gears more precise. Add a little mundane mechanical skill, and a Moros can create a number of useful, durable devices. These are not necessarily magical in and of themselves, which suits the Guardian tendency to avoid unnecessary magic. Don't count on these Moros serving support roles, either. For every cloistered mechanic, there's a Guardian who can improvise with materials at hand, turning kitchens and department stores into toolboxes and arsenals. These Moros usually have background in engineering, vehicle repair and gunsmithing, and might even include hobbyists who forge blades and armor.

Obrimos

Walking angels of lightning and secret flame don't seem to present much chance for subtlety, but a Guardian Obrimos likely bucks the brash stereotypes, replacing them with silent, iron determination and quiet confidence. Do not forget that Forces grants invisibility as well as storms. Prime is the Arcanum of holy fire and phantasms. A Guardian from the Path of the Mighty grounds his caucus in the material world with his command of the elements, but doesn't ignore the numinous aspects of magic.

You might assume that the Obrimos would be the order's fighters, using destructive Forces to turn the tide when secrets fail—and you'd be right. There are times when no amount of plotting can keep the order out of a straight fight. On such occasions, an Obrimos' command of Forces serves the order well, even if his spells are more likely to enhance normal weapons than conjure a searing beam from a staff. Even so, Obrimos Guardians find numerous ways to use their talents quietly. These mages weave potent defensive and concealing spells. A Guardian's sanctum benefits from Obrimos defenses—Prime dampens incoming spells and Forces deflects crude physical attacks. The modern world's reliance on combustion, electricity and even nuclear power gives Obrimos countless ways to assist an operation. There are numerous ways to render an object invisible to sight, but many of them rely on clouding minds. These tricks don't work on security cameras and infra-red sensors.

Aside from the utility of Arcana, Obrimos are major shapers of the order's politics. They are naturally prideful, but even though the order discourages this, Guardians permit confidence in a higher power. This confidence drives Obrimos into positions of authority. As Epopts, they direct caucus operations according to their own, ironclad moral theses. In addition, no other Path identifies with the Hieromagus prophecy as strongly as the Obrimos. It should be no surprise that the Messianics faction has the highest number of Obrimos. Still, these Guardians do not share one purpose. Debate over the nature of the Hieromagus sets Theurgists against each other. Duels over matters of doctrine are common.

Obrimos Concepts

Concealer: This Obrimos might have been a smuggler, fence or security specialist, but mages with other backgrounds can see the advantages of stealth. Mind tricks can fall before a strong will, so these mages use both mundane and magical methods to hide themselves and important assets from purely physical detection. In an age in which security systems can detect heat, sound and pressure, only Forces spells guarantee total concealment. Magic can take the assassin's gun past airport security or bring an entire caucus through the automated security of a military installation. These Guardians are often Susceptors.

Illusionist: Prime phantasms, tricks of the light and twisted sounds are this mage's specialty. These spells can misdirect an enemy, but they're also useful within the Labyrinth, when Cultors need to manufacture miracles for the faithful. Past experience as a stage magician, a fraudulent occultist or a special effects technician aids these applications of the Arcana. These Guardians prefer to scout the people and locations where they're due to "perform" and, like most Guardians, like to add their magical illusions to mundane techniques. Together, spells and sleight of hand can inspire a Labyrinth-dweller or bedevil an enemy. Cornered illusionists use smoke and magic make their escapes or protect their sanctums.

Courier: An Obrimos can avoid detection by scrambling security technologies and defending herself with Forces spells. Order couriers carry messages and valuables from one caucus to another. This often involves handling artifacts, so Prime magic is essential when recognizing genuine articles and, if they're stolen, tracking them down. Even though Space might provide a shortcut, that Arcanum works best with the help of sympathetic ties. Guardians of the Veil habitually minimize or erase such bonds, so overland travel can be a more practical solution than teleportation. These mages tended to wander during their Sleeping years, working odd jobs but learning the most about the open road.

Veiled Fist: There are times when secrecy is moot, and the Guardians of the Veil need to stand toe-to-toe with their enemies. Obrimos excel here; they wield elemental power with a confidence that borders on arrogance. Gangbangers, street cops and soldiers learn how to keep their cool under fire. If they take on this role, their past serves them well. Although bold warriors don't embody the order's discreet habits, Guardians do have their own style of overt violence. They avoid attacks

that rely on magic alone. They ensorcel normal weapons and use deceptive strategy to win whenever they can. Guardian warriors are usually Susceptors or Interfectors.

Warder: Warders prefer to work as part of a team. They specialize in countermagic and physical shields. While his companion moves to escape or kill, he protects her so that a perfectly normal bullet or blade can win the day against an enemy spell. These Guardians prefer to work nearby, but slightly away, from the action. Some Epopts learn enough Space magic to extend their protection from the safety of their sanctums, but the average warder is part of a team of Susceptors. She must be especially aware of extended spells, which can rip through hasty protective magic. This character's job can turn into something of a chess game with the enemy, as both sides erect and test each other's defenses. This relies more on raw occult skill than most, so the character's unAwakened background rarely figures into choosing the role.

Thyrsus

Guardians envy mages who can pull secrets out of the air. Thyrsus Guardians have been known to do this. Given enough rapport with the spirits, a Shaman acquires a team of skilled, if single-minded spies. Thyrsus Cultors can be very effective. These mages understand human nature well, because they can see the very spirits it nurtures. Sensitive to resonance, Thyrsus Guardians can detect the character of a Labyrinth without asking a single question. Their Labyrinths use ecstatic rituals and faith healing to ensure loyalty. An immoral Thyrsus can break the personalities of Sleepers under his care, as pain, exhaustion and miracles turn from liberating influences into sheer brainwashing.

Thyrsus Epopts are common. They lead aspirants through the Veils with physical ordeals. Drugs and self-mortification test a candidate's willingness to sacrifice her Fallen flesh for the secrets of magic, but also tempt her to take foolish risks. Failures can kill or maim themselves, never to taste the order's secrets. In the caucus, these Epopts can call the spirits to act at a distance or heal Guardians who've been wounded in the line of duty. Thyrsus mages are charismatic and self-sufficient, so they make excellent Susceptors. A Thyrsus is likely to work alone, and can operate in environments that would challenge other Paths. Cold, torture and isolation can all be countered. Life counteracts physical discomfort, and Spirit lets him summon allies from almost anywhere. Spirits rarely help without demanding something in return, giving mages of the Stone Book another reason to work alone: they might take on burdens nobody else wants to share.

Even though Shamans can be very effective in person-to-person situations, they stand out when it comes to looking outward at the spiritual condition of the world around them. Thyrsus Guardians gather intelligence from trends in the Shadow Realm. When certain spirits grow strong and others weaken, the mage knows that something is changing local resonance. Thyrsus sound the alarm when Abyssal abominations distort the creatures and spirits around them. Thyrsus guard the order from ambitious denizens of the Shadow Realm when these spirits try to rule instead of reflect the material world.

Thrysus Concepts

Binder of Secrets: Spirits have secrets. They hate to reveal vulnerabilities such as bans and secret names. A Thrysus can use these secrets to employ spirits as spies, or protect them to keep spirits from being abused by the Guardians' enemies. Powerful spirits of commerce can make a summoner rich or ruin his rival. The Guardians of the Veil must defend themselves from angry spirits or spirits that enemies turn into weapons, so a Guardian Shaman is the order's eyes and voice among the Shadow Realm's courts and choirs. A powerful mage can master an entire group of spirits and use them as her personal spy ring, but spirits are limited by their Influences; mages are hardpressed to get spirits to investigate anything outside of their portfolios. Thrysus Guardians who take this role were usually socially adept before they Awakened.

Lone Wolf: This mage specializes in operations that require self-sufficient solitude. Any Guardian can be called on to work alone for extended periods of time — lone wolves revel in it. Thrysus mages often prefer solitude. They can speak to spirits without looking eccentric and bargain with them without worrying that their vows will ruin the cohesion of a team. When necessary, Thrysus mages can call animals and spirits to help them. These can be unpredictable allies, giving the Thrysus another reason to go it alone. Life magic lets a lone wolf heal wounds himself. These Guardians tend to be

antisocial by nature. Before Awakening, they usually preferred solitary pursuits, so lonely artists, the homeless and fugitive criminals might drift into this role.

Replacer: The Masque tells Guardians how to assume other identities, but only magic can give them new bodies. Some Thrysus master sorcerous disguise to the point where they can mimic and replace specific individuals. This Guardian will study a target for weeks before capturing or killing him. She takes his place and uses his position to further the order's goals. If the Guardian lacks some of the target's skills, she can call spirits to compensate. Quietly allying with a war-spirit can make up for a lack of raw combat ability, and all spirits can provide expert advice regarding their own Influences — as long as the Thrysus can understand them. Some replacers were con artists or government agents, but many lived meek lives before they Awakened. Instead of strengthening their own personalities, they express their newfound power by taking on those of others.

Shadow of the Wild: Mages enjoy the convenience of city life, but occult secrets dwell everywhere, including mountain-tops and barren hinterlands. When missions take Guardians into the bush, they can call on certain Thrysus to guide them. These mages are tough, have excellent survival skills and can extract favors from spirits and beasts. Most of them grew up in the wilderness. Some Thrysus are skilled enough to take the form of animals that have adapted to the environment



at hand. Otherwise, Life magic can heal mages who suffer mishaps and toughen them up in the face of extreme heat or cold. Like all Guardians, these Thrysus mages move quietly and prefer skill to sorcery whenever possible.

Soothsayer: Time magic may grant the gift of prophecy, but a Shaman reads the spirit world to see what might come. Awakened soothsayers serve the order by watching the Shadow Realm. They look at the spiritual ecology to note how flavors of resonance wax and wane. The material world has a tremendous impact on resonance, so a sudden disturbance indicates changes are afoot. When spirits of murder grow fat, killing's on the rise. Guardians can follow the spirits' movements to find out why. Spirits affect the physical world in turn; a Guardian Thrysus watches animal behavior, plant growth and Sleeper attitudes to discern the spirit of the city. Then he follows clues from the Shadow to find the cause. Soothsayers were often medicine workers from traditional cultures before they Awakened, and expand their skills to keep watch for the order.

Rites and Ceremonies

Mages admit that they don't know the Awakened City as much more than a myth supported by the scant evidence of glyphs and ragged artifacts. All mages know that the Sleepers inherited at least part of the city's legacy. Their legends hint at the truth, and often contain a spark of validity. A mage's job is to remove the errors of latter days to let Atlantean wisdom shine through.

Guardians of the Veil know that lies and distortions flow from a greater truth. In some cases, Guardians know the real meanings of the Fallen World's secret signs, because Guardians invented them. Atlantis was a society in which symbolism evolved into a high art, where a single, small gesture could elicit tears or communicate profound secrets. The Guardians of the Fallen age may not remember all of the true forms, but they knew them well enough to embed them into Sleeper conspiracies. A skilled Cultor or Epopt can follow a symbol back to its origins through its inheriting cultures.

In other cases, cultural rituals are acts of deception themselves. The Guardian practices a Fallen World ceremony, but meditates on the truths it conceals. Some rituals are elaborate lies, in which the Guardian appears to contradict all of the true principles of magic. In truth, her innermost self visualizes the opposite of her outward actions. These "contrary" rites are well-known to Thrysus Guardians. Some of them even make this a way of life, saying the opposite of what they mean, walking backwards and adopting odd taboos to reinforce the difference between Fallen falsehood and Supernal truth.

Occult Correspondences

Mage: The Awakening discusses the nature of the cultural occult symbols on p. 35. Orders and cabals use these correspondences to create a common bond or to unearth their secret Supernal significance. Guardians of the Veil also favor certain signs from Sleeper cults and occult circles. Some descend from prehistoric Guardian rites; others are the offspring of past

Cultors or contrary rites that require "mad" insight to unravel. Here then, are some favored practices, listed along with the Realms most likely to reflect them. This is not a hard-and-fast rule; Guardians accept that every Supernal Realm is a universe unto itself, with room for many mythologies. A Greek temple rite could touch the Primal Wild even though such things are often thought to be of the Aether.

The Aether (Obrimos): Ha-Satan, the Adversary that tests mortals for God, is acknowledged by some Guardians. Ha-Satan is not the evil one of later Christian myth, but God's prosecutor, tempting men and women until they break or prove themselves pure. Greek mythology's Erebus and Nyx also find favor, as does Song-Jiang, the Righteous Thief of the Dao. Guardians call the power of such patrons down from the Supernal Realm with quiet prayers and contrary acts of purification. The grime collected by murder and skulking for a higher purpose is considered to be an anointing, so dirt and blood may enter rituals. Guardians might also offer their sins up to the Aether through self-flagellation and personal ordeals.

Arcadia (Acanthus): Guardians use legends of deadly tricksters to contact this realm. Eris, Loki, and the Morrigan inspire their ritual magic. Irusan, the Celtic lord of cats, is liked for both his feline attributes and for silencing an overly frank bard – a situation Guardians appreciate. The faeries loved by the Guardians ride the night as part of the Wild Hunt and twist the trails near forbidden stones.

Pandemonium (Mastigos): Cacodemons born of sin and dream-gods like Morpheus; Tibetan tulpas and Wrathful Deities test Guardians' resolve. Mastigos Guardians are especially interested in the way the mind tests itself with archetypal images, and goetic demons may appear in accordance with the above legends. These beings reflect the state of the witness. Terrible, skull-bearing monsters greet the fearful, but tempting beauty answers pride. Pandemonium answers these signs, and rituals patterned after plays and stories. Attendants each play a role in these psychodramas.

The Primal Wild (Thrysus): Guardians follow snake and fox totems for their predatory and treacherous qualities. The totem tests the Shaman as well, keeping her true to the required ordeals of Awakening. Japanese Guardians use the shugendo, ninpo and kuji-kiri exercises of feudal spies to keep themselves alert during missions. Here is where the order's oral tradition takes on its most visceral form. Shamans tell the secret stories of stones, trees and rivers to uncover the dormant power in their dreams. This is usually associated with Australian practices, but examples exist around the world.

Stygia (Moros): Stygia is the Realm without sympathy; shades are consigned here to slough off all ties to their lives in the mortal world, even the bonds of love. Guardians use mandalas to understand the fate that awaits them and to hint of the Diamond Wheel. Legends of judgment and punishment abound, from Sobk eating the hearts of sinful Egyptians to Ixion spinning on his wheel of fire. Thuggee rituals were once used by many Guardians, but have passed out of fashion (though they haven't died) since that cult's demise.

Common Symbols

Regardless of their cultural interests, Guardians of the Veil value many common symbols. Guardians often use them as magical tools (see *Mage: The Awakening*, pp. 89–90). These signs are part of what remains of the order's Atlantean roots. The Guardians preserve ritual masks that may have come from the Awakened City itself. On a darker note, the Law of the Mask speaks of tortures that the Visus Draconis devised for specific forms of treachery. These are described in exacting enough detail to reconstruct.

The following symbols and ritual actions are commonly used by Guardians of the Veil, but given millennia of development and cross-cultural contact, this is only a sample of the order's rich traditions.

Oblations

Aside from magical aids, order symbology also helps Guardians construct unique oblations.

As noted on p. 77 of *Mage: The Awakening*, oblations are rituals that mages use at Hallows to replenish their Mana. Guardians of the Veil oblations do not rely on any particular Path allegiance, but different Paths can customize oblations based on their own mythological interests.

Each of the symbols below is followed by suggested oblations. See this chapter and "Occult Correspondences" in *Mage: The Awakening*, p. 35, to learn what elements a Guardian of a specific Path might use to create a unique oblation.

Asceticism

Guardians test themselves and others with physical stress. This consists of self-denial (fasts and vows of silence) and self-destruction (flagellation and even mutilation). It isn't unheard of to apply this discipline to outsiders against their will, up to the point of torture.

Oblations: Torturing an enemy of the order, whipping yourself while reciting one's failures, cutting out your own tongue

Blades

Knives are quiet, fast and deceptive; they're symbols of the order's prowess. Swords aren't used as often. While a sword may ward off a blow in a fight between warriors, an assassin's blade is too small or flimsy; it is only unveiled when it strikes.

Oblations: Performing knife fighting routines or practice drills, anointing a space drawn with the knife, carving a representation of the Diamond Wheel, sharpening a knife to a keen edge

Clothing

Guardians prefer loose, somber ritual clothing. Black and deep red are common ritual colors. White is used in cultures

in which the color represents death or purity, but, in many cases, these robes are intentionally stained with blood from ascetic practice or the order's grim duties. Even sullied with blood, the order's mission stays pure.

Oblations: Tearing off the clothes of a disguise, spattering blood on a white robe, meditating while cloaked and masked

Coins

Coins represent traitor's pay and the threat of temptation. A counterfeit coin stands for deception and the ability to turn greed against itself. Coins also symbolize the Fallen World itself, where scarcity and venality is the rule. The circular shape of coins suggests the Diamond Wheel and alludes to the fact that Guardians will use any means necessary to turn it on its proper course.

Oblations: Melting coins in a smith's fire, creating counterfeit coins, casting coins and studying their patterns, ritual payment for the order's deeds (given by a participant who plays the part of a non-Guardian) or refusal of that payment

Darkness

Night, caves, blindfolds – all of them bring the dark down. Darkness represents invisibility and discretion, so it is the perfect medium for a Guardian's private meditations. Mages who know the Death Arcanum also know that darkness is not the mere absence of light, but a palpable, suffocating energy of its own.

Oblations: Practicing a skill in total darkness or while blindfolded, meditating in a lightless space, snuffing out a series of candles or torches until no light is left

Drugs and Poisons

Drugs and poisons symbolize willing sacrifice; a small vial on the Guardian's person indicates his willingness to die instead of compromise his mission. The difference between psychoactive drugs and deadly poisons often depends on the size of the dose. An assassin's venom can be diluted to the point where the venom becomes a drug fit to launch a vision quest.

Oblations: Drugging oneself takes many forms and may accompany the forms of other oblations. Otherwise, a Guardian may sacrifice an animal by poisoning or smear poison on an object representing the order's enemies.

Eyes

These windows of the soul stand for intent. The Law of the Mask advises Guardians what to look for in the eyes of others to discover lies and aggression. Eyes represent perception and quiet power: the trades of the Visus Draconis. The Guardian uses her own eyes, a corpse's eyes or drawings and tokens representing eyes.

Oblations: Staring at a sacred symbol, marking the "third eye" on your forehead, applying kohl, using drugs to enlarge or constrict the pupils, drawing or sculpting objects that symbolize eyes

Flowers and Herbs

Atlantis used a secret language of flowers and other plants that is dimly remembered around the world. Guardians of the Veil use flowers and herbs as symbols. They send covert messages or impart power based on what they represent. Aside from their appearance, their reputed properties may have occult significance.

Oblations: Arrangements that symbolize the order's ethos, wearing flowers and herb sprigs that communicate your goals, burning flowers or herbs and, perhaps, meditating on their scent

Masks

Masks are the order's most infamous symbols. Masks represent the Masque that Guardians practice to acquire new identities. Masks project new emotions or no emotion at all. Guardians of the Veil believe that wearing a mask is a sign of humility, because the wearer can never be known for her deeds. Guardian masks range from the grotesque faces of Greek theater to simple dominos and even face paint.

Oblations: Masks symbolizing personal power, a pantomime or play while masked, breaking a mask as a gesture of renewal

Mazes

Mazes obviously recall the Labyrinth, but, in a wider sense, they stand for the confusion of the Fallen World and the countless choices all make as they proceed through life. There are more choices than exits, so a mortal pursuing Awakening or a mage seeking power both need to stay on a righteous path.

Oblations: Walking a maze in a garden or laid in a floor, drawing or sculpting a maze, erasing a maze

The Masque

The Masque is a complex, profound practice, symbolizing many things. At the most basic level, the Masque is the Guardians of the Veil's tradition of disguise. Guardians need to conceal their identities for many reasons. They might draw an enemy away from the order by pretending to be someone else or return to their homes with new faces to gather intelligence that would otherwise stay hidden from the Guardians' true identities. An assassin takes on a trusted face to get close to her target; an Emissary sheds past infamy with a new identity.

Beyond pragmatic concerns, the Masque is the ultimate expression of the order's humility. The Guardians of the Veil will never be princes among the Awakened. Guardians may exercise quiet influence, but they will never rule. They preserve the purity of the Awakened hierarchy that, in this Fallen World, runs from Sleeper to Hierarch – but cannot be allowed to reach higher. Beyond local affairs, the Awakened nation belongs to the Hieromagus. The order prepares the way for the Perfect Master, sinning in operations that are supposed to ensure his arrival. When he comes, he will not be a Guardian, and will forgive the order its crimes, transferring sacrificed wisdom back to his loyal servants. In this context, the Masque is a discipline that destroys false pride by taking

away the identity that holds it. If a mage can abandon her name, she will never falsely seek a crown. If he can sacrifice his face, he will never act out of vanity. If she walks away from wealth, riches will never tempt her. Master the Masque, and there will be no place for sins to take root.

But the Masque is also the study of sin – and virtue. There are 49 archetypal Masques. Although the order doesn't know that characters in the World of Darkness possess seven Virtues and seven Vices, millennia of study have uncovered the patterns that distinguish one Virtue and Vice pair from another. Therefore, Guardians of the Veil recognize 49 fundamental personalities. Guardians adopt a Masque to experience the world through new eyes. The Masque suggests what the mage's desires might be if he had that identity's temperament. Some Guardians spend decades studying one Masque, but others change their identity every day.

The Ways of the Masque

There are 49 Greater Masques. Countless Lesser Masques derive from the Greater Masques. The Lesser Masques exist to portray roles specific to certain Fallen cultures. Most of these Masques are professions or popular stereotypes. Others are based on urban legends such as the Man in Black.

Each Masque is linked to a comprehensive set of behaviors, professions and roles. For example, the Skull Priest speaks in platitudes, with repetitive phrases and rising volume. He wears clerical vestments or a uniform and carries a symbol of death. He trembles with hidden insecurity and seems weak to those outside of his cult. These behaviors and others allow the Guardians to understand the personality and use it for a practical purpose. The Skull Priest is an excellent identity when rousing followers to kill, but the Skull Priest's dark character comes with the role. The Guardian learns not to summon up fanaticism too lightly.

A Masque is usually thought of as a disguise, but this doesn't have to be true. A skilled Masquer can switch personalities without pretending to be someone else. A natural Fool can shift into the Scepter when she needs to take command. Emissaries and Cultors take on Masques this way to influence their respective social environments.

As a disguise, Masques are almost without peer. The Law of the Mask teaches Guardians every detail about a particular identity, from its secret ambitions to its nervous tics and diet. Susceptors use the Masque for disguise more than anyone else.

The order recognizes that not every cult leader's going to be one of the Devout category of Masques and many judges have little thirst for Justice. Nevertheless, Guardians of the Veil effectively connect a Virtue, a Vice and a set of behaviors within every Masque because they believe that the mixtures found in the Greater Masques teach the most about each facet. Furthermore, stereotypes have power; the Masques also represent the attitudes people expect from certain professions and roles.

Experienced Guardians mix and match Masque aspects to taste, but the Greater Masques can be lifetime studies. Guardians never completely forget them.

Training in the Masque

While all initiated Guardians are familiar with the Greater Masques, each identity requires specialized training to capture the essence. After training within a caucus, a Guardian who wishes to perfect a Masque spends time living the role. He speaks, dresses and otherwise behaves according to the rules of the Masque. Guardians encourage the trainee to do everyday work in the Masque and even practice lucid dreaming to experience what the Masque's personality would dream.

Not every Guardian goes through this specialized training. Order mages may prefer other studies, or practice the Masque as a magical discipline instead. Even Guardians without training use the Masque as a guide for spiritual study and a repertoire of disguises.

The following Merit represents Masque training.

Merit: Masque (•)

Prerequisite: Manipulation •••, Guardians of the Veil Status •

Effect: Your character has trained to master a particular Greater Masque. When the character has the token of that Masque, she is entitled to the bonus the Masque grants (see the "Trained Benefit" entry for each Masque). Furthermore, when she wears or uses the Masque's token while using the Masque identity as a disguise, you gain a +2 dice bonus to disguise attempts associated with the Masque's identity.

You may purchase this Merit multiple times. Each purchase represents training in a different Greater Masque or a different identity within the same Greater Masque (with each one favoring different Skills).

Drawback: Whenever you are capable of using this Merit's benefits, your character is so immersed in the Masque that she also acquires the Masque's Drawback. See the Masque Drawback entry for each Greater Masque.

The Masque's benefit and its drawback dice modifiers do not apply to magical or other supernatural tasks.

The Masque and Magic

Magic and the Masque go hand in hand. Guardians of the Veil use Masque tokens as magical tools or strongly associate an identity with certain magical practices. For instance, there are order mages who prefer to exercise the Practice of Compelling while they assume the Scepter.

Conversely, Guardians use magic to practice the Masque. Life magic lets a mage shapeshift into a form that better fits the archetype. Mind lets a mage study real-world examples of the Masque identity.

The Greater Masques

The 49 Greater Masques are divided into seven categories. Each category is based on a common higher drive (which players and Storytellers – but not characters – will know as Virtues). These are hobbled by each Masque's failings (or Vice). Each Masque has a suggested profession and appearance. The Law

of the Mask warns that every Masque has a hidden talent and a hidden downfall. Guardians should never get too attached to particular Masques. They should be ready to shed a decade of identity in an instant.

For ease of use, each Greater Masque includes the following information.

Appearance: What the mage looks like using this Masque.

Token: This is an object or circumstance inextricably linked to mastery of the Masque. Characters with the Masque Merit must keep or fulfill the token to acquire the Masque's benefit.

Trained Benefit: Characters with the Masque Merit gain this benefit.

Masque Drawback: Characters with the Masque Merit suffer this Drawback whenever they could exercise the Trained Benefit.

Lesser Masques: Cultural variations on the Greater Masque.

The Beloved (Charity)

The Beloved are known for their compassion. Beloved Masques feel the pain of others more deeply and when they see someone in need, they rush to respond. The Beloved can be as selfish as anyone else; some Beloved seek satisfaction by being needed and exercise control over the ones they help.

Avenging Son (Wrath)

There are violent men and women who use their strength to care for others. These violent people are fiercely loyal to their companions. The archetypal Avenging Son in mythology is Horus, who sought revenge on his father's killer. The Avenging Son is associated with violent roles, such as gang members, cops and soldiers. They will give it all for those they call family. If anyone gets in the way of their care, he'll suffer.

Appearance: The Avenging Son is strong and energetic. He wears a uniform as a symbol of loyalty.

Token: A keepsake from a member of his "family."

Trained Benefit: +1 to Stamina-based rolls. The Avenging Son shakes off pain and fatigue when he thinks of those he loves.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Subterfuge rolls, because the Avenging Son prefers direct action and has trouble hiding his rage.

Lesser Masques: The Troubled Veteran, the Renegade Cop and the Ronin

Holy Concubine (Lust)

She is a perfect lover: considerate, empathetic and skilled. The Holy Concubine wants more than this, though. Her lover should be devoted to pleasing her in turn. Love is all-consuming; work, safety and all other relationships should fall before her needs. Sensual gratification is everything. In past times, this Masque was associated with temple prostitutes and royal concubines. In modern times, it isn't linked to any particular profession.

Appearance: The Holy Concubine adopts a sensual style. Her beauty is less a matter of appearance than the confident, suggestive way in which she carries herself.

Token: The Holy Concubine bears a token of affection from one of her lovers.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Persuasion-based rolls. The Holy Concubine's sensual presence is intoxicating.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. The Holy Concubine is ultimately thinks about her own desires the most, blinding her to others' more subtle needs.

Lesser Masques: The Honeytrap, the Succubus and the Tantric Master

Lancet Master (Greed)

The Lancet Master is an expert healer. She's devoted her life to learning how to cure patients and feels profound professional satisfaction when they recover. She respects her charges and doesn't expect applause or devotion, but her skills are valuable; she should be paid well for her services. She will not relinquish a penny of payment. Psychologists, doctors and even yoga gurus could be Lancet Masters. The Lancet Master does not need to practice a legitimate healing art, but believes in the efficacy of her methods.

Appearance: The Lancet Master dresses well. Her professional garb is spotless; she accents it with the latest fashions. She takes good care of herself with the money she earns.

Token: An unusually expensive tool used by her healing profession.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Intelligence-based rolls used to practice her healing skill (not necessarily Medicine). She is skilled.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls, because her materialism becomes grating over time.

Lesser Masques: The Surgeon, the Therapist and the Celebrity Cult Leader

Lord Incarnadine (Pride)

Lord Incarnadine is the ruler who sacrifices himself for his subjects. He can be anyone in a position of authority who suffers for the sake of his subordinates. Osiris and King Arthur are mythic versions of the Lord. Modern Lords are police officers, politicians and CEOs. He demands that his subjects pay tribute to his suffering. He is not humble and expects to be rewarded for his martyrdom with accolades and deeper loyalty.

Appearance: Lord Incarnadine is haggard and unkempt. He might be injured. He wears clothes fitting his station, even if his sacrifices leave them dirty and torn. He would never dress down; it's beneath his dignity.

Token: A worn or battered symbol of his office, such as a corporate tie clip or badge.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Persuasion-based rolls. Incarnadine generates trust because he is willing to sacrifice himself for others.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. His self-involved martyrdom makes him an uncomfortable companion.

Lesser Masques: The Small Businessman, the Good Cop and the Missionary

Prince of Feasts (Gluttony)

Waste is never a concern for the Prince of Feasts. He's rich, but wants to share his wealth. Others should live as finely as he does. While he can't do this for everyone, he'll treat associates to the finer things in life. Despite all the poverty in the world, he'd rather not help others by moderating his own lifestyle and doesn't want to give at arm's length. The idle rich and certain religious leaders are typical Princes: happy to give, but never to sacrifice.

Appearance: The Prince of Feasts wears expensive clothes that are a bit crumpled from his latest fete. He may be a bit rotund or unhealthy from indulging himself.

Token: The Prince of Feasts must have the means to provide expensive pleasures for all of his companions. This could translate into a wallet with several thousand dollars, equivalent credit or a house or business in which he's able to procure items gratis.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Socialize rolls. The Prince is generous and fun.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Intimidation rolls. Everyone knows his assets are tied up in his pleasures, and he's rarely in a state to physically threaten anyone.

Lesser Masques: The Philanthropist, the Host and the Black Sheep

Silver Cestus (Envy)

The Silver Cestus helps others excel, but his motives are selfish. He may deny it, but ultimately he wants his students to outdo competitors in his field. Even though he genuinely cares for his students, he lives vicariously through their victories instead of appreciating the ways they improve themselves. Martial arts masters, sports coaches and elite teachers commonly manifest the Silver Cestus.

Appearance: The Silver Cestus is a bit past his prime. If he teaches a physical discipline, his muscles are starting to sag with fat. Intellectually, he may have more theoretical than practical knowledge. Age had made him careless in his training because he finds more happiness observing his protégés.

Token: The Silver Cestus keeps a memento of one of his students' victories, such as photos, newspaper clippings or clothing that commemorates a competition victory.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Expression rolls, because he imparts knowledge with passion.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. The Silver Cestus criticizes competitors harshly, and will even curse his own students when they fail to live up to his expectations.

Lesser Masques: The Drill Sergeant, the Demanding Father and the Sophist

Weaver of Whispers (Sloth)

The Weaver of Whispers is the one to see when you need help – but not from her. She wants to help, but won't risk her own neck. To compensate, she builds a formidable network of social contacts. She happily helps people meet to succeed



at a common goal, but won't take any responsibility for what transpires. Fences, socialites and administrators gravitate toward this Masque.

Appearance: Weavers of Whispers don't like to stand out. They style themselves according to the conventions of their subculture, with a distinct lack of originality because they follow others' fashions instead of creating looks for themselves.

Token: The Weaver of Whispers carries a notebook, cell phone or another object that contains her associates' contact information.

Trained Benefit: +2 dice to rolls related to her Allies or Contacts Merits (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 114–115).

Masque Drawback: -2 to Intimidation rolls. The Weaver is a bit cowardly.

Lesser Masques: The Fence, the Oracle and the Socialite

The Devout (Faith)

The Devout are devoted to something greater than themselves. Religions, nations and personal philosophies are objects of devotion. Devout Masques also carry the belief that this higher power can save them. Guardians of the Veil have a great deal of sympathy for the Devout. The order recognizes this character in Guardian doctrines. Nevertheless, the faithful are capable of justifying ruthlessness, hatred and greed in the name of an ideology, god or flag.

Brother Smoke (Greed)

Brother Smoke uses his appetites as a vehicle for transcendence. Most examples of this Masque use drugs, but whatever the method, the question is: is he a mystic or addict? Sometimes he's genuinely seeking visions, but all too often, his faith exists to justify his habit.

Appearance: Brother Smoke dresses to commemorate his visions. He may design his own clothes or keep trinkets to remind him of especially vivid experiences. He grooms himself just enough to get by in normal society.

Token: Brother Smoke always carries what he needs to indulge his habit.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Occult rolls. Brother Smoke has learned to see everything in a new, spiritually charged fashion.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. Despite the fact that he searches for new visions, he doesn't put much effort into understanding other people.

Lesser Masques: The Hippie, the Street Artist and the Shaman

Cave Shadow (Sloth)

The Cave Shadow is a recluse. Instead of confronting the demoralizing vicissitudes of day-to-day existence, he cloisters himself in a quiet place and contemplates his faith. This can be in the wilderness or in a locked apartment deep in the city.

Behind the Cave Shadow's devotion is cowardice; he's either afraid his faith is too weak for the real world or lacks the imagination to apply his beliefs outside of his personal universe. Monks and some eccentric artists exemplify this Masque.

Appearance: Cave Shadows are either filthy to the point of disgust or possess a refined but eccentric demeanor. Religious Cave Shadows might wear religious regalia. Odd hairstyles, wild beards and chronic ailments (a Cave Shadow is his own doctor – and not necessarily a good one) abound.

Token: The Cave Shadow's token is his retreat: a shack in the woods or an inner-city hovel.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Intelligence-based rolls. Contemplation has sharpened his mind.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. The Cave Shadow is unused to human contact.

Lesser Masques: The Hidden Master, the Prophet From the Wild and the Outcast

Flame Tender (Envy)

The Flame Tender is obsessed with the strictest tenets of her faith. She's a zealot, but is not necessarily violent. She imposes strict rules on her underlings to conceal a secret fear that her compatriots are more sincerely devoted than she is. A political party's whip, a teacher or a senior cleric could all manifest this type.

Appearance: The Flame Tender positively glows with zeal. She styles herself according to the most exacting standards of her belief system.

Token: This Masque carries a book or other explicit reminder of her ideology's regulations.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Intimidation rolls, because she always seems to have an accusation on the tip of her tongue.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. The Flame Tender's suspicion that others are backsliding (or are actually more devoted) cloud sincere understanding.

Lesser Masques: The Inquisitor, the Gnostic Perfectus and the Conservative

Heretic (Pride)

Heretics (in the sense of this Masque) do more than just defy orthodoxy. They've identified with their ideology to the point where they view opposition as personal affronts. Every Heretic knows she's fighting an uphill battle, but when she tries to promote her beliefs, she tends to entangle herself in petty vendettas. She would rather have revenge on a naysayer than slowly gather support. Revolutionaries and notorious intellectuals are common expressions of this Masque.

Appearance: The Heretic dresses to identify with her beliefs and proclaim her rejection of everyday society. Punk attire, bow ties and clerical vestments are all possible.

Token: The Heretic wears or carries a visible symbol of her beliefs such as a flag, pamphlets or a logo. She can never intentionally conceal her token.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Intimidation rolls. Even though she ostensibly wants to bring about change, she is more skilled at us-

ing her attitude as a weapon against her ideology's enemies.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. The Heretic rejects normal society and finds it hard to fit in outside of the faithful.

Lesser Masques: The Protestor, the Flagellant and the Revolutionary

Skull Priest (Wrath)

Guardians believe that nihilistic cult leaders and monstrous demagogues both belong to this Masque. The Skull Priest assures his followers that killing is a holy act. His words erase moral misgivings and drive followers to destroy, either as members of an elite faction in a public group or from the shadows of a secret society. Bigotry and eschatology are favored tools. Military officers, cult leaders and ruthless CEOs (it's as possible to have blind faith in the free market as anything else) are suitable offices.

Appearance: The Skull Priest looks a little small and laughable in the fearsome vestments of his organization. He doesn't look physically intimidating, but the harsh fanaticism in his voice gives him an aura of power.

Token: The Skull Priest carries something that represents violence and death. He might wear a stylized skull on his lapel or keep gruesome mementos from his violent career.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Expression rolls. The Skull Priest is a master demagogue.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. The Skull Priest views people as tools or victims of his violent faith.

Lesser Masques: The Fascist, the Cult Leader and the Terrorist Mastermind

Vermillion Stole (Greed)

To bring her chosen faith to the world, the Vermillion Stole needs money. Even as offerings grant her incredible luxury, she believes that she's gathering resources to spread her beliefs. She just doesn't believe that this is incompatible with the more palpable goal of enriching herself. Stereotypical televangelists and venal politicians show the Vermillion Stole in action.

Appearance: The Vermillion Stole looks a bit cartoonish. Her style combines luxury with folksy pretensions. She looks tacky, but trustworthy to her target audience.

Token: The Vermillion Stole's token is a symbol that combines her ideology with her own image. A Christian evangelist might juxtapose a self-portrait with the cross.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Persuasion-based rolls, because Vermillion Stole knows how to make people give, give, give!

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls, because her coarse manner works against her in more intimate circumstances.

Lesser Masques: The Televangelist, the Campaign Fundraiser and the Salesman

Wounded Monk (Lust)

The Wounded Monk suffers from a desire that seems to undermine his discipline of faith. He vows celibacy, but can't do without sex, or he has another sensual compulsion forbid-

den by his sect. The Wounded Monk is not always religious; a politician with secret habits that threaten to destroy his career also fits the Masque. Some Wounded Monks are tortured by the conflict; others resolve it secretly. Their hearts stray from orthodoxy while they tow the hard line. Unfortunately, this Masque includes those who abuse their trust and exercise more twisted desires on the defenseless.

Appearance: The Wounded Monk looks the way his beliefs compel him to. There's a certain amount of insincerity here, because it all seems a little too carefully constructed.

Token: The Wounded Monk carries a gift from a lover or a similar sign of his own passions, but must keep it hidden. Others may find it, but he cannot willingly reveal it.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Subterfuge rolls. The Wounded Monk is used to living a double life.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Expression rolls, because his actions make him doubt the truth in his own words.

Lesser Masques: The Disgraced Priest, the Secret Reformer and the Deviant Poet

The Exactors (Prudence)

Guardians of the Veil aren't supposed to have favorite Masques, but, unofficially, many prefer the Exactors. Exactors embody qualities valued by the order: efficiency, practicality and the ability to act according to reason – not in an emotionally charged but a vague moral sense. Exactors try to do the right thing in the right way, but their choices are often clouded by their own flaws. Though Exactors deny personal motives, their pragmatism can serve as an excuse to satisfy darker urges.

Binder of Night (Glibttony)

A Binder of Night fights fear. She can be an exorcist, a therapist or even someone who fights supernatural evil on the streets. Despite her mission, she will never do anything to attack sources of fear at the root. She enjoys being a hero, indispensable to her clients, and will not bring the struggle to a definitive end. In fact, she is so addicted to her role that if an enemy or psychosis threatened to vanish for good, she would, consciously or not, find a way to bring it back. Without the rush of small victories, she wouldn't have a reason to live. Guardians believe that this Masque fits many Banishers.

Appearance: The Binder of Night has an unsettling gaze. It's the look of a junkie looking for her fix and an investigator who's seen too many horrible things.

Token: Binders of Night carry a book (or files on a portable computer) about the occult or the dark side of human nature.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Occult rolls, because the Binder of Night explores fear's source, whether she believes it consists of archetypal symbols or descriptions of real horrors.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. Deny as she might, the Binder fights darkness for selfish reasons. She doesn't really care about her victims.

Lesser Masques: The Parapsychologist, the Demonologist and the Witch Hunter

Eye of Mars (Wrath)

An Eye of Mars is a professional warrior. In his jaded view, violence is inevitable. He's ready to take up arms when he needs to, but he pays close attention to the less spectacular aspects of war (a term that, for this Masque, can include gang violence, policing and more). He studies logistics, morale and political concerns. All of this training cannot be an end in and of itself – he wants to use it. Thus, an Eye of Mars pushes for violent solutions when he can, so he can test his skills in real combat.

Appearance: An Eye of Mars dresses practically, but, to him, cleanliness is less important than efficiency. He thinks nothing of leading the fight through dirt and blood.

Token: Eyes of Mars keep a well-maintained weapon ready.

Trained Benefit: +2 to rolls that use one of the following skills: Brawl, Firearms or Weaponry. Choose one affected skill for a given identity.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Manipulation-based rolls. The Eye of Mars is tense during negotiations. Combat plunges him into his native environment; he resents anyone or anything else that would leave a conflict dangling between peace and war.

Lesser Masques: The Special Forces Operator, the Bad Cop and the OG

Golden Hand (Greed)

Golden Hands balance their materialism and common sense to survive. Based on the merchants of ancient cultures, the Masque has become that of the average urban worker. Golden Hands are shopkeepers, salespeople and service employees: people whom the supernatural world either ignores or treats as victims. The order doesn't believe that every normal person is a Golden Hand, but that the Masque is emblematic of the modern age. It's true that the average Golden Hand is materialistic (and cowardly, because a Golden Hand views her life as her most prized property), but desperation can inspire her. Under stress, average people can devise cunning plans capable of snaring those too blinded by supernatural power to notice the threats.

Appearance: Modern, meek and unassuming, Golden Hands project the everyday insecurity that reminds mages of what they were before they Awakened.

Token: A Guardian manifesting the Golden Hand cannot cast vulgar spells.

Trained Benefit: When the Golden Hand spends a point of Willpower to accomplish a mundane, nonviolent task, she gains the 9 again benefit in addition to the normal benefits of Willpower expenditure.

Masque Drawback: A Golden Hand suffers a -2 dice penalty on the first roll the player makes when the character is exposed to violence or the supernatural.

Lesser Masques: The modern world has created a legion of lesser Masques for this Golden Hand.

Good Death (Envy)

The Good Death is an assassin. He dispatches his targets as efficiently as possible and pretends to have a detached attitude toward his victims. Mercy is not an option, unless it tempts the one weakness in his character. The Good Death doesn't really kill for money or for a cause. He kills to pretend he has power over death. In a moment of honesty, a religious Good Death might say he envies God. With every kill, he reaffirms that he, and not some higher power, is the master of his fate.

Appearance: The Good Death looks like whomever he needs to in order to accomplish his mission.

Token: The Good Death carries something that belonged to his last victim: one risky memento to remind him of his power.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Stealth rolls, thanks to his training.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Wisdom rolls, because the Good Death's obsessions are signs of a damaged soul.

Lesser Masques: The Serial Killer, the Government Assassin and the Hitman.

Lord Chain (Lust)

Lord Chain is a slaver. The slave trade is alive and well in modern times. Slavers have gone underground or learned to redefine their trade to evade justice. Slavery is alive in everything but name in sweatshops, brothels and certain prisons. Guardians of the Veil only immerse themselves in this Masque when they absolutely need to, because living as Lord Chain is a soul-destroying experience.

Appearance: Lord Chain's cold expression accompanies an expensive wardrobe, accented by trinkets stolen from his slaves.

Token: An item or mark that is proof of Lord Chain's control over others, such as a set of prison keys or a badge of authority.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Streetwise rolls, because Lord Chain knows how to conceal his trade and move slaves through underground networks.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. Obviously, Lord Chain doesn't particularly care about human beings.

Lesser Masques: The Warden, the Pimp and the Human Trafficker.

Scepter (Pride)

The epitome of hard-nosed rulers, the Scepter is the old Masque of kings, now held by politicians, CEOs, crime bosses and military officers. Scepters want efficiency and respect from their underlings. Too many Scepters are willing to accept the latter at the expense of the former, leaving Scepters vulnerable to sycophants while their organization crumbles around them. Not all Scepters meet this fate, but all must balance their pride and responsibilities.

Appearance: The Scepter dresses and looks like a leader, with a confident, steady gaze.

Token: The Scepter carries or wears an object that clearly designates him as the head of his organization.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Manipulation-based rolls; the Scepter is a skilled leader.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Composure-based rolls. His pride is easily wounded, and he is vulnerable to flattery. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: Many types of political leaders, the Mob Boss and the General.

Shieldbearer (Sloth)

Shieldbearers are perfect companions and servants. They perform their designated functions with precision and grace. This single-minded competence owes itself to moral irresponsibility. They have left life's important decisions to their masters. A paragon of the Masque leaps in the path of bullets and disposes of bodies without a second thought, but bereft of anyone to follow, she would be at a loss to act.

Appearance: Shieldbearers groom themselves according to the rules laid down by their superiors.

Token: A gift from her master.

Trained Benefit: +2 to a Mental, Physical or Social Skill (declared when the Masque Merit is learned) that best represents her designated function to her master.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Resolve-based rolls. Shieldbearers desire guidance, not independence. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: The Bodyguard, the Head Servant and the Cultist.

The Fool (Hope)

That hopeful Masques are called the Fools is perhaps a testament to the order's cynicism. This Masque is the study of moral strength cradling weakness. In a world thrown to the Fall by the secret enemies, unvarnished optimism is a chink in the armor of preparedness. Guardians of the Veil believe that it's better to do than dream. All the same, the order has some hope for the future. Fools let their guard down, but they also stumble upon the secret gifts of the world. Others miss opportunities that are right in front of them; the hopeful Fool sees opportunities because she expects them.

Bright Mantle (Pride)

The Bright Mantle loves the appearance of luxury. He's a happy sybarite whose social confidence comes from assuming that a better party is just around the corner. The fact that he devotes his life to play makes him appear to be a self-centered fop, but he's capable of surprising tenacity when something threatens his whimsical lifestyle. He believes fate will throw him more enjoyment as long as he's relaxed enough to accept it. Modern Bright Mantles are often clubgoers, socialites or musicians.

Appearance: Bright Mantles dress for fun. They buy into cutting-edge styles or even set trends themselves.

Token: A memento of his last party or an invitation for one to come.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Socialize, because a Bright Mantle's enthusiasm livens up any occasion.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Subterfuge. Bright Mantles exist for the scene, not the secret deals that happen in its shadows.

Lesser Masques: The Raver, the Model and the Debuntante

Crooked Staff (Envy)

Guardians use this Masque more than any other to portray the aged. A Crooked Staff is an old soul, at least. She uses her wealth of experience to inspire others, but her advice has another motive: she is past her prime and wants to be an indispensable font of knowledge so that she can take some credit for the achievements of her juniors. Without proper deference, she has nothing but criticism for others' accomplishments.

Appearance: The Crooked Staff's wardrobe is out of date, and if she isn't gray-haired already, she looks older than her age.

Token: A personal memento that's at least 10 years old. This doesn't need to actually be 10 years old, but must seem to be that way according to the invented history of the disguise.

Trained Benefit: +2 to a Mental Skill (declared when the Masque Merit is learned) that she used professionally at least a decade ago. Again, this depends on the history of the Masque, not whether the character actually used this skill 10 years ago.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Expression. The Crooked Staff uses dated idioms and veers off into unnecessary nostalgia.

Lesser Masques: The Grandmother, the Old Master and the Consiglio

Innocent (Greed)

An Innocent is childlike – even an actual child. He looks forward to getting older, learning more and discovering more about the world. On the other hand, he demands parenting. He wants constant attention and has poor impulse control. If he doesn't get what he wants, he might scream, run off or steal. He'll do reckless things to get what he wants because he expects others to bear the consequences.

Appearance: Innocents either dress as children do or follow the style of whomever they adopt as their guardians.

Token: An Innocent carries some sort of toy or game.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Investigation rolls. An Innocent loves new experiences and drinks in details that jaded witnesses miss.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Composure-based rolls. Innocents lack the experience to regulate their behavior well. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: The Simpleton, the Brat and the Prodigy

Lord Talon (Wrath)

Survivalists and warrior-primitives fill this Masque. Lord Talon resists civilization and believes in his own strength. He

believes that anyone outside of his enclave is probably sick or unclean. They are not really people; they don't live by the raw strength of their own hands. Outsiders should be repulsed or even raided unless they can prove that they share Lord Talon's values. Lord Talon usually lives in the wilderness, but some examples of the Masque could isolate themselves inside cities.

Appearance: Lord Talon has a practical style. He's a bit rough around the edges, but exudes confidence.

Token: Lord Talon carries a knife that can act as a tool or weapon.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Survival rolls. Lord Talon knows how to live in the wild.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls, because Lord Talon cares more about another person's accomplishments than their inner lives.

Lesser Masques: The Fugitive, the Barbarian and the Wanderer

Master of Dust (Gluttony)

The Master of Dust has a fortune to reclaim. She's seen better times; at one point, she enjoyed wealth and power, but those days have passed. She is desperate to return to those days and, whenever possible, lives as if she's enjoying the fruits of power once again. She's invariably undone by her profligate ways, but she is confident that she deserves to have her status restored.

Appearance: Masters of Dust adopt styles that used to be expensive, but are now threadbare or dated.

Token: The Master of Dust carries an object that represents her old prestige: a photo, signet ring, diploma or the like.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Expression rolls. The Master of Dust has an educated eloquence.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Streetwise rolls, because this skill is beneath her.

Lesser Masques: The Heiress, the Deposed Prince and the Prodigal Son

Hearthkeeper (Lust)

Hearthkeeper Masques stand for enduring love. Hope renews the Hearthkeeper's passions, because even in tough times, he believes things can only improve. Two Hearthkeepers can delight in each other their entire lives, but a single Hearthkeeper is an easy target for an abuser, who manipulates hopes that he'll change or lets the Hearthkeeper think she can "save" him.

Appearance: Hearthkeepers don't have any particular appearance, though most tend to be older.

Token: A Hearthkeeper carries or wears a token from her lover.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Empathy rolls. The Hearthkeeper reads others well because she constantly practices the skill on her beloved.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Intimidation rolls. Hearthkeepers are used to compromising, which weakens their ability to issue raw threats.

Lesser Masques: The Wife or Husband, the Romantic Knight and the Battered Victim

Untended Forge (Sloth)

This lazy Masque models those who demand that others give them what they need to survive. An Untended Forge can nominally hold any job, but learns to delegate or shirk his duties. He has an enduring faith in the human spirit because experience has taught him that someone will take up the responsibilities he avoids. Some Untended Forges have rich interior lives that they'd rather explore instead of working. Others just lack the confidence to take ownership of their job or studies.

Appearance: An Untended Forge dresses to provoke sympathy or respect, but his laziness leaves him a bit slovenly.

Token: The Untended Forge carries a substantial amount of money (equivalent to Resources • for the day) that he didn't earn or steal himself.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Persuasion-based rolls, because he knows how to persuade people to work for him.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Resolve-based rolls, because his laziness prevents him from applying himself. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: The Decadent Ruler, the Grifter and the Begging Monk

The Magistrates (Justice)

The Magistrates value law and order. *Mob omerta* and federal law both have codes to cleave to. Magistrates can be merciful or draconian. What do these Masques all have in common? They don't believe in acting according to vague feelings. Their code always guides them.

Adamant Judge (Envy)

Solomon and Han Feizi are legendary Adamant Judges. They appear to value the letter of the law, but, in fact, manipulate rules to influence others. Solomon used his wisdom to reward the compassionate; Han Feizi, the father of Legalism, advised rulers to create fear through harsh laws. In truth, all Adamant Judges distrust humanity in its natural state. They resent free will; it's a competitor to the order they prize. Adamant Judges are variously lawyers, professional negotiators and disciplinary officials in both public life and secret societies.

Appearance: An Adamant Judge adopts the style that obeys all the customs and rituals of his station.

Token: Identification or a symbol of authority that represents his ability to judge others.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Politics rolls. Adamant Judges know how to navigate formal social structures.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls, because he finds it hard to interact with anyone outside of a formal structure.

Lesser Masques: The Party Official, the Police Negotiator and the Union Boss

Diamond Triangle (Pride)

A Diamond Triangle believes that hard work ought to be rewarded. She's used to working inside the structure of a skilled profession, where competence (ideally) determines compensation. She does her best to excel within this framework and fights to rid her profession from regulations that hold back the gifted – or help novices, for that matter. The Diamond Triangle believes she is one of the best in her field and doesn't believe she owes her inferiors anything. Medical professions and skilled trades are common for this Masque.

Appearance: The Diamond Triangle dresses according to her professional responsibilities. She is devoted enough to her craft that she rarely has a chance to change out of work clothes.

Token: A Diamond Triangle carries one of her profession's signature tools at all times.

Trained Benefit: +2 to a single Mental Skill (declared when the Masque Merit is learned) related to the Masque's profession, because the Diamond Triangle works hard to master it.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy, because she cares little for anyone suffering from problems of their own making.

Lesser Masques: The Stock Trader, the Master Tradesman and the Callous Doctor

Factor (Sloth)

Factors believe that people ought to live according to a code, but leave it to others to decide what that code is. Thus, Factors are almost always subordinates of others. Factors prefer detail-oriented professions, which they approach with real zeal. They believe that their bosses or companies set the rules for good reasons, and want to live up to them. Accountants, insurance agents, middle managers and desk officers in police departments are excellent roles for a Guardian with this Masque.

Appearance: Factors adopt the style their supervisor demands.

Token: A Factor bears a sign of his allegiance: company IDs, uniforms and even tattoos can count, depending on the circumstances.

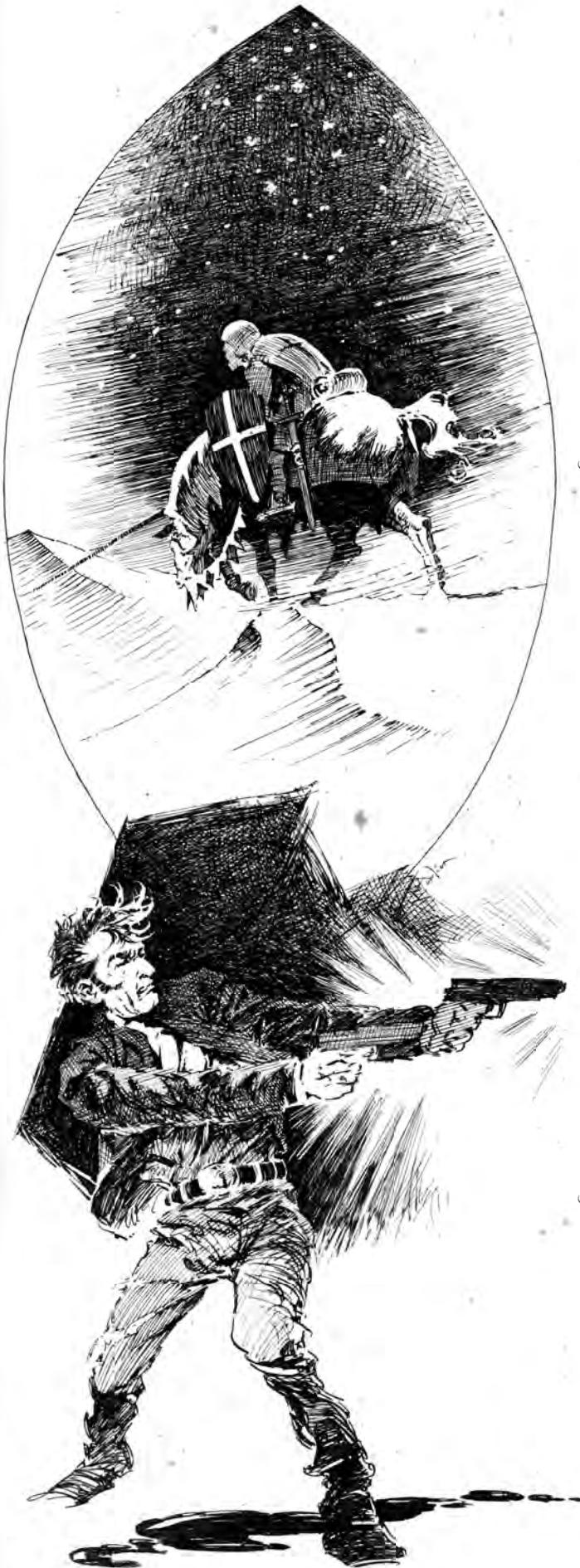
Trained Benefit: +2 to Politics rolls, because the Factor respects and learns the rules of a hierarchy.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Resolve-based rolls, because he's not particularly self-motivated. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: The Salaryman, the Censor and the Bookie

Lord Asp (Wrath)

Lord Asp believes in retribution. He follows his code of honor to the point of appalling violence. He has no mercy for anyone who violates his adopted code, but he keeps to that code himself. Personal affronts can't provoke his rage. He must justify his actions. Once he acts, he persecutes wrongdoers to the full extent allowed by his beliefs. This past Masque of Crusaders now belongs to figures as diverse as cops, preachers and mobsters.



Appearance: Lord Asp prefers a conservative style that still leaves room for action.

Token: Lord Asp is armed at all times.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Brawl, Firearms or Weaponry (choose only one when the Masque Merit is learned) rolls when attacking someone who's violated Lord Asp's code.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Composure-based rolls, because Lord Asp has trouble checking his judgmental, aggressive nature. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: The Vigilante, the Duelist and the Holy Warrior

Sighing Tower (Lust)

The Sighing Tower holds an important office. She's competent, but beneath that exterior, she has formidable – and distracting – sensual appetites. Just as the Wounded Monk, her lusts might be fodder for blackmail, but she doesn't shrink from them. She uses her power to sate them, so it's more likely that she instigates blackmail, instead of suffers it. She often chooses lovers from the ranks of her underlings. In love and work, she believes in a job well-done. She does her best to balance her appetites and roles that have considerable social, political and economic power.

Appearance: The Sighing Tower has a businesslike style, but with enough idiosyncrasies to show that she is too formidable to be bound by normal decorum.

Token: The Sighing Tower has at least Status ••• in the Masque's professional organization (city government, bank and so on).

Trained Benefit: +1 to Persuasion-based rolls. She uses a combination of prestige and personal drive to satisfy her desires.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Resolve-based rolls, because the Sighing Tower is distracted by her passions and the effort it takes to manage them. (This penalty does not apply to defensive contested rolls.)

Lesser Masques: The Harasser, the Lustful Mentor and the Master's Lonely Husband or Wife

Silver Key (Greed)

Silver Keys are ardent capitalists. They believe in the sanctity of contracts and the market, but little else. They will never cheat anyone, but they are so ruthless about using the rules to their advantage that they might seem to. Then, members of the Masque will explain that everything was legal. Abhorrent? Maybe – but legal, too. "Legal" can refer to both actual laws and the unwritten codes of various subcultures. The order speculates that the contracts that stole the Americas from their natives were written by proponents of this Masque. Their modern counterparts are common today.

Appearance: A Silver Key dresses with enough ostentation to let everyone know that he's prospering.

Token: Silver Keys keep ledgers, PDAs or other devices that note recent business activity.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Manipulation-based rolls. He knows how to use the rules to his best benefit.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy rolls. Their base greed interferes with caring for others.

Lesser Masques: The Nouveau-Riche, the Landlord and the Creditor

Whip (Gluttony)

Whips enforce internal discipline within a large organization. Whips are not ambitious enough to want true leadership, but make the best of the privileges they reap as their lieges' right hands. In totalitarian regimes, Whips are party officers who watch for anyone who questions official doctrine. In other political arrangements, Whips enforce ideology by issuing orders from on high and punishing enemies of the organization's consensus. In the process, Whips amass personal power, but they are rarely liked by the party, office or garrison rank and file.

Appearance: The Whip has a confident bearing and a style that fits with his chosen doctrine.

Token: The Whip carries orders from his superior.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Intimidation rolls, as he is a formidable figure.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls, even outside of his organization, because his habitual severity is incompatible with making others feel comfortable.

Lesser Masques: The Fascia Bearer, the Propaganda Officer and the Efficiency Consultant

The Unbowed (Fortitude)

These Masques rely on sheer emotional toughness to confront life. They don't make excuses for themselves. The Unbowed seem cold to some; they prefer to toughen up their companions instead of satisfying their needs. Self-reliance justifies selfishness far too easily, under the excuse that the weak must adapt or fall. Kinder Unbowed set themselves as examples to follow.

Apprentice Forge-Coal (Envy)

Mages know this Masque well. There are always students who hate their teachers or want to lay their classmates low. An Apprentice Forge-Coal burns with envy for their expertise, but is determined to stick out her studies. She looks forward to the day when she can make fools out of her so-called betters. Sometimes, she'll cheat or plot to ruin others over improving herself. Any student can manifest this Masque.

Appearance: The Apprentice adopts the fashions of her field, but proclaims them a little more loudly than most. She hopes a book or other object she carries will direct the conversation toward her own abilities – or others' failures.

Token: Study materials relevant to her field.

Trained Benefit: +2 to one Mental Skill (declared when the Masque Merit is learned) relevant to her field, because she craves knowledge to show off.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Expression rolls, because her egotism and barely-hidden disrespect annoy others.

Lesser Masques: The Mad Scientist, the Conniving Assistant and the Resentful Child

Gray Cloud (Sloth)

The Gray Cloud's soul is broken. Tragedy or natural melancholy makes it impossible for her to feel unblemished happiness. In the modern age, Guardians associate the Masque with clinical depression. She loses touch with friends and lacks the energy to take advantage of opportunities. Still, there is a core to her personality that will not submit to suicide or total madness.

Appearance: Gray Cloud is shabbily dressed. Her face lacks emotion, and her voice is dull and monotonous.

Token: Gray Cloud's token is her speech. Every scene, she digresses self-deprecatingly or expresses hopelessness. This isn't the talk of an angst-ridden teenager who needs to express herself, but that of a disordered mind that isn't conscious of its sickness.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Persuasion-based rolls. As an easy object of pity, she is obeyed by others so that they might relieve her sadness.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. A Gray Cloud's despair makes her uncomfortable to be around.

Lesser Masques: The Suicidal Lover, the Prophet of Doom and the Despairing Soldier

Hound of Flowers (Lust)

Obsessive lust can destroy both the afflicted and the object of desire. The Hound of Flowers is the Masque of stalkers, lovers who can't accept that it's over and anyone who confines or threatens the ones they claim to love. No profession is favored, but extreme cases tend to lose their jobs and standing in the community.

Appearance: The Hound is a creature of extremes. He is either careless of his appearance or obsesses over looking the way he thinks his love would prefer.

Token: He keeps a memento of his love with him at all times.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Investigation rolls. He's an expert at following and interrogating others, because he practices on the ones he cares for.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Subterfuge rolls. The Hound of Flowers cannot hide his obsession for long.

Lesser Masques: The Abusive Mate, the Celebrity Stalker and the Neighborhood Creep

Jade Seeker (Gluttony)

The Jade Seeker lives beyond his means. He accumulates debts while he strains personal relationships, but he almost always manages to save himself with a burst of effort. Jade Seekers work hard for wealth they'll squander. Members of this Masque are often petty crooks who alternate between periods of pleasure and risky labor. Others balance an addiction with the demands of home and family.

Appearance: Jade Seekers look a bit worn from a combination of work and play.

Token: Jade Seekers carry a running debt; he must owe someone money or favors. (As an option, reduce the character's Resources dots by one while he dons this Masque. If this drops his Resources to less than 0, the Jade Seeker is either homeless or owes money to people who are truly determined to get it back.)

Trained Benefit: +2 to Socialize rolls. The Jade Seeker's fun-loving manner endears him to almost anyone he meets.

Masque Drawback: The Jade Seeker's token — his debt — is his drawback.

Lesser Masques: The Compulsive Gambler, the Clubgoer and the Secret Addict

Master Tarnish (Greed)

Master Tarnish is a miser. She craves wealth, but is obsessed with hoarding it against trouble instead of using it to better her own life. Master Tarnish usually has a humble job that doesn't hint at her formidable savings. Examples of this Masque can be found all over the world.

Appearance: Master Tarnish looks poor, even totally destitute. There's a fire in her eyes that comes from being obsessed with work and money, but she never puts that obsession into words because she fears thieves and moochers.

Token: Master Tarnish's token is hidden currency and valuables worth at least Resources •••. She never cashes this in and can never pay for expenses worth more than one dot less than her hoard.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Survival Rolls. She refuses to enjoy her own wealth, so she learns to make ends meet in other ways.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. Her lack of compassion for herself also applies to others.

Lesser Masques: The Workaholic, the Reclusive Genius and the Wealthy Beggar

Prince Ragged (Pride)

Prince Ragged is poor, but tough. He also refuses to let others help him better himself. He would rather sleep under the sky than take a handout out of pity and believes that his own efforts are all that is necessary to catapult him out of destitution. The real world isn't like that, though. Not only are circumstances arrayed against him, but even the most independent lifestyle depends on others. Beggars, ascetics and farmers could belong to this Masque.

Appearance: Prince Ragged's clothes are poor, but he keeps himself clean and walks with an upright bearing, hoping that his personality will make a greater statement than his obvious poverty.

Token: Prince Ragged carries a symbol of his aspirations. One might clutch an ad from a job; another keeps a memento from the lover he hopes to win once more.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Survival rolls. Prince Ragged knows how to scrounge what he needs without anything other than his own two hands.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Subterfuge rolls. Prince Ragged wants to make his way with honest work instead of trickery.

Lesser Masques: The Good Mother, the Backwoodsman and the Disabled Veteran

Stone Sentinel (Wrath)

The Stone Sentinel is more of an icon than a person. He is a consummate professional who uses intimidation and violence at the command of his superiors. He is no idealist; he'll go the distance for his masters, but knows that he must appear unstoppable so that he can hide their flaws. Soldiers and police officers take to this Masque when they become amoral or pragmatic, but still want to serve a higher authority.

Appearance: Stone Sentinels dress in uniform — or as if they're wearing a uniform. They are simultaneously nondescript and frightening. You won't remember quite what one looked like — just that he terrified you.

Token: The Stone Sentinel's token is the way he dresses: in conformity to the ideal image of his role, whether it's a military uniform or a severe suit.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Intimidation rolls, because of the Sentinel's ominous presence.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Socialize rolls. Stone Sentinels specialize at keeping others afraid and distant, not at ease.

Lesser Masques: The Man in Black, the Mob Enforcer and the Beat Cop

The Viziers (Temperance)

Balance in all things. The Viziers preach it, but struggle to practice it. Guardians favor the Exactors for their practical natures, but, in the end, turn to the Viziers to look beyond individual passions. Viziers have a gift for seeing beyond the obvious; they perceive the greater purpose in all things. This can inspire cruelty or mercy, depending on what the Vizier sees and what she tells others. These are the Masques of powers behind the throne. Leaders can be decisive because they have a certain amount of useful ignorance, but Viziers can frame a debate, spin the facts and ensure a result to their liking.

Crown of Eyes (Wrath)

Epopts study this Masque to understand how they might fall to corruption. A Crown of Eyes collects secrets whenever and wherever she can. Spies, undercover cops, compulsive gossips and informers from totalitarian societies are apt Crowns of Eyes. As she discovers the secrets currents of the world, she's tempted to use them against personal enemies instead of for a greater purpose. Information inspires paranoia. Paranoia erupts into violence.

Appearance: A Crown of Eyes has a casual style. Members of the Masque usually look tired from stakeouts or late-night debriefings.

Token: A camera or a notebook.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Streetwise rolls. A Crown of Eyes knows how to extract information from clandestine groups.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Expression rolls. A Crown of Eyes is used to learning and manipulating information — not sharing it.

Lesser Masques: The Mole, the Secret Police and the Snitch

Lord Scar (Lust)

Lord Scar is the Masque of traitors. Scar is a double agent, backstabber and inside man. Almost any profession suits him. It's easy to hate Lord Scar, but he does what he does for noble and base reasons. He confuses the latter with the former when it suits him. Sometimes he has special knowledge of his situation. He knows his friends are turning down an evil path or his cause is founded on a lie. Knowing this, he has to bring the corruption down from the inside. But Lord Scar betrays those he once cared for as a twisted way to possess them. If he cannot walk with his comrades again, he must make do with destroying them.

Appearance: Lord Scar's treacherous nature leaves no mark on his appearance.



Token: Lord Scar can't just pretend he's going to betray others. He must act on his plans on at least a weekly basis.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Subterfuge rolls fits his treacherous nature.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Intimidation rolls. Lord Scar is reluctant to use direct threats for fear that if he pushes too far, his plans will be exposed.

Lesser Masques: The Treacherous Lover, the Insider and the Double Agent

Opener of Ways (Greed)

The Opener of Ways is conscientious, kind and resourceful — for a price. Concierges, consultants and even prostitutes manifest this Masque. Openers don't haggle or cheat their clients. They set clear, non-negotiable prices for their services. If a client can't pay, the Opener's companionship is at an end. Openers reserve revenge for people who cheat them.

Appearance: An Opener has a polite, humble mien. An Opener prefers to let her expertise speak for itself.

Token: The Opener of Ways keeps a memento of her last professional relationship.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Wits-based rolls. Openers of Ways are exceptionally perceptive and highly motivated.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Subterfuge rolls. Everyone knows an Opener's in it for profit, so they aren't inclined to trust her.

Lesser Masques: The Courier, the Bard and the Contractor

Regent (Envy)

The classic Regent supervises a state for its child-ruler. His modern equivalents could be chairpersons or personal assistants. Aside from the young, their charges could be stockholders, naive celebrities or local politicians. Regents are ideal for the role; Regents tirelessly collect the information they need to protect their charges. Unfortunately, the Regent's weakness is as well-known as his role. Regents' plans to usurp power have inspired myths around the world. After managing affairs for so long, many believe that they deserve the authority their charges aren't fit to assume.

Appearance: Regents have an air of muted power about them. If their privileges truly belonged to them, they might assume a more assertive style.

Token: The Regent carries an object that represents his charge. Two examples are stockholders reports and a picture of the heir.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Politics rolls. The Regent understands the hierarchy around him and his charge.

Masque Drawback: -1 to Persuasion-based rolls, because his role as a caretaker — not a rightful ruler — hampers his authority.

Lesser Masques: The Retired Ruler, the Shogun and the Chairperson

Runehold (Sloth)

In ancient times, the Runehold Masque was associated with scholar-monks and sages. Runeholds are smart, but passive. Nowadays, a Runehold is likely to be a professor, engineer or technician. Runeholds prefer research and tinkering to the practical aspects of their fields. They're happy to talk about what they know, but hate the pressure of a workplace, a client or anything else that constrains their private studies.

Appearance: A Runehold takes little care of his appearance. His clothes are usually messy and out of style.

Token: A corroded tool or dog-eared book related to his field.

Trained Benefit: +2 to the character's two highest Mental skill rolls. Runeholds have the time and inclination to master whatever interests them.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Empathy and Socialize rolls. Runeholds don't get a lot of practice at talking to others.

Lesser Masques: The Inventor, the Librarian and the Geek

Twin of the Ring (Greed)

Twins of the Ring love success. They aren't often successful themselves, but they know how to ingratiate themselves with famous and influential people. Twins are smart enough to help their meal tickets out and try to be humble enough not to take too much. Otherwise, their rides on another people's coattails might come to a rapid halt. But sometimes, just joining the party isn't enough. Twins want a piece of the action for themselves and cheat their benefactors.

Appearance: A Twin of the Ring wears a combination of cheap and expensive clothing. For instance, he dresses to draw attention to his silk blazer instead of his bargain shoes.

Token: A pass, key or other symbol that lets him go wherever his patron goes.

Trained Benefit: +2 to Socialize rolls. Twins of the Ring are pleasant enough to join the inner circle of some powerful figure.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Intimidation rolls. The Twin's reliance on someone else to support him makes his tough talk feel forced.

Lesser Masques: The Groupie, the Disciple and the Confidante

Untwisted Branch (Pride)

Lord Scar's opposite is the Untwisted Branch. She combines far-reaching wisdom and unshakeable loyalty. Untwisted Branches are ideal vassals and companions. Unfortunately, they don't always swear their oaths to worthy people or pure causes. Even so, Untwisted Branches refuse to abandon them. Untwisted Branches follow people, faiths and nations to their doom. Their honor is strong, but ultimately selfish, because they care more about their word than right or wrong. Warriors, patriots and lovers are fond of this Masque, and the order notes its similarity to the Adamantine Arrows' ethos.

Appearance: Untwisted Branches tend to have neat, yet functional personal styles.

Token: An object representing whatever he is devoted to, such as a flag or a religious symbol.

Trained Benefit: +1 to Resolve-based dice rolls. This reflects the Branch's resolute character.

Masque Drawback: -2 to Politics rolls. Untwisted Branches see the world in terms of personal relationships, not systems.

Lesser Masques: The Loyal Lover, the Samurai and the Grail Knight



CHAPTER THREE: OF SECRETS AND SPIES

Circe cursed again with impatience. *Where was that bitch Guardian? She said she'd be here, with her entire cabal.* Circle looked around the gloomy, twilight clearing again. A circle of crows was her only company. They cawed to one another and looked at her impudently.

I've had enough, she thought. I'm out of here. She turned to walk back to her car, and froze with a primal shiver up her spine as the crows all screamed in unison, a fingernails-on-blackboard screech. She turned back to look at them, wondering what the hell had riled them up at once, and saw that three of them were growing. *No, not growing – shifting.* They became human-shaped silhouettes of shadow, which then resolved into fully formed, cloaked women. Hildegarð, the Guardian of the Veil Circe had been waiting for, stepped forward and offered her hand in greeting.

"Well met, Circe," Hildegarð said with a mocking tone. "Let me introduce the rest of the Parliament."

*Tell the truth
But tell it slant.
—Emily Dickinson*

There are many rumors and stories about what goes on within the hidden confines of the Guardians of the Veil. Most other mages have developed their own beliefs about the order and layered these on top of the public images that the Guardians foster among the Awakened, evolving something completely fictional and untouched by the Guardians' hands — exactly what the Guardians of the Veil expect. After all, they long ago gave up the hope that the Awakened world would accept that Guardians perform a necessary function and cooperate with — if not help — them in safeguarding magic from its decay. Instead, the Guardians understand that they have no option but to often act at odds with their brethren, serving them by betraying them.

While the method is harsh, the ideology is sound. Despite the rationales some Guardians give for their behavior, the Guardians of the Veil don't necessarily choose their order out of an attraction to the lifestyle of a spy or because they really like lying. Sleeper spies who choose to betray their country usually believe in an end that justifies the means, or because they want to work toward a better way of life. Only rarely are double agents or moles motivated solely by money; in fact, they are rarely paid that well for their expertise. Corporate spies, more common in today's post-industrial societies than they were in the past, are more often tempted by sheer financial gain. There is less natural loyalty to one's company than one's country of birth, and financial institutions also have much more money to throw around than governments do.

The Guardians of the Veil, like traditional Sleeper spies, believe in the cause. Each mage wants to safeguard magic and mages against those who would destroy them, including themselves, and a Guardian is willing to go to nearly any lengths in order to accomplish that goal. A Guardian knows that she won't be paid, and may often have to find her own way to get by financially. The ideal drives Guardians of the Veil and should, in fact, make them heroes to the Awakened world. Guardians' methods — necessary but distasteful — make them outcasts.

Initiation: Crossing Behind the Veil

Nobody wants to join this world of Supernal paranoia and espionage. Nobody thinks, upon Awakening, that joining the group of mages who are hated by all will let him make the best of this new, magical life. But the Guardians of the Veil order has not yet disappeared or become a footnote in the Mysterium's annals. Initiates continue to join the Guardians, maintaining enough numbers for effective operations — which may be as few as two or three in some regions. Sometimes, more experienced mages defect from another order or leave

behind apostasy to join the Guardians. Such recruitment is a powerful testament to the morality of the order's mission. The very fact that the Guardians did not die out during the centuries after the Fall of Atlantis betokens the correctness of the faith the mages have in their tasks. This conviction is the first step toward passing through the Veils.

Every candidate for initiation, whether he is a Sleeper, a newly Awakened or recruited mage or an ancient 3rd-degree master, must evince this conviction to the satisfaction of the local Epopt, who guides initiations through her agents. Each candidate is tested differently, however, depending upon the individual Epopt's factional affiliation (if any) and the nature of the candidate.

Recruitment

Mages are secretive by nature, but all orders know that the Guardians epitomize paranoia. The Guardians of the Veil, like most orders, have a constant need for more Sleeper agents, more Sleepwalkers and, of course, more mages. The clandestine way in which Guardians conduct their business certainly doesn't make recruiting any easier, but few Guardians would prefer letting someone they can't trust behind the Veils.

If any generalization can be made, it is this: the Guardians of the Veil are cautious beyond belief. They never approach anyone, especially a mage, openly as themselves. First contact is performed under a guise that a Guardian can use to simultaneously attract and test the subject. A Sleeper interested in occult architecture might meet someone posing as the designer of that mysterious building downtown, who prods at the Sleeper's understanding while offering seeds of knowledge. New mages could encounter a wise woman of the O'odham tribe, who drops arousing but empty hints and analyzes when and where the candidates bite.

But in no case do the Guardians step out into the open and introduce themselves. That would be too revealing to someone who, like 99.9% of the world, cannot yet be trusted. Besides, there's probably a bullet out there waiting for a Guardian to do just that.

Recruiting Sleepers

Some factions of the Guardians of the Veil staunchly oppose broaching the Lie in any manner, including testing Sleepers for strength of will, character and conviction. Though most Guardians accept that careful observation and oblique training of some Sleepers provides useful results, the Inheritors faction (see p. 135) fights any movement in their local caucuses that would increase the number of Sleepers who might be exposed to the forbidden Mysteries. Luckily for the Guardians of the Veil, the Inheritors' power in the order at the moment is not enough to seriously reduce the number of ongoing programs that draw dedicated Sleepers from the Labyrinth or from other walks of life.

Favored are the Sleeper candidates who are chosen by Guardians personally from those notable mortals encountered during the course of the agents' work. Also well received are those who have come to the Labyrinth on their own or sought out the Invisible World in any way. Sleepers who show strong character are singled out by the Cultor. After several weeks — sometimes months — of focused surveillance, the pool of candidates is thinned once more. Any who remain, rarely numbering more than can be counted on two hands, are given offers too good to be true but too good to refuse, tailored to their personal tastes and dreams. An engineer working at Lockheed Martin may be offered a job working for a private astronautics firm. A geneticist chafing under strict genetic manipulation guidelines may be given the chance to shift genetics without boundaries. A plumber may be offered the position of in-house, full-time pipe maintenance. Not all offers are monetary. Some generous individuals may be best drawn in by the chance to do volunteer work for an environmental or political concern. The Guardians lure their prospects using whatever bait the Guardians can muster or fake.

Just like mortal intelligence agencies, the Guardians of the Veil often maintain offices on university campuses, and some Guardians might even act as part-time faculty. Attendance at university is a good — but by no means the only — sign of a malleable mind; beginning students are often more open to different perspectives and, some Guardians believe, less inhibited by the Quiescence. College life is also a time for the young to be active in support of their ideals, and gives the Guardians of the Veil an excellent opportunity to observe exactly how dedicated an individual can be to an ideology while beset with the pressures of academic studies and social life. Occasionally, a Guardian on the watch goes to the lengths of creating difficult circumstances to test or hone a subject's resolve. Students are usually drawn into the web through specialized academic programs or scholarships.

Several conditions can make a candidate unsuitable for invitation into the program, however tempting she might be, due to temperament, strength of will or ideals that mesh with the Guardians' own. Subjects who are married or otherwise have powerful emotional ties to family or friends are often too great a security risk. Not only are people with strong connections to others more likely to divulge a secret to someone inside their confidence, but loved family and friends can be (and often are) used as levers against people in sensitive positions. The Seers of the Throne have been known to kidnap loved ones to manipulate other mages; for that matter, the Guardians do it as well. If a married woman evinces little attachment to her spouse, she may still be considered, but with great skepticism. Other obvious weaknesses may disqualify a Sleeper. A man with a gambling habit and an accompanying debt can be more easily blackmailed, as can someone with dependence on a chemical substance or, for that matter, with any addictive habit. A nymphomaniac is as poor a secret-keeper as a crack-head. Ideologues are also often dismissed. While devotion to an ideal defines the Guardians of the Veil, many ideologies oppose indoctrination in the Guardians' beliefs. A firm believer

in communism, for example, is not necessarily someone who can accommodate into his worldview the keeping of magic and power for the select few. Only people with ideologies that the Epopt or Cultor determines can be transferred to the guardianship of magic, or can be manipulated to include it, are valid candidates, and they are watched very carefully.

Candidates have a high acceptance rate, if only because the Guardians of the Veil do such a good job at discovering exactly what will make the candidates say yes. Any offer the Guardians make through one of their many fronts includes a confidentiality agreement that requires the Sleeper to conceal even the existence of the job. The agreement isn't simply a test of trust; each nondisclosure contract is explained to each nominee in a way that ties it to his morals and desires. The astronautics firm has powerful rivals who would endanger the firm's progress, or the government would censure the secret genetics lab if it were discovered. When the nominee agrees, the Guardians' proxies redouble their surveillance of him, ensuring that if he tells anyone about the opportunity, they will know it. This lasts about a month. Any Sleeper who betrays the small confidence given is immediately disqualified. The false opportunity presented by the Guardians dries up completely, but legitimately. Guardians are careful not to let mysterious circumstances surround the person's loss of the job. A letter is sent suggesting that the position has been filled or that the scholarship has been given to another. Meticulous Cultors may even arrange for related articles in newspapers that they know the failed applicants will see.

Recruiting Mages

Watchtowers call across the Abyss, Awakening Sleepers into mages. Watchtowers do not discriminate by race or creed, offering enlightenment to any mortal whose soul strains for the freedom to see truth. While the Guardians of the Veil can try to nurture a Sleeper's potential to scribe her name into a Watchtower, their results are poor at best, and always erratic. Neither can they predict with much accuracy which Sleepers will rise from their slumber. When a Sleeper Awakens to find the Invisible World laid bare to him, it won't be long before he becomes apparent to the Invisible World in turn.

An Epopt's job is a harsh one, and she expects all mages in her caucus to assist her in locating new Awakenings. Sometimes, a lucky glimpse at the obituaries or a human interest segment in the news reveals the clues. More often, the bewildered new mages come to the Guardians, nervously seeking information on the strange things happening to them. Because the Guardians of the Veil have, perhaps, the largest network of occult and pseudo-occult contacts and agents (in the Labyrinth), they manage to get a lock on more new mages than they believe the other orders do. Because the Labyrinth is the tie-in to this advantage, it is often Cultors who report the discoveries; as a result, Guardians who don't hold these positions tend to neglect the duty of watching for new mages.

Epopts would rather approach a young mage in the same way they approach a Sleeper nominated for one of their special programs: with two thorough background checks and a cover

story tailored specifically to entice him into the program — assuming, of course, that he is the right sort for the Guardians of the Veil. To the Epopts' dismay, they simply don't have the time. Despite their occasional early leads, they are sometimes not the only group with the new mage in their sights. Sometimes, the local Epopt doesn't even hear about an Awakening before an enterprising mage from another order has swept the soul off behind closed doors. And some mages just disappear, which usually indicates that a spirit or a Banisher got to them. As a result, the Guardians of the Veil are often forced to abandon their plotting and scheming and simply send out a recruiter to discuss the truth with the mage.

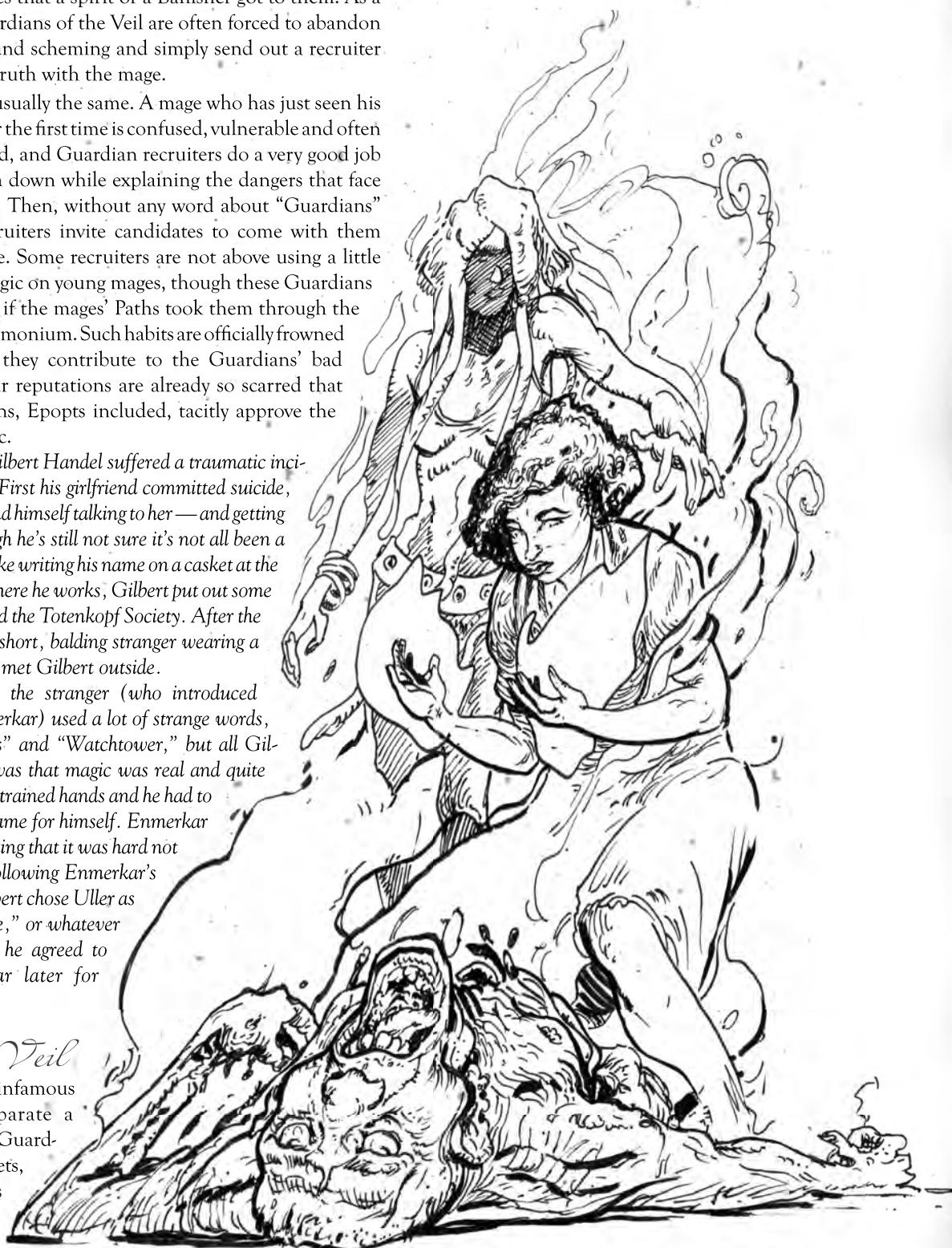
The spiel is usually the same. A mage who has just seen his Watchtower for the first time is confused, vulnerable and often very, very scared, and Guardian recruiters do a very good job of calming him down while explaining the dangers that face him as a mage. Then, without any word about "Guardians" or "Veils," recruiters invite candidates to come with them and learn more. Some recruiters are not above using a little bit of Mind magic on young mages, though these Guardians take more care if the mages' Paths took them through the Realm of Pandemonium. Such habits are officially frowned upon because they contribute to the Guardians' bad name, but their reputations are already so scarred that many Guardians, Epopts included, tacitly approve the recruiting tactic.

Example: Gilbert Handel suffered a traumatic incident last week. First his girlfriend committed suicide, and then he found himself talking to her — and getting answers. Though he's still not sure it's not all been a hallucination, like writing his name on a casket at the funeral home where he works, Gilbert put out some feelers and found the Totenkopf Society. After the first meeting, a short, balding stranger wearing a Realtor's blazer met Gilbert outside.

Over coffee, the stranger (who introduced himself as Enmerkar) used a lot of strange words, such as "Moros" and "Watchtower," but all Gilbert really got was that magic was real and quite dangerous in untrained hands and he had to choose a new name for himself. Enmerkar was so unassuming that it was hard not to trust him. Following Enmerkar's suggestion, Gilbert chose Uller as his "shade name," or whatever it's called, and he agreed to meet Enmerkar later for training.

The Gray Veil

First of the infamous Veils that separate a mage from the Guardians' many secrets, the Gray Veil is an extended



test of loyalty and principles. As the candidate learns the qualities valued by the mysterious organization, she is put in various situations that challenge her to follow their guidelines or not, as she pleases. No "wrong answer" is damning, but any incorrect response is cause for concern to the Guardians of the Veil observing her.

At this point, few candidates know anything about the organization that watches them. Only some few mages, through Supernal intuition or deduction, learn anything about the order that they are not told. This mystery, to determine whether the candidate will perform tasks on behalf of something she does not know, applies to the secrets of the Tapestry: will the future Guardian be capable of working to protect Mysteries she does not — and may never — understand?

Indoctrinating Sleepers

Once past the first two selections and the first test, candidates are relocated to regional facilities devoted to the purpose of testing Sleepers. The excuse for moving the nominees, especially when they expected jobs near their homes, is intensive training programs ranging from three to six months that will make them ready to work within their new company or environment. This sometimes serves as a first test: a candidate who won't leave a significant other behind for a temporary training may be too strongly attached to serve.

One candidate might go to a small communal farm, populated with other Sleepers and perhaps run by a Sleepwalker with some inkling of the greater picture. Another candidate attends a small, very private art school in the city where all students live on the premises and have one-on-one lessons with the eccentric teacher. On a larger scale, multiple candidates could go to the same management-track program in a large office building, surrounded by Sleepers entirely inconsequential to the Gray Veil (except, perhaps, as living scenery). The situation for each Sleeper is unique, and Guardians try their best to fit the programs to the individuals.

Resources willing, Epopts prefer to maintain multiple facilities so that they may better fit the myriad candidates they find. But any given caucus has only limited time, space and money; as a result, the caucuses work together. Each maintains what facilities it can (sometimes as few as one or none), and Epopts maintain relations with a select few others so that they can send Sleeper potentials to the best possible places.

Each facility maintains a theme that allows the Sleeping candidates to more easily accept the presence of all the other students. An art school façade teaches all manner of artistic endeavors, for example; another facility might boast great professors of the sciences or politics. There are rarely enough nominees for Awakening to fill out a single class, let alone an entire facility, and so the Cultor administrators accept additional, unremarkable students for a fee. This method sometimes allows the facility to remain solvent, but, more importantly, provides a small crowd of "peers" for the *important* students to keep secrets from and eventually betray. Some Epopts, unable or unwilling to share with other caucuses, use detailed covers to make it feasible that the disparate candidates

can all be at the same training facility. Pretending to be an independent training service that caters to large or exclusive concerns — training management for Lockheed Martin or H&R Block, for example — is a popular cover. Whatever the story, Guardians lay all the appropriate tracks — websites, records with the Better Business Bureau, whatever it takes — to make the service look legitimate.

The instructor or head of the facility explains to all the guests that their stay there is probationary; their potential employers, partners or sources of funding are exacting in their need for well-balanced, trustworthy people who can accomplish what needs to be done. The instructor, usually a trusted Sleepwalker, introduces herself as the ultimate representative of the people her students want to or will be working for. Teachers and trainers, all Sleepers hired for their expertise, then go about educating the candidates in all appropriate subjects. An author who signed on for an intensive novel writing course really learns how to sculpt a plot and bring life to a character, and an engineer gets a first-rate education on a broad range of topics, from building an automobile motor out of spare parts to disarming bombs. The difference between this education and a normal one is that the Guardians of the Veil are always watching. And, slowly but surely, they are introducing the most harmless tidbits of the Mysteries into the curriculum for the "special" students.

Here, then, is when a Sleeping candidate's suitability to pass through the Gray Veil is tested. Among other students or trainees, the candidates (there are rarely more than one or two actual nominees at a standard facility) are taught the tiniest secrets. They are given the merest suggestions of something beyond the world as they know it and, more importantly, instructed to keep it secret from all. As candidates begin to prove themselves able to maintain perfect confidentiality, the instructor steps up the challenge. In the interest of aiding another student's education, or in order to help a lagging friend's training along, the candidate is asked to perform some tasks that indicate a devotion to the greater good, even if the tasks would normally be considered inappropriate or rude. They might include shadowing a target for a day and recording his activities or carefully going through his room to uncover any possessions or habits that may be hindering his education. The candidate reports the results to the facility's instructor. The candidate usually believes that these tests are known only to the instructor and must also be kept from the other teachers; though the Guardians or trusted Sleepwalkers watching the facility are all aware of the process, any Sleepers on the faculty probably won't be.

At the same time, a candidate's morals are tested. Through the Guardians' artifice, a candidate is caused to be failing an important class, or she is caught in the process of doing something illegal or against the rules. Having the Guardian catch her at a task set her by the instructor — who set her up, of course — is common. When this occurs, the authority figure offers the candidate a chance to pass the class or escape with nothing more than a warning, but only in exchange for a favor. Favors might include doctoring another student's test,

stealing something from a staff member's office (especially the instructor), revealing information about her clandestine tasks, keeping a specific secret or, sometimes, sex. Whatever the demanded trade is, a candidate who accepts it, or considers it for too long, is dismissed. Someone willing to accept those options to get out of such minor trouble would undoubtedly snap under the pressure a rival mage can bring to bear.

Preventative Recruitment

One of the duties that the Guardians of the Veil takes upon itself is to work against the Awakening of mortals who are unready to see the truth, or who would be unable to wisely wield that power. After centuries of spying on the Silver Ladder and the other orders, the Guardians are quite familiar with the sort of Sleepers that other mages attempt to Awaken. When an Epopt or Cultor becomes aware of a Sleeper who meets another order's requirements, he judges that Sleeper's worth as a mage. If he believes that the Sleeper's Awakening would bring only harm to the Mysteries, he may decide to recruit the Sleeper to one of the Guardian training facilities first or draw her into the Labyrinth.

Such "candidates" are never expected to do well, but they are taught just as any other student. And the instructor of the facility works to introduce these candidates to the Gray Veil as she does any other nominee for initiation. This candidate is judged *much* more harshly than others, but, if he still succeeds, he may well become a respected initiate, should he actually Awaken. Those who fail are watched, and, by the Guardians' reckoning, much less likely to be picked up by another order.

As successful nominees pass these and other, similar tests, they are being indoctrinated into a way of thinking that the Guardians of the Veil approve: holding an ideal dearer than all else, committing small sins solely for the benefit of others, understanding that some rules should never be broken, and that others can be ignored when appropriate and when even those rules can be trod upon in pursuit of the ideal. As a candidate progresses, the tasks that test her become more morally difficult and increasingly in line with the mindset the Guardians want from her. Not all of the tests, if failed, indicate immediate expulsion from the program, but any failure ensures that later tests will be all the more difficult. The Guardians take this necessary step to redeem a valued candidate, but they rarely allow someone they do not fully consider ready to continue — unless, of course, she Awakens, in which case they induct her using different procedures (see below). If a candidate performs well enough in the course, which can last anywhere from a few months to several years, and is receptive enough to the indoctrination, she is considered to

have passed through the Gray Veil. She is never told that she has passed this important waypoint; she does not know it even exists. Only mages fully initiated into the order know of the Veils in more than vague terms, and, even then they may not be able to recognize the exact moment that marked their passing through the first Veil.

At this point, when a candidate is deemed worthy of approaching the Crimson Veil, the Guardians of the Veil make an attempt to Awaken him. In one of the most controversial actions within the order, a Guardian gives the candidate the last few clues necessary to tie together all the hints and brief words that had been taught to the initiate up to this point. If the Epopt is lucky, the clues cause an epiphany of the soul and the subject Awakens. More commonly, the Guardian ends up breaking the Lex Magica to a minute degree. The Sleeper continues to Sleep. Many Epopts take time out of their busy schedules to deliver the revelatory words; deflecting the criticisms about encouraging Awakenings is easier if the leader of the caucus is responsible for the failure.

The Guardians of the Veil understand that Awakening is a very personal process, and they are patient as long as they still believe the subject may find enlightenment. Until such time as an initiate Awakens or is deemed unable to do so, she is kept usefully employed by the order. The initiates' loyalty and judgment have both been proven, however, so they are given respect and properly challenging assignments. Many of the best mortal agents the Guardians of the Veil fields are "graduates" of this program whose souls refused to Awake.

If the candidate has not Awakened, she is watched from this point onward, in the hopes that she one day will. The Sleeper at this point is given some tasks of actual but minor importance in keeping the Guardians of the Veil functioning from one day to the next. An academic may become a teacher in the facility in which she was trained, or she may be utilized as a "talent" scout or mole at a university. A cultist who passed all his tests could be promoted to be a messenger between the cult and the Guardians, a tool for the order's manipulation of the Labyrinth with a little understanding of what he does.

In some cases, the initiate is put through further tests — even life-threatening tests — to try and provoke an Awakening. If years pass without an Awakening, the candidate might be quietly abandoned, as the Guardians put their resources into more fruitful endeavors. Those Sleepers who have passed the Gray Veil without Awakening often serve as agents for the order, although unknowingly. They believe they are working for whatever cover organization they've trained with or into which they are placed upon "graduation." They are never told the full truth about their true benefactors, unless they Awaken, in which case they are then advanced into the Crimson Veil.

Too Many Mages?

Herein are described the Guardians' methods for singling out, testing and, hopefully, Awakening Sleepers to be admitted into their order. A reader may get the impression that this is a common occurrence, that the Guardians of the

Veil have perfected their criteria for discerning what Sleepers could, with the right push, Awake and become productive members of the order, that there are far more Guardians created through this program than through other means.

Not so.

A typical Epopt has eyes and ears over some of the local high schools, hopefully one nearby college or university and maybe a military academy, if one is in the area. In any given year, the Epopt is only tracking only a few subjects who actually intrigue him; only one who has the correct profile is issued an invitation, and a depressing number of candidates refuse their invitations. Due to exacting standards, years may go by without a single initiate.

A candidate is given a minimum of one year to pass the Gray Veil, and it sometimes takes as many as three. No more than one of five is, in the long run, acceptable, and at least 17 out of 20 of these cannot muster the strength to Awaken. That is 2.5% of the original candidates. Under these conditions, the Guardians of the Veil are *lucky* when they manage to Awaken a Sleeping soul.

Still, to the Guardians, it is worth the price in time and manpower.

Seekers From the Labyrinth

The Guardians of the Veil always keep many pairs of eyes on the Sleepers who are winding their way through the Labyrinth. Ordeal Keepers and Inheritors (see Chapter Four: Factions and Legacies, for more on these factions) especially believe in the Labyrinth as a method for testing the merits of those who fall or are drawn into it. These Sleepers rarely end up in special training facilities; the Guardians consider them to be in a different class altogether. The most important difference is that these Sleepers, instead of being chosen by the order to learn, chose for themselves to seek out the Mysteries of the Fallen World. They are, simply by virtue of being inquisitive into the wrong things, more dangerous and suspect than the Guardians' handpicked candidates—but also more promising. Their hunger for spiritual truth might be hints of restless souls, ready to reach across the Abyss and attain Watchtowers. For this reason, candidates from within the Labyrinth are watched very closely but from a distance.

When an individual who has been shunted into the Labyrinth comes to a Cultor or Epopt's attention, a Sleepwalker or low-ranking Guardian is assigned to watch him for a period. They observe everything the subject does, but they pay the most attention to whether he keeps secret or disseminates the false clues he learns, whether he helps others and how he does so and whether his search for the "truth" is avarice

or altruism. The wrong answers to these questions cause the Guardians of the Veil to lead him deeper into the bowels of the Labyrinth, where whatever exceptional qualities first brought him to the order's attention will not serve to get him closer to any truths. If the answers turn out promising, the Cultor or Epopt sends orders into the Labyrinth. Drabs of knowledge are let down to him, and he is adopted into a cult or other occult organization where he has peers, much as the enrolled candidates (described above) are set among other students. Trials similar to those in the specialized facilities are employed, in the same order, to determine the worth of the subject. He is now, for the first time, considered a candidate. If his performance is up to snuff, he may be allowed to see the other side of the Gray Veil.

Intelligence Agencies

The modern incarnations of the intelligence agency came into being around the 19th century, and some mages believe that the Guardians of the Veil were behind them every step of the way.

Whatever the truth, Guardians tried for many years to recruit members of these burgeoning spy shops into their order—attempts that nearly always ended poorly. The truth is that the Guardians couldn't monitor all these agencies. Guardians recruited when and where they could, but not as much as they let others believe.

The order discovered that agents for Sleeper governments were often taught too strong a loyalty to their countries or political ideals to effectively switch their allegiances over to the Guardians' cover organizations. Epopts wrote off the intelligence agencies as wishful thinking for pre-trained agents and returned to their tried-and-true recruiting methods.

Every rule has an exception. In this case, it was the cold war. Espionage was an integral part of the conflict between the East and the West, and many spies were trained during that period. Some Guardians of the Veil found that many agents were trained not to the ideals of their nation, but to counter the ideals of the enemy—an easy task for either side, as the propaganda each spread was quite effective. Young CIA or MI6 operatives were fighting communism instead of upholding national ideals, though they thought they were doing both, and new additions to the KGB were combating pervasive capitalism instead of supporting the Soviet Union. Guardians in positions to manipulate both sides found the agents' ideologies easy to shape into something more suitable for work as Guardian tools, and spies who found themselves Awakened were more than eager to work

for any ideals that they could rationalize. For the first time in decades, the Guardians reopened "operative academies" that had been empty or turned to other uses.

Eventually, the cold war came to a close and the trust between nations returned to pre-war levels. After the single influx of agents who had no more missions and still wanted a war to fight, the Guardians of the Veil accepted that the well of potential mages trained in tradecraft and built to serve an ideology had run dry. Today, there are still many Guardians in the field who were recruited during that exceptional period, and the Guardians of the Veil is still enjoying the swollen numbers and vastly increased efficacy from that time.

Sleepwalkers

There are never enough Sleepwalkers to satisfy the Guardians of the Veil, but a process has still not been discovered that will raise a Sleeper into that semi-Awake state. And, while no Guardian wants to reduce the number of useable Sleepwalkers in their employ, a mage is an infinitely more valuable agent in the eternal mage's war than a mere Sleepwalker, no matter how well trained. When a Guardian of the Veil spots a Sleepwalker whom the Guardian believes is able to reach

enlightenment and, more importantly, handle it worthily, the matter is reported to the local Epopt.

Sleepwalker nominees for initiation from outside the order are treated similarly to other candidates. The potential Sleepwalkers are recruited into a school or business that sends them to a Guardian facility, where they are trained and tested. Or they are allowed into a cult's inner circle because of "enlightened status." Because the Guardian instructor can divulge secrets to a Sleepwalker without fear of harming the Mysteries, the Sleepwalker's "education" moves much more quickly than an equivalent Sleeper's. The Sleepwalker is tested more rapidly and, in many cases, more harshly. A Sleeper who is rushed through the program is more likely to fail and end up worthless to the Guardians' cause, but a Sleepwalker will be useful regardless. Epopts claim that the failure rate of Sleepwalkers does not increase significantly due to the increased pace, though even Epopts admit that there are few records from which to draw that conclusion.

A Sleepwalker who fails to pierce the Gray Veil is "recruited" by another facet of the Guardians of the Veil, if another order doesn't reach her first. Her special talent is utilized there, but she is never allowed to know any important secrets. One who passes the Gray Veil is considered a worthy Retainer, and sometimes a good agent. She is let into the order's confidences, trusted with secrets but only rarely with missions. Guardians consider such people among the most valuable of the order's unAwakened agents.



Indoctrinating Mages

A willing initiate is given over to a local Guardian whom the Epopt trusts to properly handle an apprentice. Under that individual's tutelage, the new mage learns the basics of the Guardians' credo ("Casting magic is dangerous; we want to make it safer for everyone.") and some good practices that the Guardians wish every mage followed, such as using magical tools. Along with basic lessons, the candidate accompanies his teacher on some tasks. These missions, while real, are always secondary to testing the new mage. They reveal nothing important about the order, but there are certain inferences (the mages are cautious, they watch others carefully, they truly care) that the Guardians expect their candidates to make. Whether or not one does is part of the test.

Any time the teacher must leave her apprentice alone or unsupervised — whether she just needs to sleep or she splits them up as a test — he is watched. Other Guardians observe him surreptitiously, testing how he acts when he feels private. If he does not abuse his magic and keeps secrets well, he rises in the Guardians' esteem.

Teachers introduce other mages to their apprentices; just after Awakening, feeling comradeship with others who profess to have suffered the same harrowing and estranging experience is very easy. That connection is allowed to form over the course of a week or so before the teacher forces the apprentice to keep secrets from the others. As part of the apprentice's lessons indicate correcting those who practice poor or unsafe magic, one of those "friends" begins evincing that sort of behavior — perhaps asking the candidate to keep it secret. This tests the apprentice's ability to betray people he may like for the greater ideal.

Each apprentice is also given the opportunity to break a stated rule for his own benefit. Usually, his teacher manipulates him into a position of minor disgrace (failing to use a magical tool or erring on a mission), and another mage gives him the opportunity to strike it from his permanent record by breaking a rule. Since the young mage doesn't yet know that Guardians keep no such records, he may be eager (and misguided) enough to perform a minor sin for his own behalf. To do so, of course, fails the test.

Candidates who pass all tests with honors may graduate to the Crimson Veil in as little time as two weeks. Any failure slows this advance as the candidate's teacher makes her lessons increasingly explicit. Failing even two or three of the different criteria cannot keep a mage from approaching the Crimson Veil, but does affect how closely he is watched and how stringently he is tested.

Example: *It's been a strange couple of weeks. Gilbert ("Uller," now, though he has trouble remembering that) has been taking lessons on magic from Enmerkar. He's learned that obvious magic makes magic work less well and can hurt the mage, and that subtle magic is safer. He's also been helping Enmerkar. One day, Uller took a message to an abandoned post office and put the message through the slot; another time he sat in a bookstore all day watching the owner while pretending to read magazines. Enmerkar gave Uller some brief pointers on how to remain inconspicuous.*

He's played around with magic a little when he's alone, in his room at home or after-hours in the funeral home. He's still talking to the dead, because they have interesting things to say. He's finding that he can learn a lot from them.

Uller met a few other mages after Enmerkar first started teaching him. Just a few days ago, he walked in on one of them animating a pair of shoes just for fun. The mage told him that it wasn't dangerous if one did it carefully, but Uller discussed the incident with Enmerkar anyway; Enmerkar seemed pleased.

Just yesterday, someone whispered in Uller's ear that she knew about his nighttime activities with the dead — especially the vulgar magic. She'd not tell Enmerkar if Uller did her a favor.

He didn't sleep last night, and he's still thinking about his answer.

Enmerkar knows all of this. He anticipates another week, maybe two, of training for Uller. The apprentice is still not respectful enough of how dangerous vulgar magic can be — a demonstration may be in order — and he's hesitating far too long before turning the offer down — if he does.

Converting Mages

Public relations and propaganda make up one of the oldest professions. Perception is an important aspect of reality, and the Guardians of the Veil understand that. Guardians work very hard to portray themselves as everywhere, insidious, always watching and always prepared to kill in order to defend the Mysteries and the Veil. The paranoia that this evokes in the Awakened community makes mages more liable to follow the rules, out of nervousness if nothing else. To Guardians, this makes up for the additional precautions that paranoia causes mages to take before they betray the Ars Mysteriorum. Guardians also foster the resentment heaped upon them by other orders. Hating the double agents who break the very rules that they lie and cheat to protect helps keep the other orders human, and wise.

What all this means is that the Guardians of the Veil hold out very little hope of recruiting any mage who has already found a place in an order such as the Silver Ladder or, worse, the Free Council. It isn't hard to recruit a mage new to the Awakened world to the cause, plying him with the nobility of the ideal before weaning him to the reality of it all. But after a Libertine has taken the new recruit aside and explained the Silver Ladder, the Mysterium or the Arrow, she then says, "Then there are the Guardians of the Veil. They want to hide magic from everyone to 'protect' it. If the Guardians had their way, you would never have Awakened." That statement may or may not be true, but it's hard for the Guardians of the Veil to get a fair shake after that. Not all the orders are as directly hostile to the Guardians as the Free Council, but it never takes long for an initiate to acquire the usual, impersonal hostility toward any Guardian the initiate meets.

Losing Members

It is more common than the order would like for its mages to leave the Guardians after many years of sacrifice and self-degradation in the name of the Veil and the Mysteries. Guardians

accept the loss as inevitable, understanding that they cannot really control a full-fledged mage. Guardians also accept that they'll snag a few more Awakening mages with their explanations of their ideology and mission, and losing a few

of those after many years of loyal service is expected, if not pleasing. Most mages who leave the order do so not out of disenchantment with the Guardians' ideals or goals, but because the lies and the betrayal wear on them, dragging them down and making it hard for them to get out of bed in the morning. Depression is a common malady among mages whose dedication has begun to wan. In modern times, some Epopts have taken to providing Guardians trained as therapists when possible, making sessions available after deep-cover assignments and other missions that can easily unbalance spies.

When nothing can convince a mage to stay in the order, the members of his caucus discuss the issue. It is better to have a mage in another order grateful for being let go than a spy in the field resenting his superiors, and some Guardians figure that it can't hurt to have at least one mage saying good things about the order.

But that only applies to Guardians who cannot cope with the level of sacrifice any longer; many more defectors come to hate the Guardians and their ideals. These, in most Epopt's eyes, are prime targets for regretful assassinations. Not only would such turncoats likely give away any secrets the Guardians want hidden, but they would also become nothing but trouble for the order. Only if a mage can be quite convincing in a magically thorough exit interview will his caucus trust him not to divulge secrets. (Mages intending to fool their ex-comrades should note that they likely know what spells he favors and whether he has the capability to fool their tests.)

Most often, defecting Guardians become apostates rather than joining another order.

What order would have them? Infamous for their stealth and their cunning, a reputation that the Guardians have fermented over centuries, few outside mages would ever trust the an ex-Guardian not to be a spy — or a tool for spying. Only the most foolish or confident mages would accept an ex-Guardian into their orders. Mages

who want to leave the order instead remain, choosing companions and misery over complete ostracism from the magical community.

In some regions, scheming elders of the order have introduced an alternative. They permit a group of apostates, ex-Guardians all, to operate in the area. The group is tacitly accepted

by the local Guardians of the Veil; the group is secretly run by the most senior local Guardians, unknown to anyone else. This group serves as a safety net for mages who can't cut it as true Guardians. Rather than force these mages to learn secrets in misery, the order removes them from positions of importance but continues to use them as tools.

Mages who choose to come to the Guardians of the Veil after careers in any other order have a very good reason for doing so. Most have suffered traumatic events that made them believe in the Guardian ideal in their own ways. A mage who watches a friend's Paradox kill himself and six innocent Sleepers may decide that he can best help the Awakened by working to prevent that sort of thing. One who uncovered a mighty artifact that proceeded to detonate an entire library of Arcane information might choose to help cover up such discoveries in the future. This is usually where converts to the Guardian cause originate from, though mages who work with individual Guardians for long periods of time and are impressed by their dedication and results might, if rarely, choose to dedicate themselves to this paragon's order.

Example: Magellan has grown tired of the pointless pedantry infesting his *Mysterium caucus*. After years of contending with countless *Paradoxes* in order to find and develop his myriad discoveries, he needs to feel like he is doing something, in a way that his work for his order never lets him. He knows a couple of Guardians of the Veil and, despite their uncomfortable reputation, they have always seemed dedicated to their cause and quite convinced that they are doing something right. Magellan arranges a meeting with one of his Guardian acquaintances.

Young mages interested in leaving their orders for the Guardians of the Veil usually take the honorable path, tendering "resignations" to their superiors before beginning the Guardians' initiation. This gives the mages' old orders a chance to try to convince them otherwise and to place magical bindings on these mages before they leave; young mages are less aware that the orders may well prefer to kill them rather than let them go.

Any 1st-degree master or better recognizes that her order would rather condemn her than dismiss her, since she has learned many of the order's secrets and could potentially teach the unique rotes to others. For this reason, many more mages choose to leave surreptitiously, approaching the local Epopts to request protection before giving their old orders any hint of their intentions. A caucus' reaction to defection depends greatly on the individuals leading the caucus; some react furiously to betrayal while others would prefer that any mages too "weak" to dedicate themselves to a single order leave.

For the Guardians of the Veil, suspicion surrounds mages who abandon their orders to join another. The Guardians have been placing spies in the other orders since Atlantis, and most other orders would like nothing more than to return the favor. To prevent being taken in by a deceit, Guardians interrogate

any mage who comes to them and thoroughly examine the conditions surrounding her departure from her old order. After agreeing to protect the mage and making any necessary arrangements, the Guardians demand many secrets from the mage. Most important of these is her real name: it is the surest way to be sure of someone who may be a spy. To make the requirement less harsh, the Guardians only require that one person learn the name (though that person sometimes tells one other, in case the mage is a plant and would kill to keep her name secret).

Example: After a frank discussion with a Guardian representative, Magellan attends the Guardians' monthly caucus in secret. There, he formally requests protection from his former order, knowing that order members would "prefer" not to let the secrets he knows get into Guardian hands. The caucus agrees, then the Epoet interviews Magellan. Magellan can see, as they enter a private chamber, that the Epoet shimmers with magic both protective and investigative.

By the time they emerge from the chamber some hours later, Magellan is sweating, but at least he's received the order's protection. He's also been told not to reveal his defection to his caucus.

Anyone who fails this basic test of legitimacy is "invited" to undergo a second interrogation, enhanced by the Mind and Time Arcana, or give up his desire to join the order. The second interrogation is complete, in all senses of the word, and any discrepancies the Guardians find are expanded until his interrogators believe they know the entire story. But the Guardians of the Veil are never willing to rest assured that there are no moles among them, and they skew the Veils to test the new convert for any remaining allegiance to his old order, or even to another.

After a mage has been cleared, she may become a candidate for initiation. The first stage of passing her through the Gray Veil is much the same as that Veil for a new mage, at least on the surface. She is given a general, long-term mission, alongside an experienced mage, if possible. As with a new mage, secrets are leaked to her, but her monitors pay little attention to how she keeps them. Any experienced mage is familiar with keeping the Mysteries from initiates and other mages who are unworthy. The typical morality tests, seeing if she can betray her companions in order to aid them, also earn little credit from the Guardians. If she were a double agent, she should have no difficulty spying on her "friends" to get ahead. Instead, the Guardians overseeing her initiation provide a chance for her to advance in the organization, gaining more responsibility, more trust and more access to official secrets, but to earn it she must betray the Veil. The Guardians of the Veil design the test to be especially tempting for a spy, and it is. Many of the spies they catch before initiation is complete fail this test.

Though it takes nearly as long as the full Gray Veil for a new mage, this is just the first step forward for a potential convert. Once a candidate is deemed acceptable at this stage, he is given more important tasks. After some brief training, he is assigned as the Guardians of the Veil's contribution to a cross-order project, usually a small task ordered by the Consilium and preferably one that the subject wants to see

succeed. His monitors now sneak him secrets pertinent to the task with strict orders for him not to share them, and they require him to collect information about his comrades. Betraying the Guardians is easy for a mage of another order; betraying other members of his Consilium is harder, even though the Guardians try to choose a task force that does not include a member of his former order.

Example: For the last month, Magellan has been working diligently to translate an ancient text that the Guardians provided, though he has no idea where they got it. At the same time, he has been maintaining the ruse by doing similar work for the Mysterium. As the Guardians suggested, Magellan has subtly tried to retrieve any sources of sympathetic connection that he may have left with his old colleagues.

At this point, the Consilium announces a project to catalogue the truly haunted sites in their region; of all the orders, only the Guardians of the Veil are not invited. Magellan volunteers and, to prove himself, diligently (but secretly) reports information to the Epoet.

The final stage of the Gray Veil for this sort of initiate is to integrate her with a group of other mages from her old order. The Guardians have, thus far, tried to keep the subject's defection a secret. If they believe it hasn't been compromised, they then have her spy on her old comrades. She is carefully watched, and her answers carefully judged for deceit, to ascertain that she is not getting the aid of her order to fool the judges. During this period, the tests cycle again, determining whether she is able to keep important secrets from members of her old order, and whether she can hurt them to help them. As a double check on any information the candidate reports on her companions, the Guardians place her with a group of mages on whom they have full profiles. The initiate is given multiple chances to "escape" from the Guardians of the Veil with all the useless secrets they have given her, just in case she's a good spy but getting cold feet nonetheless. If she manages to perform adequately, the Guardians consider her to have passed through the Gray Veil.

When this stage of the Veil is complete, the Guardians take one last step: they "out" the mage. They watch her order, looking for not too much and not too little commotion over the mage's resignation, and the Guardians who investigate the matter are quite good at judging when a falling-out is a put-up job. If the mage's order learns of her defection before the Gray Veil's last stage, the Guardians pay attention to the order members' reactions and substitute additional questioning of the mage about the order's secrets — some of which they hope to verify through other sources — before admitting her to the Crimson Veil.

Example: Unfortunately, the Mysterium seems to have caught on to Magellan's new affiliations. He is removed from his position on the Consilium's task force and stripped of all the honors his order ever gave him. Luckily, he succeeded in retrieving all tokens and mementos that he had left with his order for the purposes of contacting him; also, his apartment has already been cleared. This is good, because the new residents reported a break-in the day after Magellan's old order learned the truth.



Because the Guardians can't test Magellan's ability to betray his old order, the Guardians give him another interview. His answers, combined with the apparent veracity of the Mysterium's uproar, convinces the Epopt to advance Magellan to the Crimson Veil.

The Crimson Veil

Though a mage passes through the Gray Veil without fanfare, the candidate's master now reveals information about the order, finally putting a name to what the student may already suspect. The candidate moves beyond the false organization that served as a front, though the Guardians of the Veil is still a vague, tenebrous entity to him. The teacher and student discuss, in the sparest of terms, Guardian aims and ethics so that the student understands, to a degree, what others expect of him. After showing this mark of trust, the master continues the young mage's lessons, because there is still much for him to learn.

She never knows that another Veil awaits her or that she has not been fully accepted; she is also not fully aware of the order's nature. Red brothers, as they are called among full initiates of the order and the less-couth elder mages, are given tasks specifically suited to their skills. Sample tasks given to a red brother include acting as messenger, relaying confidential communication and orders, surveillance and spywork, watching suspects of minor importance and guard work, watching over Guardians of the Veil sanctums and other secure facilities.

Whenever the red brother is not occupied with these menial tasks, her time is spent under the instruction of a senior

Guardian. She is taught how to properly handle the newfound power in her Awakened soul, and her understanding of the Mysteries is both broadened and deepened. Someone, usually a different instructor, takes on the job of training her in the jobs she will eventually be expected to perform. She may be taught the tradecraft of espionage, the art of politics or any other skills, all dependent upon the uses her superiors intend for her. The skills, Arcana and rotes taught to the red brother are meant to shape her into a mage the Guardians of the Veil can use. Some Epopts direct the candidates' training in order to fill in gaps in their caucuses' capabilities.

After perhaps a month of observation and judging the red brother, who is still only a candidate in most Guardians' eyes, the Epopt introduces him to a new superior. This superior gives him a new task, putting him on the trail of a fellow mage, directing him to keep an eye on her. By this point, the mage is familiar enough with Guardian policy, if not the truths behind it, to know how to proceed in several different situations. His investigation inevitably turns up evidence of the suspect's acts against the general welfare of the order.

The Guardian in question is usually acting the part, but initiates still working their way through the Veils make good, unexpected bloodhounds, and the betrayal is sometimes all too real. The investigation continues until the red brother acquires enough evidence, real or not, to condemn the suspect. Real double agents are ordered killed. Once the initiate has taken the opportunity to prove his dedication to the cause by making the first move, other Guardians back him up to ensure

that their valuable and devoted recruit survives the encounter. Fake double agents are "killed" as well, though the Guardians behind the initiate's testing make liberal use of squibs, stage blood and magical shields just in case something goes wrong. Because an experienced mage is a poor trade for a young one, the Guardians of the Veil take every precaution to make certain that they do not lose anyone they don't want to.

Another option is for the initiate to hunt, with a team, a dangerous mage to prove the recruit's willingness to kill. The target is always a mage of some kind or, very rarely, an influential Sleeper. The target is never a vampire, werewolf or denizen of the Shadow Realm, no matter how useful the assassination might be. The initiate must prove himself able to kill despite identifying with the target, knowing what would and *should* happen to him should he ever fall to such depths. A supernatural creature is different and terrifying, and killing one does not come from the same place in one's heart or soul. Such a killing may prove something about the initiate, but does not prove what the Guardians need to know. Banishers, Seers of the Throne and rogue mages of any order (or apostates) are often the game. When the time comes, the initiate is artificially put into the position of having to go it alone. He believes his mentor or teammates are busy and cannot be bothered, even though they are really backing him up secretly. The Guardians of the Veil must be sure that he is not responding to any sort of pressure from his peers, that he is willing to kill for the cause and not only for his friends or teammates.

Although neither of these different tests takes an overly long time (internal investigations range from a week to two months, and "mage hunts" one to two weeks), sometimes the order must test an initiate's loyalty *now*. In such cases, the Guardians supervising her set up an on-the-spot situation in which she must kill. Perhaps she comes to a prearranged meeting with a contact only to find him in the murderous hands of an unknown mage. She may walk in on a Guardian preparing to disseminate many of the order's secrets to the world. This sort of "emergency verification" never involves people the order actually wants dead; making such unwilling targets play their parts is too hard. The Guardians of the Veil prevent their homemade villains from being slain by being on hand to stop the bullet or turn the knife.

One important facet of the Crimson Veil is that the initiates are never told to kill. They are only made firmly aware of the appropriate responses to different circumstances, then put in situations in which murder is the correct — or only — response.

When a candidate manages to reach the Crimson Veil but fails to handle the climactic situation, the Guardians do it for her. The double agent or Banisher is executed before her eyes, or the play-acting Guardian "escapes." Candidates are never told that they failed a test, or if the situation was faked. The candidate is then taught more harshly in preparation for a more successful examination in the near future.

How harshly the mage's handlers judge her depend on her handling of magic throughout the entire investigation. Significant reliance on Sleeper methods of research and sur-

veillance, supplemented by covert spells when necessary and judicial (but sparing) use of vulgar magic is ideal. As new mages often find the lure of using magic irresistible, the Guardians understand that these new mages may not have the willpower to refrain; so long as the candidate does not use vulgar magic without warrant, his actions are still acceptable to his superiors. A good score in this area guarantees that Guardians will think well of an initiate, despite an initial failure to kill when necessary. The worst score, possible only through a great deal of unnecessary vulgar magic, ensures that he has a great deal to relearn. The Guardians see to it that he does learn it, and as quickly as possible.

Some Epopts make a point of specifically testing candidates' judgment. In a such case, the candidate performs multiple investigations on multiple suspects. Some of them are innocent, some bring the investigations to climaxes without warranting assassination, and only the last is driven to the point where he should be killed. An initiate who levels accusations on the undeserving or kills inappropriately is just as washed-up as one who freezes when the blood must spill.

Example: Because Enmerkar is not aware of any valid targets in the area, Enmerkar's plan is to paint the mage who tempted Uller in the Gray Veil as a turncoat. After learning the identity of the Guardians and some lessons on what Enmerkar considers proper protocol, Uller will begin to find hints of her betrayal and, in the end, fall into a position in which he must kill her before she escapes to strike again. She will, of course, be secretly properly protected.

All of his planning is a wash when a mad Banisher assaults Uller, having tracked the young mage to the funeral home. There, Uller kills the mad mage and, recalling his lessons on Banishers, considers it a proper thing.

Sighing, Enmerkar discards his plans. Uller has passed the Crimson Veil.

Crossing the Crimson Veil Early

Initiates occasionally kill on behalf of the Guardians' ideals before the scheduled time. Before they have stepped onto the path toward the Crimson Veil, such an action is unacceptable; initiates who have not put the Gray Veil behind them are carefully kept from circumstances that would warrant such an action. After the Gray Veil, it becomes less black-and-white. The Guardians watching over an initiate try to keep him from that sort of situation until the scheduled confrontation. They usually succeed, so an initiate who kills early is probably responding with excessive force and jeopardizing his chances with the order.

But the Guardians of the Veil are not all-seeing, all-knowing gods. They can only do their best. An initiate can always run across a mad mage in the streets, causing Paradoxes left and right with her spells, and Banishers have a nasty

habit of targeting mages before they are fully trained. When an initiate comes upon a mage or mortal who needs to be put down for the safety of the Veil, and he does it without qualms, the Guardians judging him are likely as not to accept it as the candidate's necessary step through the Crimson Veil. He is not told that he has done anything remarkable, however. His training continues, not least because the Guardians of the Veil want the initiate to be able to pursue his missions, and his internal investigations, to their natural conclusions. Even the fake ones.

Converting Mages

The Crimson Veil is critical for a mage who has abandoned an order. If the many trials of reaching beyond the Gray Veil did not test her resolve, this will. The Guardians of the Veil who are supervising her tests search their records for members of her "old" caucus. They usually have little trouble finding a member who was one of the subject's friends (or at least acquaintances) yet has made no small number of infractions against the Guardians. He casts magic unwisely, uses his power for worldly gain and is generally a fool in all the ways a Guardian counts such things. The Awakened world could do well without him, and it isn't surprising that the Guardians have slated him for death.

The Guardians of the Veil command the candidate to kill this person. They give her a team to help her reach that objective, but she must deliver the blow herself. Some Guardians leave the target's identity a mystery until the last minute, wondering whether the surprise will break the candidate. Others let her go in knowing full well who the target is. In most cases, the victim is a very, very convincing fake, created using the best magic the Guardians can wrangle. Using the Life 5 spells "Create Life" or "Evolutionary Shift," and some Mind magic, the Guardians create something that they are willing to let die.

Any candidate who makes it this far through the process might suspect that the assassination is a test, and expect an elaborate setup to test her loyalty. When she is asked to verify the kill, however, and determines that the death was genuine, anyone unprepared for real blood on her hands will show it. Her monitors determine whether one who makes an outburst should be allowed to progress. It isn't an easy decision, because anyone's first kill is difficult and emotional, but the Guardians have become quite good at it over the years.

Very rarely, the victim of the Crimson Veil actually is the person. Guardians arrange this only if they would kill that mage anyway, making it a very unlikely coincidence.

Example: For Magellan, the Epopt has to choose a target the mage will believe. The Mysterium Councilor is too ostentatious a victim; instead, she chooses a mage who calls himself Eigen. Eigen has always been incautious when exploring the Mysteries and developing new spells, and his Paradoxes are the stuff of legend.

Two Guardians choose a place where Eigen occasionally works and lead Magellan there, telling him that he must be willing to kill to protect the Veil and the Fallen World. As they enter the old library, Magellan suspects. When he sees the familiar figure hunched over a book, he knows. But Magellan is dedicated and knows that Eigen's sort of behavior only contributed to the general moral malaise Magellan has been fighting. Shaking, he performs his rotes; his first strike is deadly, and the victim falls.

Though Magellan cries, he does not break. Although the victim was but a living dummy, Magellan has passed the test.

The Black Veil

The Black Veil is short; it is an event, not a process. That moment when a mage must choose between obeying and what is right is when the Black Veil either lets the candidate pass or traps him in its folds. Though the Crimson Veil is technically over when the student has successfully and properly killed, many Guardians consider the short lead-up to the Black Veil part of the Crimson Veil. Others disagree, but it is a matter of semantics, not effect, and few waste their time on nomenclature.

Leading up to the Black Veil takes the guise of a promotion from the recognizably mundane tasks the candidate has been performing up to this point. Paired with another mage, one well-trusted by the Epopt, the initiate is given a mission of actual importance. She takes lessons only from him, and only he briefs her on the tasks they are to perform. During the course of the mission, which may be as brief as a week or as long as one or two months, the superior begins to disregard some of the order's light rules, insisting that such actions are warranted. He may order the candidate to do the same on some occasions. No candidates are expected to question those orders; they are minor enough infringements. Permission to cast a specific vulgar spell, given because of the danger the spell could avert, is an example of a rule broken at this stage.

As the mission approaches an end, the senior partner specifically increases the initiate's freedom to act outside of recognized rules, citing the great importance of her tasks. To a degree, this may be reasonable, but the superior purposefully increases her freedom beyond the point dictated by convention. The candidate for full acceptance into the Guardians of the Veil is expected to begin questioning this irregularity and to investigate her mission and her superior on her own. If she does well, she learns that the danger is not quite as looming as the man led her to believe and her foes are not as ready to kill or flee as he suggested. These discoveries are never enough to condemn the man she has spent the last several weeks trusting completely, but are enough to cast a light of suspicion. Once she begins to doubt, the Black Veil begins in earnest.

Then comes a direct order – not just permission to use her own judgment – from the highest Guardian authority, perhaps the Epopt or a Guardian sitting on the Consilium. The command is to do something *wrong*. The senior Guardian always has a very good reason for the command, but the candidate must decline. She is judged more favorably if she goes beyond

the call of duty, stopping her superior from doing it himself or reporting him to other senior Guardians.

Some tests reek of wrongness, others seem sweet; none are easy to turn down. Some actions are obviously against the grain: the murder of Sleepers who are only tangential to the mission and know nothing of the Mysteries, or completely reshaping the mind and memories of a Sleeper when there are obvious, less dangerous alternatives. However clear it is that the deed is not the right choice, resisting is still not an easy thing; such orders often appear to be yet another test of an initiate's resolve. Others are more subtle: keeping a recovered artifact from the local caucus for "more study" that should reasonably be done by someone else or sharing Guardians' secrets as part of a trade for information under the guise of necessity. Although this is harder to prove wrong, the candidate's judgment must steer her true.

Failure to pass the Black Veil is most damning. The Guardians of the Veil have no use for any mage who cannot judge for herself what is right and what is wrong. They cannot even use her talents in an out-of-the-way location, because, unlike a Sleeper, a mage is too great for such menial work. She also attracts significantly more attention than a Sleeper, and any order that underutilizes a mage will soon find the mage lured away by the promise of more power and responsibility. Promising candidates get a second chance, but by no means do all.

One reasonably common fate for a mage who could not pierce the Black Veil is to be introduced to a recruiter for another order, one more appropriate for the mage's goals. Epopts assume that mages so happy to blindly follow orders will fit best into the regimented structure of the Arrow, but individuals vary. Whatever the order, the Guardians of the Veil buy significant favors from it in return for a partially trained candidate. He has not yet been exposed to any of the Guardians of the Veils' important secrets, so they are not afraid to let him go. Orders that accept such mages apply their own tests to the initiates. Familiar as some orders are with the Guardians' practice, another order is never willing to simply accept that the young mage is not a mole. Only after extensive magical examinations and loyalty testing do the beneficiaries agree to somehow repay the favor. Conversely, the Guardians almost never receive similar candidates; other orders would rather give their washouts to any other mages than the Guardians.

Nearly one-fourth of the Guardians' candidates either quit or fail out of the program before completing the Black Veil. They are simply unable to maintain the level of dedication or endure the sacrifice that would be required of them in the Guardians of the Veil. This number is less shocking than one might imagine, and less devastating. First, the Guardians have high standards, and any who do not meet them cannot progress past the Black Veil. Second, the order's access to the Labyrinth nets them more than their fair share of Awakening mages. If all the young mages who let themselves be convinced by the Guardian recruiter at the beginning held through to the end, the Guardians of the Veil would be the most powerful order in magical society. But the world would be worse off if the Guardians were less selective, and the Guardians

know it. They accept the loss of quantity in exchange for the assurance of quality.

Example: Enmerkar gives Uller over to another Guardian, who continues the magical lessons but evinces increasingly less care about when he casts vulgar magic and who sees it. (Unbeknownst to Uller, most people whom he lets see his magic are Sleepwalkers.) After a week, Uller begins to think that maybe Enmerkar was just a tightass, and it really isn't all that big a deal.

At that time, the Epopt commands Uller to kill a Sleeper who has seen too much. Uller does not believe that this is necessary, and instead quietly leads the Sleeper into the hands of the local Cultor. Uller passes the Black Veil and is admitted into the order as a full Guardian.

Converting Mages

Experienced mages who come far enough to become red brothers of the order are treated nearly identically to initiates who have never known another order. The Black Veil awaits, and the candidate approaches it quickly. He is "apprenticed" to a Guardian who would normally be considered his inferior, and she leads him through two or three minor operations to humble him. Whatever his assigned master isn't, she is a master at manipulating others, and after they have worked together for a short while she does her marked best to make the initiate fail the Black Veil. But if he gives the right response to the order from on high, he is henceforth considered a full member of the Guardians of the Veil. Many older members will treat him still as an initiate or a probationary member, and he still must prove himself to advance beyond neophyte status, but he has been accepted in name and will eventually be accepted in other members' eyes as well.

Example: Magellan's journey is nearly complete. After slaying "Eigen" in cold blood, Magellan receives an order from the Epopt telling him that they need a patsy for a failed operation. Magellan is to seek out a Sleeper whom none will miss and bring him to a certain address.

Once Magellan arrives there with the victim, he realizes that he is about to enter a Demesne during a magical ritual. Knowing the sort of damage a Sleeper can do to such a useful place, Magellan leaves the Sleeper behind, at a safe distance, and enters alone. Inside, he protests the action to the waiting Epopt, refusing to defile a place of free magic with Disbelief.

It is the right answer. The Sleeper is sent away, and Magellan has passed the Black Veil, though it will be many months before most Guardians in the caucus trust him.

Variations on the Process

Different Epopts focus on different things when recruiting Sleepers and mages. Variations can be a result of the Guardian's personal preferences, training methods or factional beliefs. A Guardian who grew up watching *The Night Stalker* and *Twilight Zone* episodes on television could search sci-fi conventions and Internet forums for potential initiates while one whose other duties include manipulating national economies might draw more often from the crowds of financiers. Similarly, a single Epopt can only focus on certain kinds of programs in his region

and may send Awakened initiates to other regional Eopts with whom he is allied who have more appropriate facilities.

Faction plays a strong role in the way an Eopt approaches his duties. Inheritors are against the idea of inducing a Sleeper to Awaken from the start, so they spend more of their resources on finding and recruiting any who Awaken naturally, and only recruit Sleepers for initiation when another order might do it first. Ordeal Keepers, on the other hand, watch the Labyrinth for the most exceptional Sleepers caught within. The Prophets most closely match the general descriptions above, though any Guardians in their caucus who identify with the Inheritors will surely criticize such methods.

Unsurprisingly, Messianic Guardians of the Veil watch churches and religion-affiliated schools more assiduously than other Eopts. They also refuse to participate in the “preventative recruitment” of Sleepers that another order intends to Awaken, and they even occasionally let Sleepers they would normally take go elsewhere, if another order shows interest in the subject. The Messianics hold out hope that the Sleeper they allow another order to recruit may turn out to be the Hieromagus. For that matter, a Messianic might try to convince volunteer converts from other orders to remain with their old orders, at least before their superiors get wind of the situation. The Faceless are rarely appointed to the office of Eopt, and when one is, he gets unpredictable results. His hunting grounds for new blood fluctuate with every acquisition of a new identity, and he even sometimes imitates an Eopt from another faction.

Rank and Privilege

Secrecy is the world of the Guardians. The order’s members keep many Mysteries hidden from the minds of other mages, where the Mysteries could be used for harm, and from the eyes of Sleepers, where the Mysteries could do harm simply by being seen. Living in this culture of subterfuge, it is little surprise that the Guardians of the Veil make an effort to hide even their daily routines and trivial relationships from the eyes of their enemies. It might be the paranoia, the belief that even the slightest hint of knowledge will give their foes the edge necessary to strike out against the Guardians or, worse, escape their sight. From the initiates, very nearly kept out in the metaphoric cold, to the magisters with their celestial secrets and chessboard minds, everything is confidential. It can be a very lonely world – which only serves to strengthen those classified relationships.

As a Guardian demonstrates his merit to senior members of the order, they recognize his talents by rewarding him with greater responsibility and greater access to the *Ars Mysteriorum*. Not everyone has what it takes to play the status game; a mage may hold petty jockeying for position in disdain, be a poor communicator or simply prefer to remain in the field. Since the order is a strict meritocracy, senior Guardians don’t wait for their subordinates to bring skills to their attention – they see the talents themselves. When a mage of the order becomes worthy of learning deeper secrets, his superiors will notice,

and they *will* begin to teach him. The mage goes from the beginning rank of neophyte to become a respected famulus, or from famulus to lofty magister. With access to more powerful Mysteries comes the accompanying expectation of greater skill in other areas. A famulus is accorded more important tasks and expected to successfully carry them out. There is always more than enough responsibility to go around, so the Guardians do not suffer mages who refuse promotion gladly, or often.

Neophyte

Prerequisites: None

Initiates who pass through the Black Veil are admitted into the Guardians of the Veil as neophytes, mages understood to be trustworthy but unready for the order’s more dangerous secrets or concealed missions. Each neophyte is also considered a near-untouched block of marble, one that the order can, over time, carve into a mage able to wield any of the great spells subtly, and with proper caution and judgment. There are only two problems: First, the marble is not pristine, and none but the best teachers can predict how the sculpture will end up. Second, any cut of stone can conceal flaws that, when reached, will cause the subject to break. These uncertainties give the Guardians of the Veil adequate cause to proceed with a neophyte’s education slowly, teaching small things before large things and large things before secret things.

Degree of Education

<Neophytes are assigned according to how they can be best used. A mage who does not have a tactical or social mind but shows great promise at wielding the Mysteries may become a classical wizard’s apprentice, but a willworker with a winning smile or a brilliant mind for surveillance will hone her skills and go out on more active missions. Wherever the neophytes go, the Guardians see to it that neophytes have decent instructors, teaching them the magical and mundane skills they need to survive and flourish as a Guardian. The order carefully chooses instructors for good judgment in regard to how much and what each lesson should contain.

Not all neophytes are available for such extensive assistance. In many places, there are not enough Guardians to teach a student everything she wants (or needs) to know; some caucuses trade favors to other orders for additional training. Other neophytes might spend the majority of their time with their cabals, whose other members often belong to different orders, and have little opportunity to take lessons. Guardians of the Veil then make it a point to claim some of the neophyte’s time for lessons in morality, protocol and how to perform a Guardian’s duty; they let the mage’s cabal teach her magic, if necessary.

Instructors, usually senior neophytes but occasionally famuli, teach neophytes the Mysteries and the other tools of the Guardians’ trade: spycraft and the ins-and-outs of policing the magical world. But they discourage neophytes from deepening their understanding of the Supernal without strict guidance. Guardians understand that a greater Gnosis means greater power, and insist for that reason that it should

not be attained until one has no desire to attain it. Further, they recognize that strengthening a mage's sympathetic connection to his Path Realm is like widening a channel. Higher laws can come more easily, but so can the Abyss. Neophytes are encouraged to keep their Gnosis low as long as possible in order to avoid Paradoxes as well as they can. Not only does this make them less dangerous to the Tapestry in the period when they are least responsible, this also makes them better suited for covert operations.

Even as Guardians encourage neophytes not to strengthen their connections to the Supernal, Guardian teachers teach neophytes how to use those connections—at their present levels, or after their eventual increase. The bond between mage and the higher world is what makes magic possible, and its use is hard to resist; this is likely to one day betray the Guardian, revealing his nature to the Sleeper world and rending the Veil concealing the Mysteries. When a neophyte is taught the oblations of his Path, therefore, his Guardian teacher carefully drills into his head the necessity for secrecy and caution. It is necessary and good to enact these rituals that draw one closer to one's Realm, but *do it in secret* is the Guardian caveat. Some neophytes take this strongly emphasized message to heart, becoming quite vocal to the members of their cabal on the matter.

Because of the caution with which Guardians approach increasing Gnosis, neophytes learn primarily two things relevant to the Ars Mysteriorum: Mysteries of the Arcana and rotes. By the time a neophyte is a disciple in his primary Arcanum,

he has earned additional status and, by the time he is a 2nd-degree disciple or a 1st-degree Adept, he is being considered for promotion to famulus, assuming he has been learning his rotes properly. Instructors bombard their trusted students with rotes that will reduce the chance of Paradoxes from any vulgar spells they might cast, and any neophyte who cannot or *will* not learn rotes is one whose acceptance into the order will be re-examined under a severe light. Rotes are central to the Guardians of the Veil's safe use of magic in the Fallen World, and a mage who does not understand that has no place in the order. Legacies are only taught to neophytes if there is a tutor of that Legacy available among his superiors, and if the neophyte shows great promise in that specialty. As a rule, only senior neophytes (and few of them) have an understanding of the Supernal deep enough to begin the process of shaping their souls to a specific purpose.

Low-status neophytes are discouraged from teaching others the secrets of Arcana. Senior Guardians do not believe that a neophyte has the requisite judgment to know when a student is ready to advance in one of the Arcana. If a Guardian with these beliefs finds that an inexperienced mage has been teaching others, the Guardian may try to punish the neophyte by withholding or reduce training that the student wants but the Guardians do not consider critical, like certain Arcana. On the other hand, the Guardian may decide that the neophyte has been teaching wisely; this may result in increased status once word gets around that her judgment is sound.



Senior neophytes have a little more leeway in teaching others, but they must be prepared to explain their confidence in the students. Teaching rotes to others is officially discouraged but quietly accepted, especially for rotes relating to vulgar spells. While a rote may give a mage enough confidence to cast spells he should not cast and enter situations he is not ready to face, it is better, in the Guardians' eyes, that he know how to cast those spells with a minimal chance of a Paradox.

Non-magical education depends greatly on the neophyte's place in the Guardians of the Veil. If he works undercover, he is appropriately trained in subterfuge, stealth and whatever Mental Skill let him take the most advantage of his inside perspective. Guardians who are to represent their order to other mages (and some feel that the order sorely needs diplomats) receive training in Academics, Politics, Empathy, Expression and Persuasion (or Intimidation). Surveillance demands a certain amount of Wits and Composure, as well. Regardless of what endeavors they want to undertake, all Guardians are encouraged to study Investigation, Occult, Larceny, Stealth and Subterfuge. Only those destined to be spies master the Skills, but every almost every caucus encourages its Guardians to cultivate the abilities of keeping (and finding) secrets.

Similarly, ambassadors often study the Mind Arcanum, for the ability to increase their Social Attributes and conceal their true motives, and sometimes Fate, to know what the perfect word might be at any given time. Spies often practice Death, lengthening shadows, or Spirit, to coerce spirits to help out, and Matter, the better to get through those pesky locks. Guardian detectives favor Space, for scrying and tracking correspondences. The Arcana a mage studies may be up to him in the end, but few caucus leaders hesitate to make a few strong suggestions toward that end.

Summary

Gnosis: Neophytes rarely have a Gnosis higher than two or three dots; senior neophytes may have one as great as four. Higher levels aren't unknown, but they're generally discouraged for neophytes.

Arcana: A neophyte is training his primary Arcanum to two or three dots, potentially higher if he is avoiding promotion. A senior neophyte has his primary Arcanum at three or four and usually two more Arcana at two or more.

Rotes: Six *at least*, and usually learning more. It is not uncommon for a neophyte to have upwards of eight rotes a short while after joining the order and a senior neophyte to have at least 10.

Skills: Neophytes develop one Mental Skill to at least three dots, usually Investigation. They practice two or three Physical Skills until they have two or three dots, usually Larceny, Stealth and one combat Skill. Ideally, they also try to have two or three Social Skills at three, maybe four dots, especially Subterfuge or Intimidation.

Tasks Within the Order

One should not get the impression that the Guardians of the Veil rules over its members with an iron fist. For neophytes,

at least, that isn't quite true. Many Epopts push neophytes hard, some Epopts even going so far as to give their neophytes assignments that will take up as much time as (and sometimes include) a full-time job, but most superiors let their neophytes live their own lives. The local caucus usually assigns each neophyte a long-term mission that will not disrupt his routine or take too much of his time away from his mundane life or his other supernatural pursuits. An Epopt or the leader of the local caucus is the only one who can give the mage orders, and will occasionally come to him with odd missions that call for his specific skills; alternately, she may direct him to meet with a teacher for a lesson in the Arcana, rotes or Skills that fit the neophyte's position in the caucus. Occasionally, other Guardians may call upon him as a resource; though it is the neophyte's choice whether or not to help, his decisions reflect upon him and will be weighed by his peers and superiors.

Tasks that neophytes are assigned to perform vary by the individual. A mage without any aptitude for combat, firearms or stealth isn't going to be an Epopt's assassin, and one who grew up on a farm and studied painting won't be asked to analyze market trends for supernatural influences. This, in itself, isn't unique to the rank of neophyte; famuli or magisters aren't going to receive tasks to which they are unsuited. Rather, the difference between the two is how much one knows. A neophyte should know enough to accomplish his task and often no more; depending on the region, some superiors may think more of him if he investigates his assignment in more depth to make sure that it is a just task (in accordance with the self-will proven by the Black Veil). Most requests (or petulant demands) for more information meet infuriating deflections: "You aren't ready," "Your outburst proves that you are unworthy of knowing" or one of the order's many parables and koans put the unready mage in his place.

To use an analogy, the Guardians' neophytes are like Mafia soldiers to the famuli captains. They do the grunt work but rarely plan the jobs themselves. One might earn some respect by coming up with a good idea, execution and all, and selling a famulus on it, but it's not expected of neophytes. Otherwise, famuli just give neophytes increasing amounts of responsibility until they prove themselves.

Many tasks could be seen to by Sleeper agents; these are not the jobs for neophytes. In short, neophytes do what famuli need done that can only be accomplished by one of the Awakened.

Neophytes are sometimes assembled by their seniors to comprise a special task force, and given a specific mission to accomplish before the crew can disband and return to their normal lives and tasks. To a neophyte's cabalmates or non-magical acquaintances, the neophyte simply disappears for a short period. After such a task, the order's resources are usually available to create a reasonable explanation for the absence. A task force's members are chosen for their unique skills and how they can come into play to complete the mission.

Sample missions include retrieval of a powerful artifact or important secret from a high-security area, forming a short-term embassy to a distant Consilium (usually when there's more than simply diplomacy at stake) or preparing to repel

an expected Seer of the Throne assault on the region. If the situation that calls for the unit's formation requires immediate attention, the task force is assembled from those Guardians who are available on short notice; membership may be less than ideal and, to make it sufficient, may include famuli or more senior neophytes than normal.

A mage's superiors call upon him for his regular tasks as frequently as once every couple of weeks, but more often than once per month is rare. Special task forces are hard to assemble and harder to control, so a caucus only creates such a team when absolutely necessary — usually no more than once a year, but situations of extreme crisis may have groups of Guardians working together nearly constantly. Other than these occasions, a Guardian neophyte is left to his own devices and desires.

Promotion

As soon as a neophyte's superiors think she's ready and she's met the requirements for advancement (see below), the mage earns the rank of famulus. The only time requirement involved is the time necessary for the mage to successfully perform a few missions for the order and earn the respect of her peers and superiors. There is little fanfare surrounding such a promotion. Other famuli in the region simply respect the mage enough to consider her a peer, and she will soon have greater access to secrets and the Epopt's motivations.

For those who haven't yet become famuli, there is the unofficial rank of "senior" neophyte. When everyone understands that a neophyte is largely trustworthy but not yet ready for the deeper secrets of famulus rank, he is considered a senior neophyte. Senior neophytes receive the assignments that require more thorough background information or a greater amount of trust, get to boss around other neophytes and are more likely to get the ear of a famulus when he asks for it. It also a sign that the famuli trust and value the mage enough to teach him a few more of their less-sensitive secrets.

Relationships Within the Order

Unless a Guardian neophyte foregoes attendance at caucus meetings (an act that would attract attention), she knows the other mages of her order in the area. Outside of those meetings (which are security conscious even then), members of the order meet rarely and furtively, so neophytes have few opportunities to develop their relationships with other Guardians. How close one is to any other Guardian depends on the individual, but the relationship is always hindered by the Guardians' professional paranoia. It's hard to be friends with people you're never sure you can trust.

With Neophytes

Neophytes, unless they have had time to develop a relationship, tend to relate to each other only professionally. Each is well along in the process of absorbing the Guardians of the Veil's infamous paranoia, and it's hard for a Guardian to be quite sure of someone that she hasn't "checked out" herself. Being on hand to observe another neophyte's passage through the three Veils, possible because neophytes often help with the basic surveillance work during such periods, can sometimes

be enough to create a feeling of security about that person. This doesn't mean that Guardians who don't know each other simply back into opposite corners and stare; a neophyte is more likely to seek a positive reference from someone she can trust. Occasionally, she also looks for proof that the other Guardian is who he says he is, but a quick scan for indefinite-duration spells is *usually* precaution enough.

Included in "professional relationships" is a sense of comradely competition. Guardian neophytes share a queer sort of vague boasting. They know better than to discuss in full something that another mage doesn't know anything about, or even to describe something in terms that can give its identity away. Instead, neophytes who each practice assassination might compare numbers of deaths — but never dates or frequencies, which might enhance the prestige but would reveal too much. Two neophytes might compare the lies they used to fool Sleepers, but always out of context. Only when two Guardians get to know and trust each other better are they comfortable sharing such information, and even then circumstances might change one's mind.

To an outsider, these conversations are disjointed and curious. One says, "Detroit Street," referencing a dangerous gang that frequents the area, and the other replies with "9th and Jefferson Jewelry," bringing a high-class, high-security jewelry store to mind. The second Guardian knows the first infiltrated or otherwise manipulated a dangerous gang; the first recognizes that the second evaded detection by a security system as sophisticated as the one in the jewelry store. Both know that neither actually did anything with the gang or store that was mentioned — that would be too obvious. In fact, if there were only one other gang as dangerous, or one other place as secure, such a vague reference might be too explicit.

A neophyte often doesn't know how to reach more than one or two other neophytes if she wants to. E-mail addresses are almost never shared, even between close friends, simply because the communication is so insecure. Phones, while much simpler, have been widely recognized leaks since the age of Alexander Bell, so Guardians only use phones for real communication in emergencies. Only a few neophytes have the ability to reach others telepathically over distance, and they're not available for public use; no Guardian wants her name or sympathetic connections blatantly revealed to anyone who doesn't already know them, and her friends won't be her friends for long if they make that mistake. Most often, friends among the neophytes communicate the same way with each other that they do with the famulus who gives them new tasks: a prearranged set of dead drops and coded messages. These drops may schedule informal meetings, or they may be complete missives in themselves.

Coded Communications

The Guardians of the Veil are a paranoid bunch, to be sure. There are a series of lessons developed over the last century — decade, even — that describe why one should not discuss anything private over the phone, on the Internet or in

the post (those lessons are older). Others, older still, explain why communicating telepathically is also not ideal — it isn't necessarily secure or safe for a constant recipient of such message to grow so used to being sympathetically targeted.

In the end, face-to-face contact is still the secure option, especially when combined with secrecy and some of the technological and magical precautions available to the Guardians. But meeting in person isn't always easy to do. People have other places to be, and people can be followed.

For lesser communications, including setting up the personal meetings and spreading the word about the next caucus, the order uses a mess of different dead drops and coded messages. Their natures are complex enough to make them nearly impossible to break. Some caucus leaders might hand out one-time pads — the only truly unbreakable code, since their pattern is used once and then discarded — to ensure secure messages, but they are often only for communication to and from the "head office," and given out in limited numbers.

A dead drop might include throwing a message into a specific trash can and letting it be picked up by the recipient; alternately, a Guardian might employ a bum to convey the message to another pick-up point for five dollars a message, or the Guardian might pay a county worker to pick messages out of the garbage. Any message that goes through a dead drop should also be coded, because one can never be sure that unwelcome eyes won't read whatever's written before it reaches its destination. Highly effective codes use different decoding methods depending on certain variables, such as the day of the week or the location of the recipient, and the encryptions are changed often.

In the end, though, written messages are used only as often as necessary, and usually then to set up more secure personal meetings. A mage can only cast so much protective magic on a scrap of paper, and Seers of the Throne know the spells to break codes as well as the Guardians do.

Outside their competitive spirit, the things that neophytes discuss with their peers are unusually mundane. They discuss the latest movies, good books, current events, politics, sports, romance and anything else not at all related to their work in the order. This is partly for security — a secret, they say, known to two people is not a secret — but, much more, it is a release. The neophyte is still new to the Guardians' world of rampant



secrecy and deadly paranoia, and she uses her friends just as they use her, to serve as connections back to the unmagical life they once knew. Her friends are not her superiors, who have so little time to spare for unproductive talk, and they are not the Sleepers and marks with whom she deals daily. Other neophytes understand exactly what it is like to know things that cannot ever be told to humans, things that cannot even be shared with another neophyte in case he is not yet meant to hear them. The act of talking with someone who *knows*, even if the conversation steers far clear from the forbidden topics, is soothing. If the neophytes truly feel they are secure, they gossip about order politics and rumors. Outside of her one or two friends, a neophyte has nobody she can talk to, so she makes the best of what she has.

With Famuli

Aware of the deeper plots within the Guardian caucus, the famulus often seems impossibly knowledgeable to the common neophyte. Apart from the periodic caucus meetings, most neophytes have only sparing contact with their superiors. Usually, the contact a neophyte has with his "handler" famulus consists of several dead drops a month, directions and questions at caucus and the occasional face-to-face meeting when an issue just can't wait.

Only mages who work in close proximity with their superiors get closer than that. Neophytes who work the Labyrinth often see a great deal more of the Epopt than they otherwise might. The Labyrinth is an exceedingly fragile construct of ever-increasing complexity, and only the mage who runs it has the complete picture (if even he does) of the local situation. A neophyte working within what is arguably the Guardians' greatest legacy requires much direction, because a rumor or revelation in the wrong place can set decades of planning awry. To prevent that, Cultors (sometimes neophytes) working the Labyrinth have regular meetings with the local Epopt. Other neophytes working data-analysis in a famulus' office face a similar situation. They have regular meetings, far more often than with an Epopt, wherein the neophytes and famulus discuss work. The famulus may spend some effort grooming the neophyte for a future running the office; that is not an uncommon reason for choosing a new initiate to work there.

Senior neophytes have somewhat closer relationships with the famuli to whom they report. Senior neophytes have been recognized for their skill, dedication and trustworthiness, and famuli use them as sounding boards for a wider range of decisions and hold them in closer council, especially when another famulus is not available. Famuli often take on the responsibility of teaching senior neophytes themselves, because the mage has a need of greater secrets than other neophytes can provide and because famuli need their senior neophytes to maintain a degree of perceived superiority and authority over neophytes their junior. Over time, a famulus can grow comfortable enough with the neophyte to discuss things frankly and even share hopes or concerns with her.

With Magisters

The closest most neophytes come to seeing the distant figure of a magister is at the monthly caucus, and the neophytes

usually hear exaggerated tales about the magister, such as how one has been sending his soul abroad to feel the timbre of the Tapestry or how she woke from her year-long meditation to broker a deal between the order and a previously inflexible tribe of theriomorphs. Occasionally, the neophytes feel the effects of a new policy and, later, hear that it was ordered by a mysterious local magister. It is not unusual for two neophytes in a secure location to share and debate rumors about these distant masters.

Very rarely, a neophyte may be invited into the presence of a magister for an interview or a lesson. This occurs when a famulus believes she has an exceptional student and wishes him to receive special recognition, or when a magister has a strong premonition about the neophyte. Even in these cases, the magister remains a mystery to the neophyte.

Relationships Outside the Order

The Guardians of the Veil holds a pair of conflicting expectations over the order's neophytes' heads. The order knows well the lowly place it holds in most mages' thoughts, and it treasures this reputation. After all, others' fear of being watched does half the Guardians' work for them. Unfortunately, this paranoia begets an antipathy that makes it difficult for the Guardians of the Veil to actually *do* what their reputation suggests they do: get close to other mages. Neophytes, then, are encouraged to do all they can to maintain and spread the trepidation that other mages experience when one says, "I am a Guardian of the Veil," and gives that knowing smile. Neophytes are also expected to build foundations for a few friendships and more alliances, building a personal trust that the order itself, as an entity, cannot earn and does not want. For most neophytes, it is something of a conundrum.

Obviously, a neophyte cannot form any sort of positive relationship with a mage he has spent time intimidating on the order's behalf. Telling someone that you know where he was last night is not a good way to begin a friendship. If a neophyte seeks guidance on the matter, she is told to earn some friends first and spread the Guardians' bad name second. Once she has companions whom she can trust and who can trust her, a neophyte can begin the work of making other mages nervous.

Most importantly, a neophyte is *never* asked to betray her cabalmates. The cabal is a source of stability for the neophyte, and of safety. Even a magister, inscrutable and imperious in his ways, will find another way to learn what he needs to know, rather than requesting an action that will potentially shatter a neophyte's cabal. This rule, detailed in several parables and koans hailing from ancient times, extends all the way up through the ranks: one does not betray one's cabal or ask another to do so.

But most Guardians still unabashedly draw useful gossip and rumors from conversations with their cabalmates. The things one picks up there can provide useful leads toward dangerous caches of arcane wisdom and clues to the varied tasks a Guardian of the Veil must perform during the course of his duties.

Conversely, a Guardian neophyte learns to be wary of her own tongue. A "mole" is not always a double agent; he can also just be a mage who talks too much, too freely. A neophyte's superiors generally expect and accept that she will loosen her inhibitions with her cabal — and she should. She needs that human connection. But she is expected to keep any important secrets to herself (and she is further expected to know which those are). Just as she is listening to her cabal, a Guardian expects that her cabal is listening to her. It's a hard position for anyone to be in, and has driven more than a few young mages to another order.

Some neophytes choose to go it alone, rejecting the need for companions. A solitary Guardian isn't just eyed warily by other mages; they see him as a potentially insane willworker who has the training and inclination to police everyone's use of magic. For that matter, so does the solitary's superior. All Guardians are occasionally surveilled by their own order, but a solitary needs to be watched much more than the order can afford before they begin to trust him. In the end, all they can really do is urge him to find like-minded mages with whom to form a cabal; if he doesn't, it simply takes him that much longer to advance within the order. The last thing the Guardians of the Veil needs is a mage to push the order's reputation over the edge from the moral high ground of "watching for the good of all mages" into the mud of "self-serving, half-insane secret police."

Avoiding Promotion?

The ranks of neophyte, famulus and magister are not accompanied by official promotions. There are no ceremonies, badges, increases in salary or bigger offices. Instead, a mage becomes a famulus when other famuli agree that she is deserving of equal rank to them. A famulus becomes a magister once no one can deny him that level of respect.

And that's what it comes down to: respect. And respect is represented by dots in the Order Status Merit — the more dots a character has, the more other mages of his order respect him. They may hate his guts or hold his methods in disdain, but the requisite dots in Order Status means that they can't deny that he deserves respect.

On the flip side, a mage can have done great things, protecting the Mysteries from unworthy eyes with a fervor and effectiveness comparable to the order's guiding parables; but not be raised to higher rank. If the other mages don't notice, or if they aren't impressed, they won't think any more highly of her. Not taking dots in Order Status can represent being a new mage and not having time to advance, or be an older mage with significant power whose efforts simply haven't been recognized.

In short, a Guardian of the Veil doesn't need to worry about not being "promoted" if she has the requisite status. She really already has, because it's just a matter of being accorded more respect and an equal amount of responsibility. A mage who tries to do her job without being noticed simply doesn't gain Order Status. (Likewise, there are mages who actually *try*, and gain Order Status without doing much.)

Famulus

Prerequisites: Minimum Order Status 2, 1st-degree Adept or 2nd-degree disciple

Once a neophyte has proven himself a responsible and dedicated Guardian, he is considered for advancement to the ranks of the famuli. The existing famuli of his region come together to discuss accepting a new mage to their rank. This is, for the most part, a formality. The fact that he is being considered at all is an indication that his superiors have been impressed with his successes and understanding of his failures and that they believe him capable of wisely wielding the advanced magic they will teach him as a famulus. In some areas, the last stage before a neophyte is named a famulus is an interview with a magister — if there is one in the local caucus. Even if there is, the magister may choose to skip the interview; not all magisters care to busy themselves by affirming the judgments of mages they trust.

Degree of Education

Becoming a famulus ends the period of a Guardian's education at the hands of his superiors and neophyte peers. From this point on, a Guardian of the Veil is expected to anticipate his own needs for skills or advancement through his Arcana and Skills and act to learn them on his own. Most commonly, famuli call upon each other to round out any gaps in their understanding of the Arcana and the order's rotes. Any famulus may request a lesson from any of the famuli he knows at any time, and, if they can help him learn what he seeks, one will come to teach him at their mutual convenience.

Sharing knowledge is an important facet of political leverage among famuli, and allowing another to possess one's Mysteries is a sign of trust and alliance. On the other end of the spectrum, one famulus can easily tell another that he is not ready to learn what she has to teach, thus denying him the wisdom he seeks; to do so is a moderate insult and statement of antagonism.

More typically, the mages involved come to an arrangement. One famulus offers up some information he has or lends his political weight to an issue coming up in caucus, and, in return, receives training in an Arcanum. If one famulus truly doesn't believe that another is ready for the knowledge, she simply sets a price that is impossible for him to meet.

When no famuli are able to teach him what he wants to know, or if none are willing, the famulus must find other

avenues for his learning. He may call upon senior neophytes with specialties in the relevant area, but other famuli sometimes act to remove that source, depending on how badly they want to hurt him or how much they are certain that he is unworthy of the Mystery.

The only other teacher a famulus can find is a magister. Magisters are curious in their requirements and exacting in their teachings, and if none of a famulus' peers think him worthy, the magister may well come to the same conclusion. Magisters do not demand recompense for the lessons they give, but teaching does create a bond between the two mages that the magister will exploit. This particular famulus comes to mind more easily for the elder mage when she needs to request a favor or pass along an order, and contacting him through sympathetic magic is less troublesome for her. A famulus who cannot get teaching from any these sources is out of luck, unless he resorts to the many unacceptable instructors available to mages. Taking lessons from an acamoth or other, similar source is grounds for severe censure, to be administered by a senior magister, if not expulsion from the order.

Once famuli have become familiar with the skills necessary for their titles (lessons that their peers sell them cheaply out of necessity), they spend more of their time rounding out their knowledge of Arcana than any other magical study. Becoming a master of one's favored Arcanum is a worthy goal that most reach in short order, but the Guardians of the Veil respect exploring the breadth of one's talents before testing the boundaries of one's wisdom. They are also expected to deepen the connection they have with the Supernal World beyond that of a neophyte, increasing their power in tandem with their increased responsibilities. A famulus spends less time filling out her library of rotes. Though she is certain to pick one up if she uses the spell often or needs it for a specific task, she depends more strongly on the rotes she learned as a neophyte. This is the point when Guardians might begin to pick up Legacies, from senior famuli, magisters or tutors from outside the order who walk the same Path.

Expected to be more than just "good" at managing their arenas, Skills are an important, though secondary, focus for the famuli. Each makes an effort to improve herself in any area of expertise that would assist in her particular field, but most need at least a basic understanding of the Politics Skill to get by.

Summary

Gnosis: Most famuli reach this rank with two or three dots, unless one's promotion has been long in coming, and quickly train up to four. Reaching five dots comes later, but inevitably. Famuli with more than five dots in Gnosis are rare, but not unheard of.

Arcana: A famulus is usually an Adept (four dots) in his primary Arcanum when he achieves this rank, and most advance to mastery (five dots) in short order. Most Guardians then expect a famulus to put effort into broadening the extent of his knowledge, raising his other Arcana.

Rotes: Famuli generally have at least eight rotes and learn

anywhere from a dozen to a score more during the course of their careers.

Skills: A famulus is expected to pick up Politics 2, at least, and another Mental Skill directly relevant to his work (Occult for managing the Labyrinth, Investigation for surveillance, etc.). Few famuli do their own dirty work, obviating the need to train their Physical Skills, but many maintain them to be prepared for eventualities. The gamut of Social Skills are useful, except for, perhaps, Animal Ken. A famulus who does not have a minimum of one dot in several Social Skills will find himself trading more and greater political favors for help from his peers.

Tasks Within the Order

The tasks of a famulus are much more demanding and broad than those of a neophyte. Several specific, common offices within the Guardians of the Veil are typically taken by famuli, giving them responsibilities over entire sections of the Guardians' operations. Famuli perform such wide functions as overseeing the Labyrinth, directing investigations into mages' uses of vulgar spells, convincing local supernatural creatures to keep their heads down and tracking the studies of the Mysterium, to name a few. Many famuli take upon official roles, such as Cultor, Epopt, Interfector or Susceptor; see Chapter Two for details on those roles.

As Guardians who have reached a level of trust and respect among their peers within the order, famuli have the responsibility to plan and execute important tasks within the order. They are the ones who call and organize regular caucus meetings or call emergency gatherings. Famuli direct other Guardians in their region, overseeing or assigning missions and arranging for lessons in the Arcana and Skills necessary — they are the administrators of the order.

Famuli also usually take on the positions of ambassador. They discuss issues with their counterparts among the other orders, and the famuli take positions on the local Consilium. Because famuli are members of the order who have proven their trustworthiness, other Guardians can let the famuli represent them with faith that they will present the order's best face without accidentally betraying the Guardians' many secrets.

A famulus has a lot of leeway in the way he conducts his operations, including how centralized they are and how he keeps on top of everything. He has the ability to pull rank on neophytes and use them when he must; he can also delegate greater authority to them. His peers and few superiors expect him to see to his responsibilities without unnecessary assistance.

Just because famuli are expected to take on a greater share of responsibility doesn't mean they cannot take care of smaller tasks themselves. While most famuli design and direct significant (and often complicated) operations within their localities, there are always a very few Guardians who earn their promotion to the rank of famulus solely by virtue of brilliant skill and great wisdom. These are the spies, assassins and detectives who go down in order history, and the order gives them a task appropriate to their abilities.

Magisters rarely interfere in the affairs of famuli, only occasionally calling upon them for access to information, requesting (never commanding) a certain investigation or deception in the Labyrinth and gracing a famulus' office with data it had not yet uncovered. A magister *may* help, if asked, but is more likely to say something opaque and leave the famulus to deal with it.

Often, a famulus is the highest-ranking Guardian of the Veil in his caucus. One might try to use his contacts outside the caucus to get in touch with a magister — or simply higher-ranking famuli or a larger body of his peers — for consultation on the difficult decisions he must regularly make.

Promotion

Admission to the rank of magister requires immense wisdom, dedication and foresight. A famulus may evince these qualities within scant years — or even months — of leaving behind the title of neophyte, but his ambition will betray him if he actually seeks promotion to the magisterial rank. He can only ever reach the higher rank if he displays true devotion to the Guardians' philosophy, working selflessly to guide the Awakened and protect the Ars Mysteriorum from defilement at the hands of the unwise. If he performs well, he may be raised up by the magisters to be their peer. The best are promoted early; the worst become famuli late and die before being promoted to magister.

Being considered a senior famulus is much easier, in comparison. This is an honor accorded to a famulus by his peers, not his superiors, and is more of a general agreement than anything official. When a famulus begins to get a good grip on the political environment that surrounds him, runs his office with a light, expert touch and has otherwise earned the respect of his peers, he is considered a senior famulus. And while there may not be any signed document or badge that goes along with a famulus' senior status, other famuli defer to him more often, he gets first pick of neophyte agents for his operations and he is free to take the more difficult assignments, assuming there are no other senior famuli to contest his choices.

Relationships Within the Order

Famuli of the Guardians of the Veil are among the most connected willworkers in their order. Neophytes rarely know anyone outside their own region. Magisters may know several Guardians from around the world, but they discuss world-shaking cosmological events and unknowably dangerous secrets, not administration and organization. The tasks of coordinating the order's worldly interests, acting as faces for the rest of the Awakened and Invisible Worlds and defending the order against most attacks all fall to the famuli.

For those reasons, the famuli are the most visible, accessible members of the Guardians of the Veil, and likewise have the most access to others. Each famulus knows most, if not all, of the neophytes in his region personally and may have the necessary instruments to contact them sympathetically. For that matter, he has worked with or taught them and should be able to leverage favors from them. He's on an even footing with any famuli who attend his caucus, and even if some of

them may be distant, he knows how to contact most of them. He may know how to get in touch with one or two famuli from a neighboring district, but he rarely knows them well. Finally, he's able to get the attention of any local magisters and has certainly met most of them at caucus meetings at least once. He might have a good relationship with one, but there's no certainty of that, even after a long and illustrious career.

With Neophytes

One should never forget that a famulus was once a neophyte, and it was not so long ago for some. The newer famuli relate to neophytes on an even level, still unused to the position they now hold. Senior famuli sometimes lend their own senior subordinates to a new famulus to effect a sort of reverse training; the experienced neophytes treat the mage with respect and gently school him in the art of authority. It doesn't take long before the Guardian understands how to properly distance himself from the agents he is directing.

Older, more experienced famuli treat their neophytes with the respect due any of the Awakened, combining it with the attitudes of a teacher toward a promising pupil and a boss toward a valued employee. The famulus does not brook dissent, but he listens to his neophyte's opinions and concerns, addressing them before making his final decision. How much distance is between a famulus and his subordinates is a matter of their employment. Running the Labyrinth is an involved occupation in which famuli and neophytes work closely and develop robust, if still professional, relationships; a spy and his famulus handler communicate discreetly, professionally and rarely, making such connections less common. Extraordinary famuli can alter these fates with the right attitudes and effort.

In a more general sense, some famuli see neophytes as half-tools and half-people. They almost have to, regularly sending neophytes into dangerous situations as they do. A famulus has observed and made judgments on most, if not all, the neophytes in his area, and he remembers these well. He chooses them based on estimates of what he needs, not whom he needs, and argues with other famuli, who want the same person for a different mission, in order to get the tools he needs to do his job. Once he gets his choices — or not — the famulus must use them in the proper ways. And when he doesn't get all the tools he needs, he resents having to use a jigsaw instead of the more appropriate table saw.

Of course, no famulus can afford to forget that his tools are people, and Awakened at that. They have individual needs and wants apart from the desire to do a good job in the order. A famulus who treats each neophyte as unique, remembering her habits and addressing her personally, can bolster a flagging confidence or weakened commitment; it's something like polishing one's tools and keeping them sharpened or tuned.

The last important aspect of the famuli's relationships with the order's neophytes is teaching. Each famulus is required to objectively judge whether or not a given neophyte is worthy of the Mysteries that she requests or he thinks she needs. This is a vital part of the Guardians of the Veil's philosophy and purpose, so famuli take it very seriously.

With Famuli

Other directors of operations are the famulus' peers. More so than neophytes or the magisters, his peers are his social group within the order. All the famuli have proven themselves to the order in trustworthiness and devotion to the cause. Even with the strata that inevitably form in any social group, the famuli are equals. The famuli have their friends, enemies, alliances, rivalries and dramas among each other. And they all recognize that, despite their differences, they are on the same side.

Among his peers, a famulus is free to complain, bitch, blow off steam and generally reveal "weaknesses." It is something of a gentlemen's agreement between them all: bad decisions, mistakes and *public* weaknesses lower a mage's status in the eyes of other famuli, but anything revealed in private, just to the group, stays there. In the back rooms, the famuli forgive anything and take advantage of nothing. Behind the scenes for the men and women who *work* behind the scenes, this is where and why the fastest friendships in the Guardians of the Veil form. They may rib each other now and again, but every famulus offers his full support to every other, without judgment. Even lapses in wisdom are forgivable, using magic when mundane means would have sufficed, if done very sparingly. The only exceptions are the truly damning choices: consorting with Abyssal demons or betraying the order to the Seers of the Throne.

Friendships among the famuli grow almost as they do between two Sleepers. It's simply a matter of two personalities meshing with

a modicum of chemistry. Once his natural friendships develop, a famulus shares his feelings with the smaller subset that have become his friends more often than with the entire "club." He always knows, though, that he can bare his soul to any of them without fear. Even lasting sexual relationships are acceptable between famuli. But just as the embarrassments and shames remain behind the famuli's private Veil, so do the friendships. No matter how chummy two Guardians get in private, the friendship does not affect their public working relationships. Famuli new to the title have trouble adjusting to the dichotomy until their elders hammer it home: outside, duty; inside, comfort.

Having an enemy among one's peers is a subtler thing for a famulus. For all their fantastic acceptance and the complete freedom of disclosure, famuli can breed resentment among each other. It's a natural consequence of people being themselves: people form into small cliques, excluding others. This mage's habits bug the hell out of that mage. Jealousies arise over coveted neophytes, jobs or sexual partners. Two people plain don't get along. A famulus must be prepared to succor someone for whom he bears only ill will, and he has to do it well. These wars are fought with quiet words in rapt ears, spreading rumors to harm or manipulate the way others interact. Constantly going on beneath the surface of most famulus communities, such manipulation is nearly impossible for anyone who hasn't experienced it to detect. These resentments, too, disappear completely when the famuli appear in public to discharge their duties.



Alliances and rivalries are what an observer can see on the surface. They take place on stage, in front of any neophytes and unAwakened subordinates the famulus keeps near and apparent to any visitor who cares to look. Alliances and rivalries are predicated on secret friendships and animosities only about half the time, which means that, since famuli generally either feel positively or negatively about one of their peers, an equal number are formed *in spite* of those hidden relationships. Agreements and contentions are reached purely through business and coincidence. An Epopt who lends one of his investigators to another then has a small bond with her, and the famulus who can't get the same favor because the detective is now unavailable has a point to hold against the Epopt. Later, when the Epopt wants access to a series of reports that his rival has, he'll have to trade in extra favors to get it. It takes only a few years for these positive tallies and black marks to pile up enough that a famulus can trade them like coin, at least once he learns how.

The attitude instantly changes when an outsider tries to play the game. All debts are repaid and affronts are forgotten, temporarily. No matter how much trouble one famulus has getting information from another, the two will work together when it is made clear that there is a foreign influence involved. Newcomers to the rank of famulus may capitalize on this by creating a false opponent, a straw man to "threaten" the order and cause his peers to give them aid without "counting coins."

The young famulus learns that the plot is a poor one when senior famuli allow a *real* outside threat to endanger his operations and do a little damage before they come to his aid, forcing him to recognize the "crying wolf" parallel. They never intend for such "punishments" to do real damage to their order, but some efforts to teach the new famulus get out of hand. Outside of object lessons, the famuli stand together. When push comes to shove, they're all on the same tug-of-war team.

With Magisters

To a neophyte, the magisters are far, far away and entirely inscrutable. Not so for the famulus, who sees at least one magister from time to time. He listens to the magister's ruminations and shares his views on any subjects his senior puts forward, much as a senior neophyte does for the famulus. He requests teaching or aid, but only when the magister is the only source available, and if the famulus knows something of relevance to the magister's studies, he delivers the information without claiming any boon. It isn't the give-and-take, counting coup relationship that the famulus has with his peers. It is much freer.

Magisters are still something of a mystery to the famuli, and intimidating. A famulus knows all too well that he is the engine that keeps the Guardians of the Veil running, and the neophytes are the cogs in the machine. But a magister sits above the machine. She pursues the same goals a famulus does, but broader, and she follows up strange tangents and makes non-sequiturs with meaningful glances. Her ways cannot be understood by the famulus, with his moles, surveillance teams and memorized volumes of dossiers, which makes him simultaneously uncertain of both his and her correctness.

Every encounter with a magister feels somewhat like a lesson and somewhat like a riddle.

Knowing that one's superior is wiser, and therefore probably right, but unfathomably so, is an uncomfortable feeling for a famulus. On the other hand, knowing that there is someone to steer him the right way when he veers off course can be a comfort.

Let's Talk About Sex

The Guardians of the Veil understand and accept that the drive for sexual gratification is very human, and the Awakened are nothing if not the ultimate expression of human potential. Using magic for the base purpose of finding (or creating) willing partners is frowned upon by the order, but it finds nothing wrong with seeking and enjoying it normally. The Guardians discourage taking lovers among the ranks of the Awakened, because "pillow talk" is a classic source of leaks, and a sexual rendezvous gives a spy a wonderful opportunity to search through his lover's belongings after or before the act. Sleepwalkers, too, are discouraged as lovers because if they don't already work for one of the orders, they will soon.

Sleepers are, therefore, the sexual partners of choice, though, of course, the order recommends sticking to one-night stands or prostitutes instead of developing a long-term relationship that may prove to be a weakness. Not every Guardian agrees, but the order admits that it cannot rule a member's life and doesn't even try to force its mages to abandon relationships. Neophytes follow this pattern, either satisfying themselves through strangers or trying to keep a significant other just as any Sleeper (though it isn't easy). Some neophytes choose to sleep, instead, with their peers. Even the strictest senior Guardian studiously ignores such relationships as long as they remain superficial.

Sex is somewhat harder for a famulus to arrange. Though a neophyte can hook up with any Sleeper in a bar without thinking about it overmuch, the famuli are the order's officials and directors of operations, and, for all that, they are also the most public Guardians of the Veil.

Their identities are known by the other orders, and they tend to suspect that any Sleeper they encounter without planning may actually be attributable not to chance but to design. Still, using magic to ascertain a Sleeper's allegiance solely for the purpose of sex is far from optimal.

Famuli counter this by identifying a reputable escort agency in their area through pure inves-

tigation, then discharging their urges through that resource exclusively. But sex can also be a weapon. If a famulus knows of (or simply suspects) another order's agent, he may use a night together to sow disinformation. Sleeping with mages from another order is less taboo for famuli, because they are the Guardians of the Veil's faces. As long as these relationships do not develop into something deeper, they are accepted without question.

Magister's sexual habits are highly individual and not common knowledge, even within the order.

Not every mage is capable of being sated by one-night stands and other fleeting relationships. This is something of a problem within the Guardians of the Veil: a long-term relationship is something that can be exploited. Some Guardians manage it by lying to their significant others, keeping them completely separate from their other lives and employing the Space Arcanum to hide evidence of their association. Others take their life companions from within the order, choosing to deal with potential issues of disparate rank instead of completely hiding their lives from Sleeper partners. Having a relationship with a mage outside the order is frowned upon, but, in the end, is seen in the same light as dealing with a member of one's cabal. (Though other Guardians might almost prefer that a mage sleep with a cabalmate, since Guardians already have to hide secrets from their cabals.)

Guardian relationships all have one thing in common: they're never easy.

Relationships Outside the Order

As the Guardians of the Veil's ambassadors, propagandists, public relations, spymasters and strategists, not to mention the myriad other jobs they do, the famuli interact with mages from other orders regularly. Famuli do, in fact, see more of the foreign mages than any other Guardians. The order encourages their "faces" to spend the time and effort necessary to earn a few light favors and to create positive associations for the Guardians — the order's insidious reputation renews itself elsewhere, with some help from the famuli's agents. If a famulus manages to distance herself a bit from the popular perception of her order, she can make a number of friends. She never opens up to them the way she is free to do with her peers within the order, but she can enjoy their company at the theatre, over a cup of coffee or in whatever locale they like.

The famulus can even drop some hints about the order's activities and share minor magical secrets, though different factions have varied opinions on such matters. She is, after

all, one of the proven, and the order trusts her judgment on the matter. When she does so, the famulus is building capital toward buying small favors and improving her stance among the other mages, but they know it and are doing the same thing. And another facet of it is their surprise: other mages believe it to be so *rare* that a Guardian steps out of her paranoid shell and plays the game face-to-face with other mages — so it usually works. Many Guardians of the Veil genuinely take pleasure in the human contact, as well.

So the famuli make themselves active in local Awakened politics, attending Consilium and occasionally holding an office there. Young and foolish Guardians go so far as to seek the position of Hierarch, and occasionally older and wiser Guardians achieve it. They more often earn the position of Councilor, though manipulating things from beside the throne as Provost is more to their taste. Some occasionally serve as Sentinels, or encourage neophytes to serve this role under the famuli's direction. In regions where the Guardians of the Veil are a distinct minority, the famuli go one of two directions. They either go underground, doing their duties as far off the radar of the governing Hierarch as possible, or they go for the gold, trying to be as up front as they can and trading with the other mages for favors and the political freedom to pursue the Guardians' ideals. Where the Guardians are more balanced with the other order, the efforts are more balanced.

Although still rare, a famulus is more likely than a neophyte to conduct a relationship with the various supernatural creatures that pervade the Fallen World. Neophytes may (very occasionally) have friendships or rivalries with individual creatures, but some famuli make an effort to meet with local theriomorph packs, undead coteries and spirit courts. Such meetings are rarely friendly, for the Guardians of the Veil represent one of the worst stereotypes held about the mage population by the Invisible World, and the supernatural creatures do not share the mages' interest in seeing that the scions of Atlantis survive.

Magisters

Prerequisites: Minimum Order Status 5, 1st-degree master

Only the most starkly dedicated, the most sacrificing and the most wise Guardians of the Veil ever achieve the rank of magister. Neophytes cannot conceive of the suffering a magister has endured or the terrible acts of kindness she has performed in her role as a Guardian of the Veil. A famulus is too concerned with the temporal aspects of the order to see the paths that magisters must follow. If neophytes are the fingers and famuli the brain, the magisters are the order's soul. They guide it morally and spiritually, maintaining the Guardians' sacrificial integrity in the face of ever-increasing threats to their way of life and their dreams for a new age under the Hieromagus.

Degree of Education

At this point, there is no longer a superior the mage can look to for guidance and teaching. Much like the famuli, magisters must seek out their peers in order to learn advanced Arcana.

There are no favors traded or judgments of character at this stage in the game; one magister knows that the other is worthy of tutelage, or she would not have sought it. Much more than simply ratcheting her Arcana to ever-higher levels, a magister concentrates on building her knowledge and understanding of a chosen field, raising Mental Skills to the limit and then purchasing relevant Specialties. She may also build a library (per the Merit) focused on aspects of her research, if she hasn't already, but many prefer to frequent the libraries of their companions and keep their research in their heads. Rotes are very important to the order, but the magister only rarely learns them now—she *makes* them. Passing rotes down to the famuli (who also make rotes, but less often) and the neophytes is an effective way to increase the order's efficacy, especially when they incorporate the order's Rote Specialties.

Gnosis is another focus of a magister's education, but there is little aid to increase Gnosis. As one's Gnosis grows, it becomes more and more unique to the individual. Help from another magister avails little. So the magister pursues her increased enlightenment on her own, hoping that with a greater bond to her Watchtower comes greater understanding of how she can aid and protect the Fallen World. Those magisters who took on Legacies at a younger age continue to develop them as their Gnosis increases. Some choose to shape their own. Most take the time to initiate at least one other Guardian into the Legacy they lead. When a magister's Gnosis advances beyond five, the Guardian seeks her knowledge of the Mysteries from unique sources. Studying the aura of a shapeshifter as it changes may help her gain deep secrets of the Life Arcanum, while exploring the Dreamtime or the Underworld may raise her Spirit or Death Arcana.

Summary

Gnosis: Five dots, usually more. Those magisters who have a Gnosis of six dots or more do not discuss it with their peers, and they don't take pride in the great connection they have with the Supernal.

Arcana: She has raised her Ruling Arcana as high as she can, and other magisters have helped her increase her understanding of other Arcana as well. Although a mastery of only one Arcanum is required before a mage can be considered a magister, most magisters are masters of at least an additional Arcanum.

Rotes: The magister has many, many rotes, at least 20. She also has at least one or two unique rotes, which she uses to her advantage.

Skills: Occult 4 at minimum, and likely another Mental Skill just as high. Otherwise, the mortal Skills of magisters vary with their eccentric personalities.

Tasks Within the Order

Magisters occupy themselves with subjects that are esoteric even to other mages. What each studies is unique to her, sometimes an offshoot of an old mentor's research and sometimes an entirely unrelated investigation. She may focus her interest on vampires (or a specific sect), the Abyss, the Temenos (and/or the *Anima Mundi*), the composition of the original

ocean spire, theriomorphs, a particular branch of the Mysteries or any other subject, sometimes less and often more specific. Magisters apply their research to the world stage, discerning how that particular group or phenomenon can help or hinder the Guardians of the Veil's mission to protect the magic of the world. They concern themselves only tangentially with the events and politics around them; only their specific interests manage to capture their attention for long. No matter how random or unconnected to the Veil the subject may seem, one can be sure that it has some deeper meaning, perhaps recognized (or sought) only by the magister herself.

Rarely do magisters interfere with the Fallen World immediately around them. The famuli are in place for that work and well trained to do it, and if they need a magister's assistance or advice on that score, they can come and ask her. When she actually consents to help in person, it is because she believes she can learn something from the experience, or the help falls directly under her area of expertise, and she can improve the situation more effectively and completely than anyone else could. Examples include a magister who focuses on a tribe of werewolves, approaching a large gathering of that tribe (or what he assumes to be that tribe— even magisters often fail to completely comprehend theriomorphs) and securing a mutually beneficial agreement; one who studies the depths of the Shadow may attempt to hide a potent artifact there to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands. Near-miraculous solutions to impossible problems is a magister's contribution to the area in which she lives. She will assist other regions, too; the network of magisters is broad enough that she can ask for help from her peers, and they from her.

The other task a magister must perform is to guide and mentor a small group of famuli within her region. No famulus is really "hers," though; she holds no claim on the enlightenment of any given famulus, so the ranks of her students are fluid and often mix with those of other magisters. Being a guide and mentor consists of teaching rare Mysteries to the deserving and showing those not yet worthy the correct path. The magister watches the famuli she shepherds from multiple perspectives, seeing how she interacts with neophytes and Sleepers and noting how the mortal and supernatural scenes react to her policies. She uses this to judge a famulus' preparedness for additional enlightenment and decide what lesson to bestow next.

Magisters do not spend a great deal of time judging the worth of famuli, taking brief glances and expertly extrapolating the rest. One who is very involved with her teaching (and there are some magisters who focus on it to great effect) might check on her students twice a month and visit them once a month; a more typical magister sees a given student only two or three times a year and examines her progress twice as often.

Promotion

Magisters bestow equal status to a famulus worthy of the title, as proven by years of devoted service and displayed wisdom. There is no formula that can predict when a Guardian will be deemed ready to advance beyond governing the physical to guiding the Supernal, and famuli with apparently identical records have been promoted years apart. Becoming

a magister is not a sudden transition from the white-collar work of a famulus to the refined mystical contemplation of the higher rank. The change is more gradual than that. When a magister believes a famulus may be ready, she requests judgments on the matter from several of her colleagues. It would be like convening a panel if the group of magisters ever met in person; instead, each conducts her own investigation into the subject's worthiness. Any who find in favor of advancing the famulus simply begin to treat him as an equal. There is no grand announcement or ceremony. As time passes, the famulus-turned-magister perceives that he is being treated differently by those he considers his superiors; they ask his opinion more often and with more respect and they encourage and assist his more tangential pursuits into the nature of magic and its relevance to the defense of the Awakened. He then realizes the importance of his personal studies and understands that he can best serve the order another way; he finds a famulus to take on his office and duties in the order and moves on.

There is no official rank beyond magister. A Guardian of the Veil promoted above famulus has no further prestige to pursue (though, had she been pursuing rank, she would never have achieved it). Instead, there is only the development and refinement of her unique studies and her new task of passing on enlightenment to the rest of the order. This does not mean that there is no stratification among magisters. Status is less important than it is among famuli; magisters treat each other as equals or near-equals without hesitation. Increased status is simply a matter of having made great strides in a certain area of research or resolving dire problems in elegant and effective ways. One magister never has the right to command another, but the greater her accomplishments, the greater respect she has earned from her peers and the more weight her words carry. Status isn't something for a magister to get jealous over, just something that grows with time and success, perfectly commensurate to her achievement.

Relationships Within the Order

Magisters are sometimes less knowledgeable about the Guardians in their region than even neophytes. A magister could find out the names of everyone who attend caucus meetings and call themselves Guardians – it would be a simple matter of asking the magisters or famuli she knows for how to contact those she doesn't and remembering the data. But she doesn't. Knowing all of the caucus' neophytes by name simply isn't important to her; it is, in fact, a security risk for the order.

All in all, the magister is friendly with all the local magisters and has relationships – some distant, some involved – with a few more from other regions. She mentors, on and off, a small group of famuli and can get in touch with at least one more. And she only knows one neophyte by face and could name two more. She has more important things on her mind than membership.

With Neophytes

A magister looks to neophytes as youths full of hope, despite their actual ages. It is something like the larval stage of an insect, except that a neophyte is slowly developing his ideals

and worthiness instead of an exoskeleton. Magisters can do little more than feed the neophytes the right notions and provide an environment that will help them turn into excellent Guardian of the Veils. On a more personal scale, magisters rarely get to actually see neophytes. So much of the magisters' time is spent on their potent studies and passing wisdom to the order's members in a general sense that they almost never get to do it on an individual level. When a magister has a one-on-one meeting with a neophyte, the magister consults his dossier ahead of time and makes a quick judgment of him in person. Using that information, she impresses upon the neophyte the seeds of notions that are tailored to help him remain wise throughout his ages. Once she receives whatever firsthand information she needed from the neophyte, she enigmatically leaves.

With Famuli

To a famulus, the magisters are guides and mentors. To a magister, the famuli are promising students. A magister teaches not just the mystic arts, but also correct manners of thought and teaches how to safely pass that knowledge on to others. Her pupils are willing to learn, but the magister must judge carefully everything she chooses to pass on. A famulus is too well schooled in the Guardians of the Veil politics and the art of subterfuge; the magister cannot glance at a document, share a few words with him and decide how she can best broaden his mind without threatening the Mysteries, as she can with a neophyte. The caution required to properly teach a famulus is one of the reasons that the magister consults with him from time to time. She uses these meetings to gauge how prepared he is to take the next step into the *Ars Mysteriorum*, even as she teaches and learns from him.

Magisters expend some effort to appear as enigmas to the famuli. Being seen as an enigma is a tool for exciting the mage's curiosity and investigative senses while simultaneously reminding him that there are some mysteries he is not yet ready to learn.

Finally, the magister understands that the famuli are the force behind the order's large scope. Without the direction a famulus gives his operations, the Guardians of the Veil would be a worldwide mess of discrete agents, barely able to make heads or tails out of their findings. The magisters would have to spend their time organizing and running the order instead of dealing with the largest and most subtle problems. Because of this, a magister always shows respect to the famuli she encounters: respect for the work they do, respect for their abilities and respect for the responsibilities they have shouldered. Apart from assistance when necessary (which often amounts to little more than asking a famulus with the proper skills from a nearby region to help), a magister does her level best to keep out a famulus' business unless she has no choice. She may be able to foresee the disaster fomented by a famulus' actions and step in to prevent it, or she may give one of the magisters' very rare commands to set specific circumstances in motion for her own ends. When necessary, she overrides the complex politics of the famuli's interactions and makes two or more famuli work together without regard for favors or debts.

In many areas, magisters are few and far between and the famuli outnumber them greatly. When this is the case and a magister has no one with whom she can commiserate or blow off steam, she either finds one from another area with whom she can meet as an equal on a regular basis, or she makes herself more accessible (and human) to the famuli. Since frequent sympathetic magic communication is dangerous and long-distance technological meetings are not secure, the latter is the more common option. In such cases, the magisters deal with the famuli almost as another famulus might, though with occasional embarrassed moments where everyone remembers the magister's higher rank.

With Magisters

One magister treats another as a valued colleague, a trusted comrade and, at the most distant, a friend of a good friend. Gone are the twisted politics of their days as famuli, gone the strict tallies of favors earned or owed and gone the backroom friendships and front room rivalries. Everyone is much more an equal among the magisters. They do not question whether or not a magister is worthy of a specific enlightenment, not unless she gives them *very* good cause for suspicion, and they assume that she really does need assistance or advice when she asks for it. A magister does not try to sneak parables and object lessons into her interaction with one of her peers, teaching another magister only by request. In general, magisters share amongst themselves whatever is needed, be it advice, substantial aid or all but the most powerful artifacts.

But magisters are also very individualistic. The work that they do is very personal, and each mage believes that her study is important to the present and future of the Guardians of the Veil. One magister's research might concern the creation of new sentient life for the good of the Veil, while another's deals with what it means, philosophically and with respect to the Matter Arcanum, when matter-antimatter pairs form from nothing. These two Guardians have very little to discuss with each other, and they very probably aren't dealing with the same mages during the course of their studies.

Occasionally, two magisters from neighboring regions will encourage their caucuses to meet and work together to a specific end — discovering the motivation behind a larger Seer plot or discovering the source of Mana that Banishers are using to cause great damage. Magisters are just about the only forces with the pull to make two caucuses share resources, and even then it lasts only a short time — hopefully as long as it takes to get the task done.

There are few enough magisters that any one only has two or three colleagues among the order researching topics related to hers. They are almost certainly not in her caucus, but these are the ones she is close to and consults with often. Others, whose studies are only tangentially connected, she talks to less frequently, and the rest she never sees unless she needs help and she cannot get anyone else. That doesn't mean that they will be more reluctant to help her, just as she would be ready to help them if they needed it; she is just less intimate with them than she is with others.

This doesn't mean that the magisters have achieved a Platonic brotherhood with each other. They are still human, even if they stand above the vast majority of their human brethren, and they suffer from the governance of whimsy and emotion. Two magisters can grow angry with each other just as easily as they can become friends, and they are still capable of holding grudges. Simply because they spend more time together than most magisters do, those whose research collide are the most likely to develop rivalries, just like they're the most likely to become friends. Conflicting professional theories on the nature of any number of subjects can also create strong enmities. Any magister will put her personal feelings and grudges toward another aside in a crisis, but she is much harder to convince that the situation is really all that critical. When one needs help quickly, approaching the friend who won't question is better than approaching the adversarial magister who will.

Relationships Outside the Order

Unique in all things, magisters have very individual relationships with other inhabitants of the Invisible World. No one questions magisters' judgment or loyalty when they consort with high-status mages from other orders, joining them for dinner out, visits to the theatre, concerts, book signings or any other conceivable event they could enjoy together. Such meetings are rare, mostly because they are not business but pleasure. These are friends whom the magisters have had since their public days as famuli, or sometimes since they were neophytes. Magisters are as entitled to relaxing evenings as much as any mage, if not more, and so they take them. Occasionally, two magisters might even discuss their research or other occult discoveries, but neither is foolish enough to let drop anything they should not.

Some magisters also have strange relationships with the local groups of supernatural creatures. If, over the years in which a magister has been a Guardian of the Veil, she's had the opportunity to interact with the werewolves and spirits that are around, she may have developed some alliances (and some rivalries) that she can use to her advantage.

Sleepers

The Guardians of the Veil have very strict regulations governing members' interactions with the walking, talking, magic-degrading machines known as Sleepers. Any meeting between a Guardian and a Sleeper is one in which the Veil that hides the Mysteries could accidentally be breached. Secrets tumble from an unwary mage's mouth and the Mysteries are spoilt, spells thoughtlessly spill from a careless mage's desire and the Abyss grows wider, making a mage's vision of the Supernal all the dimmer. The only good end to an encounter with a Sleeper is one in which nothing jostles the Lie; it is left undisturbed because the Sleeper saw nothing. This isn't hard for a Guardian of the Veil to accomplish, but is always a danger. The Guardians cannot let down their guard, or they will all soon drown beneath the Lie's bottomless depths.



General Guidelines for Interaction

Some forms of interaction are termed "acceptable" and go unmonitored by a Guardian's superiors. These include any basic encounter between a Guardian and a Sleeper, anything that could happen during the course of a normal person's day: walking past one another on the street, exchanging greetings with strangers or acquaintances, making any unremarkable purchase in a store, checking out a library book that has no ties to the occult, normal interactions at work. As long as a Guardian of the Veil avoids making any stupid mistakes, such as mentioning or practicing evident magic of any kind (including tricks done with smoke and mirrors), there is no reason that any of the Sleepers he meets doing these and similar things would have any inkling that there is another, Supernal World out there. That is the way the order wants it.

"Provisional" interactions are any that must be subjected to a Guardian's judgment before they are carried out. A neophyte's famulus superior also examines the correctness of a provisional action, though not always before the mage performs it. Guardians found to have taken such an action without exercising the proper caution or judgment are censured, reduced in privilege and responsibility. Most provisional actions are performed while a Guardian is on the job. They include getting caught in an act considered illegal by the local Sleeper government, making even the most oblique references to anything behind the Veil (any true Mystery, actual inter-order politics), allowing an unAwakened to overhear information about the Mysteries or discussions about supernatural creatures that Sleepers should not know are real (even when couched in "speculation").

Occasions on which these acts are permitted vary. Getting arrested is rarely a good thing, but some agents are able to cover it up well, or even use the incident to their advantage later on. A Guardian of the Veil may swing the jail time into a gruff and needed respect from the "boys at the pier" or turn it into an advantageous lawsuit that gains the order a legal or monetary windfall. Either one, or any other skilled manipulation of an otherwise unfortunate event (a Sleeper overhears a Guardian say something about vampires, the Guardian might avoid censure if she gets a lead on the small vampire-wannabe cult the Sleeper attends and can turn it over to a Cultor), is enough to partially redeem the agent and earn him some leniency from his superiors. Trouble with the law is only ever "okayed" by a Guardian's superiors in advance when it is the setup for a later operation, such as infiltrating a Sleeper crime family or getting agents into prison.

Mentioning facets of the Invisible World is part and parcel of preparing Sleepers to be Awakened and is permitted by the Guardians in charge of bringing them through the Gray Veil. That is the only such allowance made by the order, and any secret shared must be meticulously weighed, measured and handpicked for the individual beforehand. Famuli plan for their pupils to "eavesdrop" at certain times as a part of their training, but accidentally letting one of the unAwakened hear something he shouldn't is a provisional act, so that Guardians can escape with lesser penalties when they had absolutely no control over the leak.

Talking at too great length about topics unrelated to the Mysteries is not officially provisional, but is often considered unwise. Every interaction with anyone outside the Veil is another chance to slip up, and a long interaction is a bigger one. No spy is perfect enough to keep all his lies straight forever, and some Sleepers are annoyingly good at rooting out the inconsistencies in a mage's cover story; many more may be astonishingly bad at detecting the truth, but it only takes one bad apple to ruin a pie.

Some particularly uptight caucuses consider even covert magic dangerous and classify its use as provisional. Even in such regions, covert magic is usually considered acceptable, although "not to be used frivolously." In pursuit of an assigned goal, such as extracting sensitive information from a Sleeper institution or completing an assassination, a Guardian has near-unlimited permission to use his covert magic as long as he keeps it probable.

The last category of interactions is "forbidden." Most obvious offenses fall under this level (many of them already illegal under the Lex Magicus), such as casting vulgar magic with Sleepers witnesses, explaining the Ars Mysteriorum to Sleepers or Sleepwalkers in any depth whatsoever, revealing the location of a Guardians of the Veil sanctum to any unverified Sleepers or Sleepwalkers or bringing any Sleeper or unverified Sleepwalker to any Demesne (though especially a Guardian Demesne) or to a Hallow.

Despite the unforgiving title of this offense, forbidden acts are not met without some degree of tolerance. The Guardians of the Veil judge each infraction on its own merits, giving leniency where it is due. It is not just a matter of levying a punishment but also of teaching greater wisdom. Casting vulgar magic to prevent mass revelation of the Mysteries to Sleepers, even with witnesses, displays great wisdom and sacrifice. On the other hand, explaining random truths of the Supernal Realm in order to confuse a guard and buy some extra time does not. Both may be in service of the same ideal, but the first mage has shown more restraint and a greater understanding of the cause. The second mage, if a Guardian, will be given a penance to endow him with the appropriate respect for secrecy.

Guardians consider each use of vulgar magic on its own merits. Many vulgar spells (the ones the Guardians favor, in any case) are less noticeable and less disruptive to the human mind than others, even when completely vulgar. Using Mind 5 "Psychic Reprogramming" on a Sleeper in an emergency is less likely to be seen than burning him to ashes with Forces 4 "Energetic Attack." A mage who uses the least flashy of her vulgar choices is seen in a better light by her superiors than the one who quickly resorts to fiery destruction.

The situation described above is a good example of when vulgar magic is considered more acceptable by the order: when the alternative is worse. The larger the gulf between the offenses of what the mage actually does and what she is preventing, the more acceptable a given action becomes. There is little chance that the mage will not be punished in some way, but the Guardians of the Veil have ways to make some punishments into proper rewards for wise choices on their agents' parts. A

Guardian who wisely used vulgar magic to conclude a lengthy and important mission for the order may be shown “disfavor” by receiving no important, status-building tasks from the Epopt for a month – essentially a vacation.

Brushing aside the Veil to let a Sleeper peer through is the only act that is completely and utterly forbidden. There is never any good reason to “burn” the Mysteries, as some Guardians call it, by exposing them to the degrading light of Sleepers’ reason. The proper act would have been to use the Mind Arcanum to influence his actions, even to the point of controlling him directly, if necessary. The mission of the Guardians is to sacrifice oneself for magic, and not the other way around. Sleepwalkers are included in this category because they are risks; it is too easy to divulge a truth to a Sleepwalker and think oneself safe, only to have the Sleepwalker rend the Veil when he shares the information.

Introducing any person, but especially Sleepers or Sleepwalkers (who have no magical defenses) to one of the Guardians’ sanctums is a breach of security. Only individuals who have been okayed by the sanctum’s owner are allowed in, and Guardians whose privacy and security are violated by another of their order may request compensation (usually in the form of aid) or that penance be laid upon the transgressor at the next caucus. People sometimes admitted include Sleepwalker assistants used in some mage’s research, Sleepers chosen as test subjects, and specifically mentioned mages, among others.

If any persons not cleared are brought in by one of the order’s members, the order takes one of a number of courses. If the subject is not yet aware of the sanctum’s unique properties or uses, she is kept in the dark until she leaves. When it is too late to maintain that secrecy, she is coerced into keeping the secret through whatever means possible, whether that means lying, altering her memory or “disappearing” her. The Guardians of the Veil have many, many enemies, and a Sleeper or Sleepwalker who knows where a Guardian’s secret headquarters sits is a potential signpost pointing to the order. Bringing a security risk into a Guardians of the Veil sanctum is less of an offense if proper precautions are taken (blindfolds, driving in circles beforehand, etc.), but will still draw questions from senior members. Only a truly compelling reason to hide away the subject in a place safe from outside interference (he must be interrogated in privacy, the Seers of the Throne want him but the Guardians don’t know why) can completely justify such a breach in security.

The increased sympathy Demesnes provide with one or more of the Supernal Realms not only makes magic easier to cast, it also makes all magic free of Paradoxes. This highly desired effect is completely ruined when a Sleeper is present to observe the spells, bringing with him the dampening power of the Quiescence. The Demesnes are where the Guardians of the Veil perform their most vulgar spells, and should any Sleeper cause Demesnes to go awry, there could be terrible consequences.

Furthermore, strange effects surround Demesnes, making them suspect in the eyes of the unenlightened. A Sleeper with enough time in a Demesne can erode any indefinite-Duration

spells with his Disbelief, denying the Guardians their use until such time as they can cast the spells again. There are no good reasons to bring a Sleeper into a Demesne. If the place is the only secure sanctum that a Guardian can reach in time and he desperately needs to hide his Sleeper charge, his punishment may be lessened. Sleepwalkers are forbidden from entry only if they are not loyal to the order, for the same reason that the Mysteries are hidden from them.

The Demesnes of other mages, not Guardians, also receive (mostly unwanted) scrutiny from the Guardians of the Veil. Guardian agents do their best to locate the other orders’ Demesnes and, once located, watch over them from time to time to ensure that they are not defiled by Sleepers’ intrusions. The reason for this is twofold: most obviously, a Sleeper exposed to a Demesne will see things she ought not. Second, however, is the Guardians’ fear that the Sleeper will degrade or destroy the Demesne. Guardians want other mages to have Demesnes because, at the very least, it helps diminish the number of Paradoxes they cause. Knowing that the Guardians watch their Demesnes does not make other orders happy, but the Guardians have never worried overmuch about other mages’ happiness.

Hallows are less of a concern for the Guardians because there is less direct danger to the order. Hallows are forbidden to Sleepers for two reasons. The lesser of the two is that access to a Hallow may inspire a Sleeper to begin her own investigations into the world of the occult, and few Guardians want to send another soul into the already bustling Labyrinth. The greater reason is that studies indicate that exposure to the Supernal energy that suffuses a Hallow increases the chance that a Sleeper might Awaken. In some cases, this is acceptable, as when a Sleeper candidate for initiation is found to be worthy and the famuli try to stimulate his Awakening. In most cases, the Guardians of the Veil do not want to unleash another unprepared, unwise, potentially dangerous mage upon the Fallen World. Therefore, they try to avoid letting Sleepers have unrestricted access to Hallows, but penalties for allowing one in are light.

Punishments

When a Guardian breaks one of the guidelines set by the Guardian caucus – and is caught – he faces penance or censure. The severity of any punishment depends greatly on the circumstances under which a rule was broken, and the wise Epopt (who assigns these penances) applies only enough force to achieve the desired result: a wiser Guardian. Should a Guardian come to the leader of his caucus and confess his crimes against the order, he may be in less need of dire punishment than one who hides his offense and cringes from judgment.

Provisional actions tend to require only light atonements. Most who commit them receive nothing more than additional lessons in propriety from scowling, disapproving mages. Common penances include performing an additional daily oblation – usually one that emphasizes not doing what the Guardian did. A Guardian who was lax enough to share a Black secret (see p. 48) might be forbidden from speaking any word for

an hour every day, and one who set off an electronic alarm and got arrested might be told to draw the circuitry of such a system as meditation until the art becomes mindless.

Breaking the laws of both order and Consilium by performing a forbidden action increases the severity of any punishment tenfold. Significant breaches of the Veil are cause for Epocts to assign corporal punishment. Thirty blows with the thin rod, daily for a month, might answer the careless invitation of a Sleepwalker into another Guardian's sanctum, in addition to oblations and additional lessons as above. An Epoct might assign 50 blows with the thick rod for bringing a Sleeper into a Demesne. Volunteering a punishment for oneself, if done wisely, can raise a mage's respect in the eyes of his superiors (though likely not decrease his punishment).

Applying corporal punishment as self-flagellation is common, since it eliminates the security risk of two Guardians meeting regularly and gives some Guardians a greater sense of punishment.

Only flagrant (and repeated) violation of the Veil's secrets gives a caucus cause to expel a mage from its ranks. Truck with the Abyss in any form (or sharing in any Left-Handed Legacy) is also grounds for such an event. In either case, "expulsion" is actually a death sentence. When a caucus believes that a mage cannot be taught or convinced to follow the Lex Magica, he is not only a failed Guardian, he is a mage the order would one day execute. Instead of releasing him and be forced to track him down, they kill him. This is not always the case for those newest to the order; depending on region, they are sometimes released to join another order.

Damage Control

When the Guardians of the Veil detect a breach in the security of the Veil, they take steps to reduce the effect of that breach. But to repair damage, they first need to find it. Unfortunately, having a city- or region-wide "magic alarm" is not feasible, and many Guardians grumble about that fact.

Guardians start with the same methods that many Sleepers use to learn what's going on: the mundane news media. Television and radio can often be on a scene mere minutes after something goes down, and the wise mage listens to these free services for hints at where the supernatural might be. Internet news is less regular and not always as dependable, but can also update much more quickly than waiting for the evening news at six. For that matter, the growing number of independent bloggers and podcasters provide grassroots news sources that have viewpoints and personal insights which more public sources do not. Though weeding the insightful from the insane can be hard, more than a few Guardians have successfully used these sources as early warnings.

Beyond these services, some Guardians employ personal contacts. Some Guardians have acquaintances among the local paranormal enthusiast/believer groups (usually via the Labyrinth), others have friends in law enforcement; a quick phone call can give the Guardians a better head start than any news source.

Once aware of a problem, the first step is to eliminate whatever Supernatural effect is piquing the Sleeper's interest. Vulgar castings are dispelled by the region's most advanced available practitioners of Prime magic (if Disbelief doesn't extinguish them first). If the caucus doesn't have anyone with that capability (a lack any area would want to remedy as soon as possible), the Epoct or any ambassadors may call in favors from another order. Guardians rarely incur much debt when asking for some effort from other mages — the other orders generally want to eliminate such effects as well, although they spend less time looking for them than the Guardians do.

When no available mage has the expertise to dispel the vulgar magic, Guardians must find another way to cover it up. Sometimes it is as simple as closing a curtain or draping a sheet over the item in question, and other times it requires the Guardians to pull every string they can find, declaring a building condemned or under construction or blocking off streets from traffic. This can lead to trouble for the order, but it doesn't bother the Guardians of the Veil much as long as the trouble remains mundane, or at least covert.

Mages aren't always willing to let their vulgar spells die such undignified deaths. When someone is spreading the fire even as it is fought, the Guardians meet the mage with as much force as possible. Even the diplomatic channels are game. The mage(s) behind the spell are assaulted with magical attacks (if possible, covert), and, if they are still casting vulgar spells, with counterspells. When possible, any people who might have influence upon the offending individuals are contacted; if the mage is not a Banisher, Seer or apostate, the Guardians inform his superiors in his order — unless they believe the mage's order is supporting his actions, in which case they try to hide their "interference."

This is an example of when the Epoct might assemble an emergency task force. As many Guardians as are available come to help, and each use their Specialties to get the job done. Mages with high Prime or the right combination of Arcana practice counterspells, if necessary. Those with enough Prime work on dispellations. Mages competent with firearms or other weaponry confront the offender directly, though the Guardians prefer not to kill the subject(s). Capturing anyone involved (hopefully in secret) is preferable, by far, and take the opportunity to interrogate him. Even Banishers have valuable, sometimes disgustingly useful, information that the Guardians would like to recover before they kill the source.

Guardians accomplished in breaking and entering or electronic security can help the "direct confrontation" mages get to the target. Those with contacts in other orders leverage assistance or promises not to interfere. Contacts in Sleeper organizations provide the opportunity to cry "terrorist!" or any other buzzword to get additional help.

When there's no choice but to face an offender alone, standard Guardian procedure recommends that the Guardian destroy the casting mage first. Taking him alive is a bonus, but stopping the exposure of magic is the first priority. Once the offending mage is out of the picture, the Guardian can go ahead and eliminate or conceal the vulgar magic.



Supernatural powers, caused by the various supernatural creatures that inhabit the Fallen World and its derivative dimensions, are of less concern to the Guardians of the Veil. These creatures do not invoke Paradox, and they have no discernable contact with the Supernal energies the Guardians act to protect. The only danger is that a Sleeper will become interested in the world of the occult and eventually uncover secrets harmful to the Awakened. When necessary, the Guardians counter the assaults of vampires and werewolves on mortal beliefs with the same basic tactics: physical and magical opposition combined with a little political bargaining. Because supernatural creatures can be quite dangerous in combat, mages assigned to subdue one (or a group) are given more leeway to use the more powerful vulgar attack spells. Mages with contacts among the creatures' clans, tribes or courts get in touch with them. If the outburst is unwanted by the offenders' superiors, alerting them to the infraction is usually enough. If the superiors are supportive or unconcerned, the mages either strike a bargain to stop the activity or close down communications and finish it without help from them.

Next, once the source is gone, the Guardians of the Veil move on to limiting the information's spread among Sleepers. It is occasionally simple to locate all those affected by the breach. All the Sleepers may have been in a prison, on a plane or cruise ship, accidentally locked in a basement or stuck in a stopped subway train. In these cases, the Guardians or any agents they can wrangle arrive to deflect suspicion, often in the guise of local authorities, such as the police, coast guard or transit authority. Sometimes this is a ploy, Guardians making use of Mind 3 "Imposter" spells; sometimes these are actual authorities manipulated by a Guardian's connections or influences.

This is the old "swamp gas" routine, but the Guardians of the Veil have had ages to perfect the art of the lie. (Many Guardians take a Subterfuge Skill Specialty in "False Explanations" or "Deflecting Suspicion.") Covert magic combined with a silver tongue seals the deal, ensuring that all Sleepers exposed to the supernatural are convinced that nothing out of the ordinary occurred. Strong-willed Sleepers sometimes see through or remain suspicious of the Guardians' lies. The order watches them for the next few months to ensure that none of the Sleepers seek out new leads on whatever happened or develop an uncharacteristic interest in unexplained phenomena. When they do, they are quickly shunted into the Labyrinth.

To the Guardians' great dismay, most breaches of the Veil occur in the middle of cities, where many thousands of people can walk past and take in the vulgar display of magic. Most of these Sleepers won't remember a thing, and many who do will write it off as an exploding billboard or a crazy advertising stunt. The exceptions make the Guardians lose sleep at night. These Sleepers are too strong for Disbelief to trick their eyes, but their souls are still under the Sleeping Curse. The combination of knowing what they see and being forced to not believe it pulls the Fallen World just that much farther from the Supernal World, letting the Abyss swell even more to fill the void. It is a small blessing that the Sleepers strong enough to recognize what they see unconsciously work to unravel the magic that much faster.

This is where the detective work for which the order is famous (or infamous) comes in. The Guardians of the Veil's best investigators study the phenomenon and try to piece together who might have seen it and, more importantly, who might still

be thinking about it. Many trails end up too cluttered or cold for the mage to follow, forcing Guardians to relegate the task to their Sleeper agents who are already and always watching for people with interests in the occult. The Guardians occasionally get lucky, picking up the trail of a random Sleeper with a burning curiosity and later connecting her first "encounter" with an event they tried to cover up. Those they manage to find are treated just as those who don't believe the Guardians' cover-ups, and are watched for continuing interest in the occult and, if necessary, lured into the Labyrinth.

Very rarely do the Guardians of the Veil alter a Sleeper's memory after a magical breach of the Veil. Not only is the best spell for that purpose vulgar (Mind 5 "Psychic Reprogramming"), and would thus risk a Paradox, the spell is also an incredible violation of a person's mind. Guardians aren't afraid of moral degeneration in the name of the cause, but they consider it an aspect of wisdom to know when it is acceptable. Simply killing the Sleeper is preferable, but more dangerous in the long run. Only when a person has seen far, far too much and cannot be killed are such measures applied. A Sleeper who watches two mages duel with lightning and time is not a candidate for mental readjustment — the damage has already been done, and it can't really spread — but one who steals into a sanctum at night and reads through several books on various aspects of the Mysteries is so marked.

Reprogrammed minds are usually made to contain as many of the old memories as possible, especially when changed memories could conflict with the versions other Sleepers have. In such cases, the Guardian in charge crafts a reasonable excuse and builds it into the new memories: the husband wasn't acting strangely obsessive because he saw a wolf-man chasing a woman hurling lightning at it, but because he saw an old classmate of his riding in a convertible with a model; the time he spent in the basement and away from his concerned wife was an expression of his mid-life crisis instead of some desperate search through musty occult tomes. Sleepwalkers, despite their nature, are more common targets of memory adjustment than Sleepers. Not only will Sleepwalkers not cause a Paradox to curse the casting, they are capable of spilling the beans to someone who shouldn't hear it.

The Labyrinth

Infamous among the mage orders, the Labyrinth is a monstrous construct that can trap nearly any number of occult-investigating hopefuls. The Labyrinth is kept by its Guardian handlers, the Cultors and the Epopts, who are careful not to let it grow out of hand or escape their control.

Born in the earliest of the Greek mystery cults (although some claim the Labyrinth predates them), the Labyrinth is what the Guardians of the Veil use to slow, distract or otherwise capture the attentions of any Sleeper whose interest in the supernatural and the Supernal is of too great a duration. Essentially, the Guardians direct any *lasting* investigation that they notice into this sprawling club.

Seeking the Seekers

All Guardians of the Veil, and many of their uninitiated agents, have standing orders to keep on the lookout for any Sleepers who show an unhealthy interest in anything that may lie behind the Veil — unhealthy for the Ars Mysteriorum, that is. Because few Guardians have the leisure to perform an in-depth investigation of a given Sleeper or Sleeper group, their directions are to report any suspicions to those who do: the regional Epopt or the famulus equivalently in charge of profiling. What follows is a month-long search into the suspect's history and present nature. Twenty-four-hour surveillance, bribe-driven acquisition of government records and illegal searches accomplish the task. These duties are usually performed by Sleeper professionals paid for the occasion. The order uses these resources because the work must be done well, meaning licensed professionals or trustworthy, order-trained Sleepers, and because the Guardians of the Veil usually have more money than they do Awakened manpower. There are enough mortals who need to be investigated at any given time that devoting loyal mages to the task would debilitate all the order's other activities.

What the investigators are looking for varies by suspect. A small library on the history of mystic practices and some sourcebooks on yoga or a few arcane candles and a receipt from shopping at a local witchcraft shop are not damning enough for an Epopt to relegate the person to the Labyrinth. Evidence of actually attempting to practice magic rituals is enough, including pentagrams, candleholders and knives made out of rare materials, blood of various kinds or odds and ends from assorted animals. Handwritten notes about magic are especially strong motivation to introduce another victim to the Labyrinth, as any Sleeper who makes his own theories on the occult could potentially discover something useful or true, unlike most, who just pick up the same deliberately disseminated drivel.

Paranoia in the suspect is also a deciding factor. A set of books on mystical mumbo-jumbo that would fail to "convict" a Sleeper in the Epopt's eyes looks very different when hidden behind a false panel in the bookshelf, one that has a hair very lightly stuck to it to tell if an intruder has opened it. Whether or not the Sleeper is paranoid about detection by the Guardians of the Veil or a conspiracy she has invented is immaterial. She is more dangerous for her beliefs and the secrecy her paranoia inspires, and it is much more likely that one of the Guardians' pet cults will soon be extending her an invitation.

The process usually ends there, and often ends early. A common result of the investigation is to learn that a subject is already a member of one of the many cults, secret brotherhoods or unlicensed "universities" that already exist as a part of the Labyrinth. This happens because the Guardians of the Veil cannot possibly keep track of every person who voluntarily steps into one of the religions the order has created, guided or misguided over the years. The subject's dossier is updated to reflect that she is already one of "the mazed" (a Sleeper trapped in the Labyrinth) and the investigation ceases.

After the agents' search is complete, a Guardian trained in detective work, equipped with spells to aid in the search and trusted by the Eopt performs a one-to three-day investigation of the subject. The time he devotes to the task is based on the threat estimate provided by the Sleepers who went before him, but he has the authority to extend his surveillance of the subject at his discretion. The Guardian uses his magic to make his investigation as exhaustive as possible. This mage's report decides whether or not any given Sleeper is consigned to the Labyrinth and its keepers. Similarly, what section of the Labyrinth the Sleeper meets depends on the Guardians' judgment: Will he harm the Mysteries or will his interest in the occult bolster the strength of the Supernal in the world? Will this cult here satisfy him, or might that secret society there help him find the will to Awaken? These are questions the Guardians weigh very carefully.

Mazing the Sleepers

Any Sleeper that the Eopt deems a threat to the Veil is subjected to additional surveillance and profiling. The Guardians consider some subjects simple enough folk that luring them to where the order wants them can be done without more research, but the Guardians of the Veil have not "kept Awakened society intact" (as some choose to believe) this long by being hasty. Another two to six weeks are spent ascertaining everything possible about the Sleeper, from her favorite color to where she spent her sixth birthday. People looking into her past are usually the mortal investigators who already looked into her present, though, when immediate information is necessary, the order asks a mage skilled in Mind magic to read the target's memory. The vast amounts of information that the Guardians learn from their investigations are used to decide which of the local, Labyrinth-entwined secret organizations would be most attractive to the subject. Actually "mazing" the Sleeper is comparatively simple. Guardians subtly bring her to the selected society or club's attention, and that organization's members do the rest of the work.

Note that most mazing actually takes place without any work on the Guardians' part at all. Any secret society wants to stay alive and pass its legacy on to the next generation of believers, and to do that the society needs new members who are willing to maintain the order's traditions and secrets. In other words, the branches of the Labyrinth actively recruit without the thorough overkill that the Guardians of the Veil typically provide.

The Many Faces of the Labyrinth

Since the Labyrinth began, it has flourished. At the Guardians' guidance, the branches of the Labyrinth all offer attractive answers that people commonly lack: knowledge of "the" meaning of life and what follows death are among the most common rewards that accompany membership in one of these exclusive clubs. Many also claim that those initiated into their mysteries will experience a pleasant existence after their death, something not waiting for the uninitiated or "the other guy." Others simply provide more temporal benefits to

membership: power. Regardless, the groups attract members by being a source of something they want – the feeling of being special.

Societies of the Labyrinth come in all shapes and flavors. One secret group, with members on its rolls including several past US presidents, is based in an old university and recruits the rich and powerful youths who attend. Ever since the group and the Guardians of the Veil accidentally recruited the same person almost a hundred years ago, the society serves the double purpose of giving Guardians an exploitable connection with America's elite and introducing those same elite to an intriguing world of subtle mysticism. More than a few members have delved deeper into the Labyrinth and become willing investors in the Guardians' protections of the Veil; some have even become wealthy members of the order.

Some members of the many collegiate secret societies believe that there are deeper connections between the different groups. Only the oldest members and their Cultors know for sure, and none of them are talking. There are many more secret societies spread throughout the world's institutes of higher education. The Guardians of the Veil cannot claim a connection to all (or even most) of these groups, but that doesn't stop the Guardians from trying, though it occasionally brings them in conflict with the Seers of the Throne.

Many groups are based in religion. There are hundreds of minor cults, heresies or offshoots of major religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism that devote themselves to seeking expressions of their beliefs in the mystic symbols of the world around them. Out of efforts to conceal themselves from the more popular, more powerful churches from which they sprung, these cults or offshoots develop into secret societies, and they find, whether through chance or Guardian guidance, longevity enough to become decent tools for protecting the Veil. Children of Mani, a Eurasian cult-society following an evolved form of Manichaeism, proselytize secretly throughout the Eastern hemisphere. One of the larger self-maintained branches of the Labyrinth, the Children are useful tools for Guardians in dire need of devoted assistants; the religion's requirement that auditors serve the elect provides willing servants at short notice, at least to Guardians in the right part of the world.

Calvin's Rosary is a very hidden group of Protestant devotees, who believe that they are slowly making the world into a better place, eventually to become free of sin and return to the likeness of Eden. To this end, the Rosary utilizes primarily Christian symbolism and imagery to conduct their mystic rites, and funds and operates many schools and academies across Europe. After more than 400 years, they are quite good at incorporating subtle but effective undercurrents into their lessons that create moral students; also, the quiet hints at deeper truths attract some youths to join Calvin's Rosary. Despite this success, the organization wishes to remain hidden, and its members thank God for their continued concealment from all eyes – all but the eyes of the Guardians, who infiltrated Calvin's Rosary almost 350 years ago. Some Guardians of the Veil find that the nature of the belief and strength of will that

the group teaches increases the chance that a student might Awaken, so Cultors and Epopts who know of the Rosary continue to watch it carefully.

The Guardians of the Veil gives financial support, through channels that do not lead to them, to several groups that explore the many aspects of Vodoun. These groups exist in Africa, Haiti, and in America and Europe, where these societies have been secret since the early days of slavery. The aspects of Vodoun that reflect spiritualism and possession have been useful to the Guardians, giving them the perfect place for Sleepers whose crusades into the unknown are fueled by encounters with denizens of the Shadow Realm.

And there are many secret societies based simply on the search for and utilization of occultism. Freemasonry is a society that many believe has roots in the occult and, with the secrecy required of its members, the Freemasons would be hard put to prove otherwise. Although the Free and Accepted Masons is a very public organization, it is still "secret" in that Masons are sworn not to speak of the fraternity's mysteries and in Freemasonry's division into multiple levels of initiation. This similarity to the Guardians of the Veil comes as no surprise to some Guardian caucuses, who insist that a Cultor sat beside the Freemasons' founders in the early 1700s. Other Guardians, especially those who have bent a local lodge to their own uses, remain skeptical.

The International Association of Lions Clubs is a service organization that focuses aiding the visually and aurally impaired; unknown to most members, it also hides a secret faction that explores ways to extend the senses of sight and hearing into mystical realms — a task they hold that Helen Keller requested of them in the early 20th century. Other societies predicated upon the search for occult knowledge include the Rosicrucians and the Ordo Templi Orientis.

Guardians consider the "publicity" of the Labyrinth as valuable a tool as the cults that make up the Labyrinth itself. The Bavarian Illuminati, the least secret of secret societies and the archetypal conspiracy, seems like a typical Guardians of the Veil ploy. If it was, it worked: the political climate surrounding the society's creation ensured a quick downfall for the group. When the Bavarian Illuminati was crushed scant years after its foundation, the penned accusations of conspiracy and mystic practices (unholy and otherwise) fueled paranoid political theorists for decades to come. Initiations into the Free and Accepted Masons more than tripled and showed no signs of slowing.

Secret societies that the Guardians devise or manage to infiltrate and pervert to their cause have connections with each others' mysteries. This is a deliberate ploy on the Guardians' part to give the particularly obsessed a semblance of mutual foundation. Sleepers who are so engrossed in searching out ever-deeper mysteries will find connections between the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians that only reinforce the apparent veracity of whatever falsities the Sleepers have so far learned. Societies less oriented to the mystic and occult have only a few connections to any others, and those connections are subtle: a traditional way of standing before meals, greet-

ing one another or beginning official discussions of society business. Those more explicitly dedicated to occultism share stronger associations: a symbol prominently used in one can be found, with difficulty, in the sigil of another; similarity in the various ranks of initiation; numerological signs in the names of each that point to a common source. Additionally, these entirely un-random similarities between various branches of the Labyrinth will direct the seeker, if he perceives it, toward other sets of false mysteries and other secret societies, not yet betrayed to the light of public knowledge by a less than devoted student.

Usually, the Guardians of the Veil let Sleepers create a society or a cult rather than doing it themselves. Given how difficult it is to gauge the zeitgeist and recognize what sort of organization will or won't be picked up by enough followers to sustain it, letting the Sleepers worry about founding the cults requires much less effort; the mages can simply suborn the cult if it proves worthwhile. When an Epopt chooses to pull an existing cult into the Labyrinth, she assigns a Cultor to the movement with the task of bringing the group into the "fold." Cultors use magic to quickly gain the trust of the cults' head honchos and, as their efforts bear fruit, become influential among its members. Usually, all a Cultor needs to do is plant a couple of subtle clues among the members and lead the cult's founder to a "long-hidden" cache of "ancient" texts regarding the religion and some of its "forgotten" rites and practices. Certain Guardians are, after much practice, quite good at creating books from appropriate historical time periods that able to pass most scientific tests for age. This influx of highly attractive information introduces to the cult some elements for it to share with other mystic traditions, giving the cult the appearance of authenticity and a path for the inquisitive to follow deeper into the Labyrinth.

In extreme cases, when the cult leader chooses not to seek out these texts or refuses to apply the expertly concocted material within to her cult, the Cultor must take a more commanding role in usurping the cult to his purposes. Once he earns "promotion" to the leader's right hand and finagles an official announcement making himself the cult leader in the absence of the founder, the original leader's disappearance is simple to arrange. The fallout is rarely bad; suspicion of wrongdoing is something that the Guardians of the Veil have been deflecting for millennia.

Occasionally, the attempt to bring a cult into the Guardians' fold does not go as planned. The cult leader may be more perceptive, stubborn or (when nothing else goes right) well protected than the Guardians can cost-effectively manipulate. When this happens, the Guardians of the Veil usually leave the cult to its own devices, letting it grow or die according to the harsh whims of the Fallen World. If the situation is not that simple, when the cult learns something it shouldn't know about the mages or when the cult obstructs some important objective of the order, the Guardians do what they must to ensure that their interests can progress apace. The offending cult is destroyed, through whatever means the Guardians can find. When possible, they cause the cult's members to with-

draw their support and go elsewhere. Otherwise, they may prompt another secret society to wage a hidden war against it or they trigger (or fake) a ritual suicide. Some of the cults that the Guardians are forced to end in this way show up in the news — and some of the cults that show up in the news were destroyed by the Guardians, although they are by no means responsible for all such cults.

But the Labyrinth is more than just a place to keep inquisitive seekers. The Guardians of the Veil see an inner strength in mazers who manage to sift through the many diverse mystic phrases, passwords, names, titles, symbols, icons and sigils connected, subtly or clearly, throughout the Labyrinth. These Guardians watch the secret societies carefully for potential initiates among the Sleepers and build parts of the Labyrinth specifically to test the imagination and ingenuity of the mazed. One cult may admit only new members who know to voice an arcane word without any clues or prompting; the Guardian responsible for this test places one or two very difficult clues elsewhere, believing that only someone worthy of his attention will make the proper connection. From there, the Guardian brings the candidate to an Epop's attention and an official evaluation begins.

What the Mazed See

To a Sleeper, the Labyrinth is not the monolithic web of loosely connected occulted clans, mystic traditions and secret societies that the Guardians of the Veil sees and runs. Mazers see the Labyrinth only in one small part at a time; they simply don't have the perspective to see the sprawling, internally inconsistent world of secret misdirection. After all, the mazer is the one who is being misdirected.

A Sleeper always walks into the Labyrinth of his own free will. If the Guardians are going to force a Sleeper to join a mystic sect and find some way to make him stay, they might as well kill or imprison him to keep him from the *Ars Mysteriorum* — it amounts to the same thing. The Guardians do not want to imprison minds. Doing so makes them feel too much like the Seers, and the Guardians would rather the strong minds find their way free of the Labyrinth and the Lie. Of course, Sleepers whom the Guardians specifically lure into the Labyrinth do not know that their free will has been carefully assessed, and the invitations they receive or trails they pick up are tailored to attract them into the occult underworld.

The Sleeper's interest in the occult waxes. He begins to buy or check out books on New Orleans voodoo, Buddhism, the Hindu yoga and other mystic practices. Or perhaps he buys a gun and begins staying out in the park on nights of the full moon waiting for that wolf-thing to come back, or he wears garlic and attends illegal raves. If he gains the attention of a part of the Labyrinth, he'll get an invitation. It can be direct ("I hang out with a group and we talk about this kind of stuff. One of us has a pretty decent library."), or it can be mysterious and paranoid ("Come to the Granary Burial Ground at the proper hour. Bring your camera and all your film, and come alone, and you may learn what you seek. We will be watching. Burn this note."), depending on what the Sleeper has been

studying and what cult or society found him. Avoiding attention means the Sleeper has to pick up and follow a trail to get deeper into the Labyrinth. He finds out that the same person checks out *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* every year on the same day, leading him to the people who read it. Studying ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs at the museum each day, he realizes that there is a fresh rosebud tacked to the nearest velvet rope whenever he's there; he comes early one day to see who attaches it, and maybe ask that person why.

This period passes when the seeker follows the trail to the secret society, or when the society follows his trail back to him. Some societies kill rather than convert. There's almost no distinction between the two for the Guardians of the Veil; either keeps a nosy Sleeper from looking behind the Veil, and enough cults want followers instead of bodies that more people are initiated than murdered and the Labyrinth perpetuates itself. An attempted murder is enough to convince most Sleepers that there is a vein of truth to their research, causing them to dig deeper into whatever mysteries they were studying when someone decided they should die, or an attempted murder convinces others to give up the search. Again, either result is satisfactory to the Guardians. The most common result, initiation into a society, is where the mazed get their first glance at what will serve to both stimulate and contain their mystic interests. Secret societies are not always exclusive (the Free and Accepted Masons have millions of members worldwide), but even the largest meet in smaller groups. The initiation is a small ceremony officiated by the head of the local division, whether it is called a lodge, enclave or tong. The group welcomes its new member with traditional rituals that may or may not have actually been passed down from ancient times. Some exemplary initiation rites include sipping a tincture made from blood, reciting arcane words or formulae, receiving a tattoo or other mark, engaging in ritual sex or singing and dancing to a particular tune.

From there, the initiate is taught the customs and practices of the cult. What the cult teaches may not be exactly the mysteries that he was originally seeking, but there is usually enough to keep him satisfied for a while. He learns greetings shared between members so they can recognize each other, some of the cult's history (actual and imagined) and the claims that certain famous people were members of the cult or believers in the creed. The order teaches him mystical watchwords, images and gestures of great symbolic meaning to the order. Being a member is not enough, though. Most secret societies also ask some recompense from their members besides basic secrecy. For a more public society, this may be something as innocent as manning a booth at a fair on the group's behalf; for the most secret and dark, the cult might require him to bring back men and women from bars to be ritually drugged and raped, or even killed and eaten. Most mazers find their way to cults that share their general values; one might have to grow a little accustomed to some of the society's requirements, but that usually isn't too difficult. When a Sleeper finds himself in a secret society with significantly looser morals than he has, he is in for a rough time. Not only is the society unlikely to change



for his benefit, the cult likely has few qualms about silencing him permanently to maintain its secrecy.

Most secret societies are made up of several levels of acceptance, from the new initiates to the old masters of the inner circle. Using the Bavarian Illuminati as an example, it was divided into the major classes of the *Nursery*, the *Masonry*, the *Lesser* and the *Greater Mysteries*, each of which contained subclasses, bringing the number of different initiative degrees to 10. One who is of a lesser degree is limited in both responsibility and what he can learn of the order's secrets. Such cults impress upon everyone who joins that additional proofs of belief and understanding are required before the initiate earns further acceptance among the elders. To one of the mazed who has just gained his initiation, it is like being invited through the front door only to be told that he cannot go any farther than the antechamber. Hints of promised knowledge and power tantalize a seeker, but the mysteries will not come to him — he must go to them, and the society holds the keys. This setup explores the depths to which a mazer will go to find the clues he seeks.

Advancing through the ranks of a society will reveal many useless (but satisfying) secrets to a Sleeper, some of which hold together under examination and others who never appear to be the least bit self-consistent. But exploring the mysteries of only a single cult is not the only way to progress through the Labyrinth. A Sleeper in one secret society is guaranteed to hear

about others, if only in the mockery of his fellow members. It takes little investigation to discover their introductory and low-level rituals, and some of these bear a suspicious resemblance to the ancient rites possessed by his cult.

Most members of a society write these off as proof that the second group is merely a pale derivative of their own, but some of the mazed make connections between the two. Perhaps the words spoken during the Rosicrucian's initiation ceremony are a mystic chant known only to elite Masons. These clues can lead the most perceptive mazers to the (true) belief that the similar traditions and occult practices are more than mere coincidence. For a Sleeper to find out, he must work his way into the trust of a second society; if he then notices an unusual parity with yet another group, he must do so again. The Labyrinth is riddled with these connections, both subtle and blatant. The most persistent Sleepers could spend their entire lifetimes and not reach the end of the trail; this is not by accident, but by design.

Unwitting Agents and Contacts

Guardians of the Veil can't be spymasters without spies, and there aren't enough Susceptors in the world to fill out an Epop's ideal team. In the end, the Guardians have no choice but to turn to Sleepers for most of their footwork. The Guardians use a myriad of covers and blinds to keep these unwitting agents from ever knowing the truth about their employers. In

addition, the Guardians label some agents based on certain types of behavior or mental outlook they display, codified in oral history by such names as "Crown of Roses" or "Smoke of Altars"; see p. 83 for more information.

Allies

Guardians favor having connections with local or national law enforcement, since they feel something of an affinity with both. Some Guardians are ex-cops and still have friends on the force. Most are not so lucky. They forge documents declaring them to be from other locales, even foreign service, and request aid as one lawman to another — it may not always work, but often enough it does.

To criminals, a Guardian usually takes on the identity of a well-connected lowlife. Someone with enough pull in the underworld to get good things going for a thug who helps him. Because crooks are a lousy bunch to double-cross, most Guardians see that they pay favors back with a bit of interest.

Friends in research perceive the Guardian as scholars with odd interests. Some Guardians pretend to be from out of town, always visiting when they need a clue from the university library, but this can be a hard ruse to keep up. More often, a Guardian creates a small, local society for the pursuit of — whatever is relevant. A cleverly vague title, such as "the Antiquarians," can give the Guardian enough excuse to cultivate a friendship with the local librarian without having to nail down his academic domain.

To the Guardian's political allies, the Guardian could be an enthusiastic member of the local grassroots organizations, or he might maintain a fictional connection with a powerful regional lobby.

Whatever the lie (and it needn't *always* be a lie), the cover story requires some effort before it can affect reality. A month of dedicated work could be enough to get the recommendation of a local political bigwig, but it might take a successful heist to get in with a criminal. Increasing dots in the Allies Merit needs time spent shoring up the cover story or proving oneself; judicious use of magic can hasten these efforts.

Contacts

This is where Guardians shine. Their ability to seemingly be everywhere and see everything makes them so feared by the Awakened world. Most caucuses encourage all their Guardians to develop strong contacts and to confer with each other enough that they provide diverse sources of information.

The fellow at the newspaper might give tip-offs in exchange for tip-offs; he might consider the Guardian a source as much as the Guardian does him, and better leads get better leads in return.

Criminals react well to money, but some also like to think they're doing a little bit of good. Some Guardians (especially those with Allies in law enforcement) play the part of a cop when getting in touch with their illegally minded contacts.

An airline attendant might share flight plans with the Guardian if the mage professes a certain ideology, or if he pays enough and pretends to be looking for ways to smuggle in drugs.

Skater punks could serve as a mage's "Baker Street Irregulars" if he acts like someone who's fighting the Man — an anarchist or just a pusher, depending on what gets the kids going — and a bum might talk for the price of a bottle or over a ham sandwich, though they aren't always reliable sources.

Forging, keeping and strengthening dots in the Contacts Merit is based entirely on footwork. It may not always be literal (one need not actually walk to get in touch with hundreds of hackers and script kiddies), but it always takes some time to meet the people who will be able to deliver the news when the time is right. It's less important to have a thorough background and decent references for Contacts; instead, the right attitude and professed allegiances (and sometimes a little cash) will get the job done.

Politics and Law

Guardians are very sensitive to the local political situation, more so than all but the most politically active mages in any given region. This is partly because Guardians prefer to be aware of what each party in the Consilium is planning, but the order's local operations also vary a great deal depending on who is in power. The Guardians do not have a particularly good relationship with any of the orders, but Guardians tend to be very skeptical about having the Consilium's blessing when the Free Council is in charge. Even when the advantage doesn't belong to an order that considers Guardians on a level with Seers of the Throne, the Guardians tend to work only lightly within the Consilium framework. They don't approve of how much power a Hierarch wields over the cabals in his region, reminding the Guardians too much of the pride before the Fall. Guardians hold few official positions and often act more as lobbyists than politicians, constantly vocalizing the consequences of unwise magic and scratching the ambitious politicians' backs for the same in return. Though some of them do wish for the ultimate authority of a Hierarch or a wartime Adamant Sage, there is little chance they will ever get it.

On the Council

What follows is a brief description of positions within a Consilium and the Guardians' relation to them.

Hierarch: One can travel the seven seas and the like number of continents, and she will seldom find a Hierarch who belongs to the Guardians of the Veil. The Guardians are so disliked and distrusted that achieving the popular support necessary for ascendance to the position would be a true political miracle.

But when a region claims secrecy and caution as its utmost concern, a Guardian's reign as Hierarch may be the best way to achieve that end. Then, mages are more likely to support a Guardian candidate. In other regions, a powerful Guardian might just take and keep the position by force. It's not unlikely for a Guardian Hierarch to be a political disaster; even where cabals once favored the mage, cabals tend to eventually grow tired of having a Guardian rule. They begin to quietly disobey, then openly revolt.

Councilor: Councils are made up of either five or six Councilors, counting the Hierarch. Classically, one of those is from each Path and each order, but this isn't always the case. When one of the five orders is not represented, it is often the Guardians of the Veil. It is for the same reason that they are never elected Hierarch. The local cabals will not support them and the head of the Consilium doesn't trust them. Still, Guardians sit on the Council because, despite others' dislike of them, their extreme caution is appreciated. Moreover, this is where the Guardians prefer to be in an organization: behind the leader, making everything run smoothly while they watch the politics and give it a nudge from time to time. Guardians in this office are usually famuli, trusted by their order to know when it is proper to obey the Consilium and when to obey their higher allegiance to the Veil.

Provost: When a Consilium is making Guardians angry by refusing them a seat on the Council, one Councilor sometimes appeases the order by making a Guardian Provost. Doing so is a political action for which the Councilor earns some favors, since she is sacrificing the opportunity to have a member of her own order as her Provost. It usually turns out well because, despite whatever else a mage might think about the Guardians of the Veil, nobody doubts that they get things done.

Herald: Another position that Guardians rarely receive. Not only do the Councilors trust the Guardians least of all mages, Guardians know that other mages feel the same way—and who would choose to represent themselves to others with the least well liked of the Awakened? The Consilium might appoint its favorite (least hated) Guardian Herald when it needs to treat with a Guardians' cabal or a neighboring Consilium rife with members of the order, but it is usually temporary.

Sentinel: Besides Provost, Sentinel is the only other office that Guardians commonly bear. Most willworkers' experiences tell them that a Guardian is relentless in hunting down those she perceives as dangerous to the Awakened and that she will not hesitate to use all the resources at her disposal if the matter is important enough. Guardian Sentinels may not share the information she receives through intra-order channels with the Consilium, but all that matters is that she uses it. Guardians are happy to accept this position, since it affords them some scant authority in the region and makes easier some of their normal tasks.

The Lex Visus

The letters of the law, the Lex Magica, vary between Consilii, but one basic rule always remains: keep magic secret. To the Guardians of the Veil, this one aspect is the most important, and all other rules pale beside the importance of maintaining the Veil between the Awakened and the Sleeping. Guardians call the ascendance of this law the Lex Visus, the Law of the Eye, which they claim the order has been accorded since its birth in Atlantis. Under the Lex Visus, Guardians feel justified in breaking the laws of Sleepers and mages in order to pursue this most important of goals. They also use it as a sign of their permission to judge and sentence those who break it without regard for Consilium law. This position is contested

from time to time by Councilors, but the Guardians' answers are always the same: the Lex Visus is the most important aspect of the Lex Magicus; the Guardians' actions were in service to the Consilium.

Willworkers who ignore the "most important aspect of the Lex Magicus" receive a visit from the Guardians of the Veil, and it is never a pleasant one. Punishments levied by a Guardian are always more harsh than those laid down by a mage's cabal or by the Consilium. Though exacting magically enforced oaths from unwilling mages is frowned upon by most Consilii and proscribed in many Lex Magica, this serves as the Guardians' favorite punishment for a good number of the crimes against secrecy.

Offenders are usually given a warning, at first. The Guardian who detects a mage's transgressions goes to him in secret. She reveals that she knows of his foolish vulgar castings or irresponsible discussions of the Mysteries, and she requests that he take more care in the future, with the not-so-subtle promise of a return visit. What she doesn't tell him is that she has taken his indiscretion as permission to search his home, investigate him at his place of work and surveil him 24/7. If she or another Guardian catches him breaking the first rule a second time, he is in trouble. Guardians act to make his life more difficult but not dangerous: they may create a police record for him, arrange for an adoptive child to appear in his life, manipulate events so that he must live in a less secure home for a while or anything else that ups the stakes to make him less likely to use dangerous magic. Then, a small team of Guardians corners the mage when he is without aid and forces a magical oath on him. The terms of the oath vary with the offense, but always include a clause forbidding the mage from discussing his punishment with others or attempting to alter it.

Though using Fate is the favored tactic, not every caucus has a Guardian with that level of mastery available. When that is the case, they must resort to other methods. If the Consilium is sympathetic, Guardians may report a transgressing mage to the Councilors. When the mage's caucus leader dislikes incautious use of vulgar magic, the Guardians tell that individual. Neither liked nor trusted, Guardians make sure to have (or construct) evidence of the crime to serve as proof.

Guardians may also forcefully take a sample of the mage's hair or skin, giving them a near-intimate connection with the offending mage. This is a significant advantage, allowing the Guardians to more easily scry the subject or, if they can, counter his magic from a distance. Some may even blackmail him into acceding to their wishes, by threatening to give his physical samples to people who wish to do him ill.

Heavier punishments are levied upon mages who reveal more of the Ars Mysteriorum to the unenlightened. Placing a lasting, visible vulgar spell in plain view of Sleepers or knowingly teaching the Mysteries to them incurs greater penalties: the mage's memory of how to cast the offensive spell may be temporarily erased with long-duration Mind magic or the Guardians may incarcerate and re-educate her in prisons of their own. Whatever punishments the Guardians apply at

this level are concurrent with the forced oaths that the lesser offenses warrant, preventing the convicted mage from telling others why her abilities are limited or revealing where she's been for the past month. These penalties carry penalties of their own in most Consilii, and few Hierarchs want to hear "Lex Visus" when productive mages from their regions disappear or suddenly can't cast their magic. The Guardians of the Veil try to keep these activities as secret as possible.

Death is the least-applied punishment, simply because it is an excellent way to strengthen the negative opinions most mages have of the Guardians. When a mage makes secrets of the Mysteries available to people en masse or repeats lesser offenses without showing remorse or repentance, the Guardians know that they have no other choice. She is assassinated with as little trace as possible; if the Guardians can feasibly make it seem that she fled the region to escape her negative reputation with her peers, they do.

There are other punishments than those listed here. In fact, the Guardians of the Veil try their best to make the punishment fit the crime. A mage who has incautiously cast much vulgar magic through her enchanted item may have it confiscated, for example.

Relationships With Others

Vampires. Werewolves. Other mages. There are many other creatures and groups out there, and most of them deserve some form of attention from the Guardians of the Veil. Over the years, the many caucuses have developed official guidelines for their constituents to take toward other supernatural entities. Some are positive, some are negative and some are downright hostile. Still, these are only the common stances between the order and a subset of the Invisible World's inhabitants. These guidelines are not enforced upon individual Guardians, who are usually permitted to form their own business relations with such creatures, though any relations outside of other mages are discouraged. Personal relationships, if they form, tend to be monitored.

History also influences the Guardians' relationships with other mages and supernatural creatures. Supernatural creatures tend toward paranoia, and many of them have long memories, as individuals or as a group. When a Guardian meets with a person in an official capacity, she must deal from the position created by centuries of contact between her caucus (even though she probably had nothing to do with it) and that entity's organization, and these preconceptions will color their dealings.

A mage entering into a relationship with a vampire or other creature has no obligation to reveal her order, even if the creatures would recognize the term. Most caucuses, though they prefer contact be limited in the first place, recommend that mages take the precaution of inventing a false "order" for the creatures, and go so far as to lay a trail for the more investigative to follow. Some mages enact this deception by intimating membership in another true order, though that habit elicits anger from those orders if they find out.

The Awakened

There is no love lost between the Guardians of the Veil and their Awakened brethren. The Guardians see other mages as dangerous fools who put infants behind the wheels of cars every time they teach a mage another spell without taking proper precautions. Guardians then spend their days making sure that those cars don't crash. Other mages see it differently. When they try to teach a mage how to responsibly use his powers, the Guardians complain about his worth. When a mage tries to learn by herself, the Guardians call her reckless and want to shut her down. Mages believe that the Guardians' way would result in a world dead of magic, because all the Mysteries would be locked up in a vault where no one could find them. None go so far as to accuse the Guardians of collusion with the Exarchs, however; despite the other mages' valid complaints, too many mages have personally benefited from the Guardians' vigilance. That doesn't make the Guardians popular — it makes them barely tolerated.

The Adamantine Arrow

Guardians have worked with the Adamantine Arrow since the inception of both orders in distant Atlantis. The Guardians of the Veil respect the Arrow for its philosophy of servitude, and empathize with the Arrow's practice of guiding an organization from behind its true leader. To a Guardian, there can be no more honorable aim than to protect the Awakened and the Fallen World from that which would harm it. But many feel that the Adamantine Arrow has lost the way. Where the Arrows were once powerful shields and swords wielded by the joined will of all Atlantis and guided by the Eye of the Dragon, the Arrows now choose war for the sake of war, believing it a path into the higher realms of the Supernal. The order's mages are conflicted and poorly guided. The Guardians of the Veil see the Adamantine Arrow as a strong order with respectable goals that it has forgotten how to reach.

Though the two orders have in common some of their basic philosophies, they do not get along well. Guardians consider Arrows to be mages who have not forgotten their principles but have forgotten *how* to pursue them; when impassioned, Guardians may accuse the Arrows of this. Guardians of the Veil still attempt to work around the personal disdain their members feel for the other order because Adamantine Arrows have always made valuable allies. Improving relations between the two orders or enabling them to work together, despite deep criticisms of the way the other operated, proves difficult. After a few too many complications between the two orders, most Guardians revise their official internal stances on the Arrows to one that does not include amicable interactions.

It is not the Guardians' place to forgive, and they make a point of never forgetting, so things are much the same today. Guardians and Arrows do not do much together, but all the mage orders work together in some ways, simply because there is always some advantage one mage wants that another has. Despite this universally recognized necessity, the Guardians have a hard time making deals with the Adamantine Arrows.

When possible, the Guardians of the Veil look elsewhere for their alliances and trades.

The Free Council

To say that the Guardians and the Free Council have bad blood might imply that there was once good blood between them, and that would be a mistake. They have never gotten along well. The first encounter between the two orders occurred before the Free Council even had its name. Guardians spied on the many unaligned cabals that would one day hold their Assemblies and espouse liberty over all.

The Guardians of the Veil see the Libertines as mages who just don't have the experience to fully understand what they're doing. Worse, the Free Council maintains the Lorehouses, full of Mysteries, that so infuriate the Guardians. Improperly secured from prying eyes, Guardians consider the Lorehouses some of the worst leaks in the contemporary Awakened world. The Council doesn't think much better of the Guardians.

At the end of the day, the Guardians would rather deal with any of the other Pentacle orders than the Free Council. Any debt the Guardians paid in Mysteries would end up in the Lorehouses or be voted into worldwide dissemination at one of the Council's Assemblies. Guardians of the Veil operate as far off the radar as possible in a region where the Consilium is led by a Libertine or is suborned to a popular Assembly; Guardians also seldom hold their traditional positions, such as Interfector, there.

When the two orders are forced to work together, they make an effort to interact as little as possible. Mages of both orders treat those of the other with contempt. Some try to hide it, making the best of an undesirable situation. But, for every Guardian who tries to be friendly, there's another who bares his teeth when forced to work with a Libertine. In certain regions, the two orders actually reach an agreement about how to deal with some information. This may mean that the Guardians have worked themselves into a position where they can manipulate the few Free Council mages in the area, or this may mean that the local Guardians keep fairly lax about how they restrict information. Either way, the order leaning toward the other's way of thought will find only disapproval from other caucuses.

The Mysterium

The Mysterium is the order that scours the old places of the world for ancient Mysteries, shedding the light of the Atlantean Exiles upon the Supernal enigmas of today. If the Guardians of the Veil are working to keep the *Ars Mysteriorum* from undeserving and defiling hands, the Mysterium actually works to revitalize it and make it stronger. And therein lies the problem. Guardians fear what the Awakened may be able to do with those secrets and artifacts uncovered by the Mysterium's searching. The Guardians' single greatest focus on the Mysterium is to judge for themselves the danger of allowing recovered relics to fall into the hands of the unworthy.



If the danger is too great, the order's duty is to appropriate the find (whether an object or information) and deposit it into the Guardians of the Veil's stores for such things.

After long centuries of doing this, the Guardians accept that the Mysterium is not going to hold them in high regard. The two orders deal only rarely, instead spending more time and effort stealing from one another. Guardians raid the Atheneums, retrieving artifacts or stealing clues to the Mysteries without leaving copies; and mystagogues lift these same secrets and more from the Guardians' archival vaults. The end result, as ancient Atlantean wisdom goes back and forth, is this: the things the Guardians of the Veil consider most dangerous go into the order's most secure locations and stay there; the Mysterium fails to regain these, but gets more of those secrets the Guardians feared less. The Guardians are somewhat satisfied with the balance, but that doesn't stop them from trying to improve their security to the point where they can truly decide what information reaches the rest of the Awakened.

Still, the two orders are not at each others' throats. The Guardians of the Veil appreciate that mystagogues do not hand out lore to the unwise like candy to children, and respects the lengths to which the Mysterium's Censors will go to remove dangerous knowledge from hands unworthy of wielding it. The Guardians send agents of its own to aid the Censors on some missions; the Censors occasionally return the favor. Sometimes the groups work together openly, and sometimes one does not know the other is there. They only rarely argue about who should take the prize home with them; the Guardians know that anything worth sending the Censors to seek will not be discussed with the Consilium. The two orders agree not to publicize the support they occasionally give each other.

All in all, the Guardians of the Veil enjoy a vague camaraderie with the Mysterium. They don't agree with each other's philosophies or most of their practices, but most of their interactions are fairly give-and-take, and that spawns a sort of respect — even if members of each order spit vitriol at each other about where important data should go.

The Silver Ladder

Long ago, the Guardians of the Veil served the Awakened City as defenders against the silent and the invisible; the commanding voice of Atlantis came from the Silver Ladder. It was also the Silver Ladder that led the effort (or so the Guardians believe) to erect the Celestial Ladder, whose legacy still threatens the Ars Mysteriorum today. Guardians do not forget past offenses, though many ignore or refuse to believe that their forerunners also helped raise the Ladder. The Silver Ladder mages still make more ambitious plans than any other mages, and the Guardians know that they must stay close in order to prevent further catastrophe. There is no mage order to which the Guardians kowtow, but they treat the Silver Ladder with respect and make the most efforts to treat with them. This gives Guardians the opportunities that they so sorely need, to stay nearby as the Ladder plots the next convoluted attack on the Seers of the Throne and the Exarchs.

Though the Guardians' motives are ulterior, the way that they make themselves useful to the Silver Ladder earns Guardians some points. The Ladder mages may feel distaste at using the despised Guardians for any purpose, but their unique skills are simply too attractive to pass up. As a result, the Guardians of the Veil and the Silver Ladder deal with each other almost as the other orders do with anyone but the Guardians.

Apostates

A Guardian's dedication to his cause is second to nothing, and, for that reason, the Guardians as a whole have difficulty understanding the mages who dedicate themselves to nothing, eschewing the orders and following their own paths. It is hard for a Guardian to see that an apostate may have a cause to champion, one that may not mesh with those of the existing orders. What the Guardians of the Veil *does* see is that an apostate is without the support that an established magical order can provide. Far from recruiting apostates (something that has likely already been tried), some Guardians choose to work with them.

Apostates are the only mages outside the Guardians' own order who are not preconditioned to, one way or another, hate the Guardians for what they do — though many apostates learn over time. Between the lack of organized teaching and the relative tolerance that the apostates have, the Guardians of the Veil find them willing allies for a bargain price. Guardians teach the apostates the Ars Mysteriorum, though the lessons are full of propaganda and warnings about the dangers of misusing magic. In return, the unaffiliated mages serve as free agents for the Guardians, helping out in some missions and emergencies. One occasional use the Guardians of the Veil has for its apostates is as diplomats to the other orders; few may trust apostates, but at least most orders do not hate apostates without due cause.

Not all apostates consent to work for the Guardians of the Veil — only a minority do so — but this is the order's most common stance on apostates. Otherwise, Guardians monitor and judge unaffiliated mages on a case-by-case basis as the order does all others.

Supernatural Creatures

Not just mages and Sleepers threaten the Awakened way of life. There are creatures in the Fallen World, strange beings with stranger powers that do not draw upon the Supernatural. These entities' origins are mysteries, but many Guardians of the Veil wonder if, perhaps, these beings are not creations of the Exarchs — a subtle play in the game to command Supernatural power. It is hard for the Guardians to know the motives or intentions of these entities, and so the Guardians watch. The things may not invoke Paradoxes, but that does not mean they cannot threaten the Veil.

Vampires

No mage knows for sure from where these creatures of the night came, or their true purposes. They manipulate the Tap-



estry in a way that seems unrelated to the Supernal Realms. Together, these two things make vampires incredibly frightening to the Guardians. Although vampires are not constant threats to the Awakened, like Banishers or unrestricted vulgar magic, vampires are always there. Guardians detected the creatures in their beloved Republic of Rome before it began to fall, and at least one Guardian holds the theory that it may have been the bloodsuckers who brought the Guardians' hope for the future to ruin.

There is very little treating between the Guardians and vampires as a whole. For the most part, both groups give the other a wide berth and go about their own, secret businesses. But Guardians of the Veil have never been able to just leave a mystery alone, especially when it could literally bite them in the ass. Some Guardians make it a point to make contacts within a nearby vampire group and keep close, but only the obsessed actually try it. Few survive long before vampires (or, perhaps, other mages) consider the mage a threat and rid themselves of the worry. Agents almost never detect great plots against the mages, but neither do they learn enough to write off the vampires as a significant threat.

Occasionally, a Guardian may trade information and secrets with one of the vampire sects. Guardians are careful to never give away anything damning to the Awakened, but their customers always seem satisfied, and the Guardians are as well. Whether or not what they learn is verifiable or accurate depends entirely on the vampires in question.

Werewolves

These shapechanging half-spirits are less mysterious to the mages. Willworkers seek out werewolves from time to time, interested in studying their magical gifts, shapeshifting and rapid healing. This is not the sort research that most Guardians prefer to pursue. A Guardian who involves herself with werewolf packs focuses on the political, and she soon learns that the werewolves and the Guardians have some things in common.

The first is a common desire to remain undetected. Werewolves strenuously do not want to be known to the public, so the Guardians expend little effort trying to subdue the theriomorphs and cover up after the messes they leave. Only rarely do werewolves reveal themselves overtly to so many people that the Guardians feel they must act.

A stronger connection than their similar covert natures is the stewardship each group feels toward the way of things. Guardians of the Veil protect the natural flows of magic from the Supernal to the Fallen World against those who would destroy them; the werewolves' self-appointed task is to guard the boundary between the Fallen World and the Shadow Realm against those who would go where they should not be. A Guardian respects this duty and the devotion werewolves show to it. This bond provides a path for both mages and werewolves to follow when they wish to treat with the other; the Guardians try to help when possible, and they earn the same courtesy from the creatures.

It doesn't hurt at all that the Guardians recognize werewolves as creatures ruled more by passion than by thought, making them less likely to manipulate the mages, or that the Guardians' extended contact with the theriomorphs gives the order insight on when and where to visit the Shadow Realm without incurring their wrath.

In their pride, many Guardians fail to realize that the theriomorphs they study are also studying them. Each meeting between the two parties may give the mages some hint of when they can access the Shadow Realm, but the meeting also lets the werewolves sniff their way closer to the mages' sources of power, organizations and habits. Try as a Guardian might to conceal his intentions, the werewolves are clever beasts and not easily fooled. The most common victims of the theriomorphs are also those mages who spent the most time among them.

Spirits and the Shadow Realm

Stepping from the Fallen World into the Shadow Realm has many uses, and the Guardians exploit them when they can. They use the Shadow Realm for reconnaissance, as peering at the emotional timbre of a place in the Shadow can give a mage an excellent idea of what dangers might await in a region. They use the Shadow for questing and for research, working with the Arcana there to increase their understanding and seeking out old reflections of older writings that have been lost to time. Occasionally, they use the Shadow to hide from pursuers in the physical realm. The Shadow Realm sees whatever uses the mages can imagine, though the Guardians are careful not to anger the werewolf denizens unduly.

But Guardians also believe that access to the Shadow should be, like all things, restricted to the worthy. There is no point in

trying to bar werewolves access, since those creatures can step across to the other side without training or tools, but Guardians can and do act to prevent Sleepers and untrained mages from entering the Shadow Realm. Guardians therefore maintain a watch for Verges and listen carefully to rumors of where they might open at regular intervals. Finding one, or learning the truth about its reappearances, leads to the Guardians taking actions to close the Verges for good. Failing that, the Guardians dispatch guards when a Verge opens, keeping spirits and humans on the right sides of the Gauntlet. Sometimes, the Guardians end up working side by side with werewolves at the same task.

Spirits are a different matter. The Guardians of the Veil are always looking for new ways to reduce the amount of vulgar magic they are forced to cast, and one of the solutions they've been using for years is based on dealing with spirits. Spirit Numina are flexible and cross all kinds of Arcana, and don't invoke Paradoxes. The powers of vampires or werewolves don't either, some Guardians point out, but both of those creatures are prideful and refuse to be used. Spirits, as members of courts of the Shadow Realm and entities fueled by emotions and events in the real world, know how to play ball. A favorite Guardian tactic is to call up a spirit or spirits and treat with them, offering small boons (which the spirits can use in their Shadow politics) in exchange for favors in the physical realm that the mage cannot perform himself — or just can't do without invoking Paradoxes. Guardians who make these deals irresponsibly, either by giving too much to the spirits or by causing Sleepers to see too much (even without a Paradox), are frowned upon and eventually censured by the order.



CHAPTER FOUR: FACTIONS AND LEGACIES

The girl screamed. *They always scream*, Father Leopold thought. *Exorcisms are painful to them, or so they tell themselves*. Leopold bent down further and sprinkled more holy water onto the teenage girl's face. She howled like a burning cat.

He had done many of these by now, at least 10 of them, against the Epoch's express orders. But these exorcisms weren't real; all the "possessed" children were merely kids with psychological issues. If he could help them get over their mental hurdles with a bit of stage magic, what harm did that do? Yes, these exorcisms did reinforce supernatural beliefs, but Leopold felt they were harmless when coupled so closely to religious dogma. After all, only experts were allowed to perform exorcisms, which helped to ensure that no Sleeper would go about attempting one herself.

He flicked the water bottle at the child once more. This time, she took it without a sound, staring oddly at Leopold. Then, her skin began to pucker and smolder. Shapes seemed to form under her veins. Faint cackling sounds seemed to leak out of her ears.

Oh, shit, Leopold thought. *There's really something in there. Ten lousy exorcisms and this one's for real*. He fumbled into his cassock and drew out a silver crucifix. *How does that spell go? I haven't cast a true Exiled From the Flesh rite since initiation into the Black Veil . . .*

Whenever they gathered into groups, they would do wrong to each other, because they did not yet have the knowledge of how to form society. As a result, they would scatter again and perish. And so Zeus, fearing that our whole species would be wiped out, sent Hermes to bring Reverence and Justice to human beings, in order that these two would adorn society and bind people together in friendship.

— Plato, *Protogoras*

Factions

Guardians of the Veil do not march in lockstep to a single tune; they vary in the emphasis they place upon certain ideological tenets of the order — and some Guardians even hold tenets considered foolhardy or even heretical by others. Inevitably, some members of the order devolve into petty factionalism, carrying the banner of a particular creed higher than other elements of Guardian belief, such that Guardians argue and even come to blows with members of opposing factions.

Not all factionalism is bad for the order, however. In many cases, factionalism provides the sort of intense focus the order needs to keep its mages involved and on the keen edge of necessary action. While those who follow the loose factional ideology dubbed “Faceless” might prefer that all Guardians keep to strict secrecy and forego personal attachments to their identities, and often refuse to work with those who don’t, the Faceless at least bring an intense professionalism and creativity to their own attempts to live up to these ideals. Likewise, as fanatic as the “Messianics” can be, their devotion to the esoteric tenet of the Hieromagus ensures that other mages can pay less attention to it, safe in the knowledge that at least someone is watching out for the fulfillment of that prophecy.

Still, some Guardians speculate that if all members of the order could focus only on the positive, unifying portions of their ideologies, and not the divisive parts, the order could perhaps make powerful moves against the strengthening of the Abyss. But such is not to be; human nature, whether Awakened or asleep, seems to cleave to absolutes and expression of either/or, rather than more inclusive doctrines. The Guardians are certainly not immune to such foibles.

What's in a Name?

The factions detailed here are not organizations. That is, the factions aren’t groups with formally declared memberships and hierarchical leadership. These factions are ideological tendencies that certain mages claim for themselves. Naturally, these mages prefer to congregate with like-minded mages, so members who claim a particular ideology tend to flock together. The names given to these factions are loose terms developed over the years and are somewhat common throughout the order, but are not official titles.

A mage who is serious about his ideology is often a member of a particular group that has formed around that faction. For instance, a mage who believes that the Awakened are at their best when tested by a series of never-ending ordeals might consider himself an “Ordeal Keeper” (or be considered so by other mages even if he prefers to avoid titles). This might lead him to join with the like-minded mages of Ariadne’s Chosen, a particular group that has developed particular ways to keep life challenging.

So, the major factions described here are general categories — ideologies and tendencies associated with a certain philosophy or practice — while the specific examples of each are the specific groups in which you are most likely to find actual practitioners of a given ideology.

Major Factions

Described here are the major factions within the Guardians of the Veil, those that are prevalent within the order worldwide. There are other, lesser factions, usually formed around some minor philosophical ideal or argument, but many of them exist only in certain regions, and so are not common to the order as a whole as these below are.

THE FACELESS

Some mages, including more than a few Guardians, have commented that there’s something *cold* about the members of the faction that calls itself “the Faceless.” It might be the fact that, to quote Gertrude Stein, “*there’s no there there.*” The Faceless so regularly use the Masques, in concert with other techniques of persona manipulation, to assume roles and imitate others that faction members often lose track of their original selves. Many of these mages seem to wind up as mishmashes of echoes of the roles they have assumed during the course of their Awakened careers. While that might be a

frightening concept to some, the Faceless see this loss of ego as just one more sacrifice they make during the course of their duties to the Diamond Wheel.

Most Faceless seem strangely serene about their loss. As far as they’re concerned, the notion that any portion of an individual’s psyche is truly stable or inviolate is little more than a comforting myth, and that myth is easily debunked in the space of a single week with only a handful of simple reprogramming techniques — and that’s *without* magic. Identity is a lie, and it’s one the Faceless tell with infinite variations.

The term for the members of this faction derives equally from the fact that their frequent use of the Masques leaves others wondering about their true faces (or if they've ever seen them) and the fact that, like all Guardians of the Veil, their duties in service to other mages and the Diamond Wheel cause them to suffer shame, or the loss of face. They are the Dalits—the Untouchables—of Awakened society, so low that they can slither under every wall in pursuit of their quarries. Other mages sometimes refer to the Faceless as "the defaced" or "the debased."

It's not surprising that some mages, even among the Guardians, find the Faceless disturbing. These cunning and inscrutable mages are the ones who earned the order its reputation for assassination. Interacting with one of the Faceless is like talking with someone with multiple personalities who keeps getting distracted by something you can't see—at least until she has cause to stay in character. When one of the Faceless is playing a role for real stakes, her self-control is absolute.

Note that membership in this faction is especially popular with mages following the Subtle Ones' Legacy; the Legacy's innate stealth abilities perfectly complement the other deception skills mastered by the Faceless. Mages on the Paths of Ecstasy and Scourging are also well represented among the Faceless' numbers.

The Faceless show almost as much zeal as members of the Messianic faction; the Faceless just don't find it necessary to frame *everything* in spiritual terms. Nonetheless, they have made it their special mission to combat the Abyss, whose primary incursions result when arrogant mages allow Paradoxes to overwhelm them; the Faceless do this by "correcting" mages who incur too many Paradoxes or who make frequent and blatant use of vulgar magic. Initial requests lead to stern warnings, which lead to sanctions. Those mages spoken with might get angry, but most know better than to argue with the hounds of the Guardians. While some mages survive these "sanctions," the majority do not—and almost none of them ever see these "sanctions" coming.

Members of the Faceless hold mages personally accountable for their hubris. The Faceless do not accept excuses like "everyone does it," "no harm done" or "it's no big deal." They are steadfast in their belief that the Fallen World is imperiled by the actions of vain and careless mages, and the Faceless harbor a deep resentment against each and every mage who's too stupid, irresponsible and vain to adjust her magical practice to reflect the dire reality of the situation.

There is one group of offenders that the Faceless take particular delight in stalking, and those are the perfidious mages of the Seers of the Throne and the tainted of the Scelesti. If the Faceless had sufficient numbers, they would target these mages, all of them, for extinction.

As it is, Seers and the Scelesti take great pains to avoid the notice of the Guardians of the Veil for fear of the quiet wrath of the Faceless. Though the war mages of the Adamantine Arrow might be fearsome, it is always the enemy you don't see coming that is the most terrifying.

When, after weeks or months of stalking, one of the Faceless kills an enemy, the Faceless revels in the experience and lets the exultation of a well-executed murder wash over her in ecstatic waves.

If there's anything that remains consistent about these mages, it is this joy at the moment of triumph. There's no point in denying the dark and heady glee that comes from depriving the target of life. The damage to the Faceless' karma is already done by that point, and she inflicted it knowingly, willingly and in the service to a higher goal—and she wouldn't have it any other way.

Even so, other mages who have seen the Faceless at this moment have described the experience, typically in a low whisper, as *disturbing*.

Among the Faceless

This faction is easily the most difficult of the Guardians factions for a mage to join. The Faceless have a deep paranoid streak, and understandably so. As master deceivers, they expect the rest of the world, including their enemies, to be just as devious as they are—and some enemies have shown themselves to be exactly that. Another challenge to joining this faction is the sheer difficulty of learning to transcend one's ego so utterly that one can *believe* that one is someone else and play that role better even than the most accomplished actor. It takes a great deal of work to master the Masques and the myriad Life and Mind rotes that the Faceless use in the pursuit of their duties to the Diamond Wheel. Just learning to tell a lie capable of convincing the Awakened ear is an effort in itself. A Guardian must master a minimum of five Masques and attain disciple status in both Life and Mind before he can request admission to the Faceless.

Despite those immense challenges, there is no lack of willing candidates competing to join the faction. Among the members of the Guardians of the Veil, a mystique surrounds the Faceless, a mixture of pity, respect and awe whose closest Sleeper equivalent might be the mingled emotions felt by common soldiers when thinking about the most elite Special Forces. The mystique that clings to the Faceless is unquestionably earned the hard way. They give up *everything*, including their senses of self (and some say their sanity) in service to the Guardians of the Veil and their twisted/noble mission.

As the Guardians of the Veil see it, the Faceless are the big guns the Guardians bring out when they need to deal with particularly canny or dangerous mages. Inheritors are fine for laying the smackdown on Sleepers and easy targets among the Awakened, but for policing truly dangerous mages (especially those following Left-Handed Legacies), the stealth and subtlety of the Faceless is invaluable.

Optional Rule: The Assassin's Advantage

In general, the Faceless are no better in open combat than any other mages (in fact, the Faceless are often inferior to the Ordeal Keepers and almost all members of the Adamantine Arrow once the Faceless have lost the advantage of surprise). What makes them lethal is the advantage they gain in catching their targets totally unaware. Whenever the Faceless makes a surprise attack that he has spent at least three turns

preparing in advance (adjusting the lighting, positioning himself in the shadows, arranging for a well-timed distraction from another direction, etc.), he can make a reflexive Wits + Stealth roll to contest the target's Wits + Composure roll, to better ensure that the target is taken unawares. See the rules for "Surprise," pp. 151–152 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

This is an optional rule, and Storytellers should feel free to allow players to take it – or not – as warranted by both the maturity level of the player and the tone of the game.

The Faceless in Power

The Faceless can be wise and excellent leaders – at least for a few weeks at a time, every now and then, when the roles they're playing call for good leadership skills. After that, the burden of playing a single role for so long begins to wear on them. A single member of the Faceless might consent to guide a Consilium for a while, but such a role will likely prove to be too weighty a burden for the long term. A whole troupe of Faceless, on the other hand, might feasibly manage the task as the members trade off identities with enough frequency to keep them from growing bored, but that's as impractical as it is outlandish.

There are clear limits to the effectiveness of the Faceless in the positions of power. Actors are not generals. Assassins are not executives. The training these mages undergo, and the sacrifices they make, render them adept at subterfuge and infiltration, but leave them notably less skilled in the day-to-day management of a Consilium. The Faceless admit upfront that they do their best work when they can lose themselves in a crowd or weave webs of deception. Like gardeners tending bonsai trees, they have shaped their souls into tools of violent change, not fonts of wisdom and orderly governance. A serpent is not a lion, and a dagger is not a shepherd's crook.

There are many among the Guardians who would be happy to nudge the Faceless up the chain of command if only due to the mystique the faction enjoys in Guardians circles. The Faceless themselves know better than to let this happen, and they generally resist any such movement.

What the Faceless *might* do, however, (and what they have done in the past) is leverage their popularity into a devoted following among the Guardians and whatever other mages the Faceless can get to stand behind them. They won't lead *per se*, but they'll inspire. They won't take the Hierarch's throne, but they'll whisper in his ear; they won't call for punishment, but they'll have a few strategic words for a Sentinel. Once they establish a base of followers, they use their following to promote general Guardians of the Veil doctrine: avoid vulgar magic, seek word of the Hieromagus and keep the community free of those who serve the Exarchs or the Abyss.

On occasion, the Faceless create what can only be called a

police state. By using their abilities of infiltration to enforce "purity" among their fellow mages, they can see to it that the community is not infested with hidden enemies. Establishing this kind of paranoid government in the Consilium is not popular among the Awakened, but the few times the Faceless have seen fit to institute this kind of arrangement, it has proven to be timely and necessary, as it exposed enemies of the Consilium who had long been working against the Atlantean orders.

The Faceless and the Veil

The Faceless have a variety of attitudes about the Veil and the importance of defending it from Sleepers, but the Faceless all know their duty to their order, and they act on their duty when necessary. Truth be told, the Faceless aren't particularly concerned with keeping Sleepers from poking their noses where they don't belong. That's not the Faceless' calling and it's not their responsibility. Other Guardians factions can police the unAwakened; the Faceless find doing that dull.

What the Faceless *do* do, however, is see to it that they take extra precautions never to be seen using vulgar magic (and some of the rotes they use most frequently, like Life 3 "Two Faces" are unavoidably vulgar.) Every Guardian of the Veil knows full well the relationship between Paradoxes and the Abyss, and courting Paradoxes is playing fast and loose with the order's responsibilities. Still, even when the Faceless do suffer Paradoxes, they know in their heart of hearts that it's better to suffer Paradoxes for a purpose than to play too safely and risk – and achieve – nothing. If any mage is going to suffer the taint of Paradoxes, the Guardians are already damned, so it may as well be them.

Stereotypes

Inheritors: With just a little effort, they could play us quite convincingly.

Messianics: Their religious fervor is a self-serving mask. We know. We've worn it.

Ordeal Keepers: When they come up with a test we can't cheat our way through, then we'll pay attention.

Prophets: Without their diplomatic efforts, the other Atlantean mages would see us as rabid dogs – and take action accordingly.

Appearance: Any appearance they choose. No other mages are so malleable, so multifaceted, so protean. The Faceless can be anyone. They are not limited by age, body type, sex, sexual orientation, race or similar factors. One moment the Faceless is Bob, the guy downstairs as he's working on his car, 10 minutes later the Faceless is your girlfriend Tracy as she's going down on you, and next week the Faceless will be Captain Selzer, the city's chief of police, as he investigates your mysterious disappearance. They can wear any face. They are the Faceless.

Of all the Guardians factions, only the Faceless can honestly be

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said to have no favorites among the Masques. On the contrary, these mages are constantly striving to learn more of the Masques. The Faceless get more satisfaction out of changing Masques than sticking with any single one for too long. Many of the Faceless have a low boredom threshold, and playing a single role for more than a few weeks strikes them as insufferably tedious (although they can easily do it if the stakes are high enough).

Sanctum: The Faceless change their sanctums like most people change hairstyles. One day the sanctum is a louse-infested flophouse, the next week it's the executive suite at the Covington Arms, and the following month the sanctum is a cute little house in the suburbs with two goofy dogs and a white picket fence. Much of the security of these mages' sanctums stems from the fact that others simply can't keep track of where the Faceless are from week to week.

For the cost of one additional Merit dot, a Faceless mage may move his dots in the Sanctum Merit to a new location once per week, distributing its size and security aspects however best suits the new location.

Background: It takes a very particular background to propel a mage into service as one of the Faceless. Some have traumatic histories and want to forget their pasts. Others are wracked by guilt, self-loathing or plain old low self-esteem and want to permanently lose themselves behind a mask of someone else. Those for whom any sort of appearances matter — actors, models, prostitutes and priests — often gravitate toward this faction. Sociopaths, schizophrenics and liars often find themselves called to serve the Faceless as a means of turning flaws to their advantage. Many of those who join the Faceless are hyperactive, have ADHD or, at the very least, have very low boredom thresholds. Many of them have thrill-seeking personalities and only the constant danger and intrigue that this faction is built around carries enough payoff to keep these adrenaline junkies focused on the business at hand.

Organization: Impossible though it might seem for such a varied and variable lot to maintain communication with one

another, no less a coherent organizational framework, the Faceless may well be the best organized of the Guardians factions. Whether this stems from the sheer discipline required to master the faction's tactics, from the deep bond that develops during the Faceless' difficult apprenticeships or simply an uncanny intuitive knack for recognizing and communicating with their own, the Faceless network and organize with practiced finesse. The faction's interactions are informal to the point of chaotic, but all members recognize and acknowledge a hierarchy based on talent and experience. Those who have completed many missions and mastered more Masques are treated with greater deference than those who have yet to do so. Elders are frequently willing to share their knowledge with younger mages they respect, although the elders may be tight-lipped with those who have not proven themselves worthy.

The Faceless keep track of their own numbers — they have to because no one else can — and at any time they're likely to know which of their faction-mates is operating in the vicinity. While it's considered polite for one of the Faceless to announce to the local Epopt when she will be operating in a particular area, the Faceless also understand that doing so, for whatever reason, is not always practical.

The only mages who seem to notice the absence of the Faceless are the Faceless themselves, and so the members of this faction must be vigilant for disappearances among their own number. The Faceless are surprisingly clannish, and they defend — and avenge — each other with a barely contained fury. Any mage who kills one of the Faceless may as well be reconciled to a painful and grisly death because that's what he's set himself up for — and no amount of paranoia will protect him from it.

Concepts: Charming social chameleon, unfocused madman who has found his true calling, ego-less "executable function," schizophrenic super-spy, clever weaver of complex webs, the actor who is always on

Quote: *Since I am no one, there is no one I cannot be.*

INHERITORS

As they see it, the Inheritors are the only faction within the Guardians of the Veil *really* dedicated to keeping the Mysteries from the eyes of the unworthy, and there's little the Inheritors won't do to keep the unAwakened from nudging aside the Veil and seeing what they're not supposed to.

Inheritors have earned the Guardians of the Veil a bad reputation due to the Inheritors' clear sense of entitlement, their willingness to administer rough justice to other mages and their poorly hidden authoritarian bent. The Awakened don't have a problem with the Guardians policing Sleepers — after all, it's clearly necessary — but policing the ranks of the Awakened is another thing entirely, and it makes the mages of the other orders more than a little nervous and hostile. The other orders, for example, don't necessarily accept the Guardians' assertion that Paradoxes strengthen the Abyss. In

the absence of that belief, those other mages feel that it's no one else's business if they use vulgar magic. The Inheritors, predictably, disagree, and that disagreement is at the root of the Guardians' alienation from the rest of Awakened society. When mages from the Inheritor Guardians step in to enforce their particular perspective on those mages, all the temper, resentment and hubris of the Awakened can quickly bring the situation to a flashpoint.

That's one of the many reasons why Guardians of the Veil rely on stealth and guerilla tactics to achieve their goals. And that works well. For one thing, the mortality rate is lower.

Inheritors and the Unworthy

Most mages and, by definition, all Guardians of the Veil, acknowledge the importance of keeping the Mysteries out of

the hands of Sleepers. Mages of the Inheritor faction, however, follow a subtly different directive: they endeavor to keep magic out of the hands of *the unworthy*. The over-broad nature of this category is strategic and entirely deliberate. This definition doesn't distinguish based on whether a person has Awakened or not, it judges others based on their intelligence, prudence and discretion in dealing with the Mysteries.

For the Inheritors, this definition of "unworthy" certainly includes Sleepers (or most of them). Those who haven't even Awakened obviously have no business messing around with lore (or items or entities, etc.) that they lack even the most basic capacity to understand. There is no question that Sleepers are to be guided away from the Mysteries at every turn. Accordingly, the Inheritors, for the most part, are the ones who set up the complex symbolic red herrings used in the Guardians' Labyrinth of cults.

The Inheritors are the ones who most often set up and manage cults so they can control what Sleepers do and don't know about the truth of magic. Because of the role the Inheritors play in establishing many branches of the Labyrinth, Inheritors slip easily into the role of Epopt, and it's a role they fulfill frequently and well. The Inheritors, primarily, are also the ones who are responsible for covering up *incidents* in which Sleepers were exposed to vulgar magic or other direct evidence of the Mysteries. And when circumstances warrant it, Inheritors are the ones, more often than not, who kill to keep the Mysteries mysterious.

Call the Cleaner

Inheritors often get the worst of those tasks that mages think of as "Sleeper-related" because of the Inheritors' well-known disdain for the unAwakened. The most onerous (and yet strangely prestigious) of these tasks is the role of "cleaner," and it's one played by members of the Inheritor faction in almost every city with a Guardian presence. While cleaners aren't *always* drawn from the ranks of the Inheritors, that's the case often enough that people think of the two as almost synonymous.

In Guardian jargon, an *incident* is defined as an instance of a Sleeper seeing more of the Mysteries



than the Guardians are comfortable with. In the narrowest definition, the term specifically refers to a Sleeper viewing a mage performing vulgar magic (and, in all likelihood, witnessing the resulting Paradox as well). In the term's broader definition, it refers to a Sleeper coming across any blatant evidence of the supernatural, from an imbued item that he inadvertently activates to witnessing a werewolf changing form. A *cleaner*, in Guardian nomenclature, is a mage who specializes in cleaning up *incidents*. Cleaners (who are most often Susceptors, see p. 60) typically have good social skills, reassuring demeanors and a wide array of appropriate uniforms they can slip into, ranging from common police uniforms to full HAZMAT gear. Competent cleaners will have extensive contacts within the police force, the media and probably the medical community, where their contacts, ideally, range from the lowest paramedic to the county medical examiner. Most cleaners possess ample magical skills to back up their mundane abilities as well: Mind magic to nudge away the curious and purge witnesses of telltale memories, the Fate Arcanum to create convenient diversions and, frequently, Forces to get rid of physical evidence (whether through creating light inside a roll of film or setting fire to the scene of a major incident). Rumor has it that some experienced Inheritors even know a rite that transforms corpses into sand. Well-regarded cleaners, incidentally, are among the very few Guardians authorized to use vulgar magic during the course of their duties, and then only *in extremis*.

The job description for a cleaner would be difficult enough if the cleaner only had to be responsible for covering up lapses in judgment by the Awakened, but that's rarely the entirety of this role's obligations. Cleaners are responsible for covering up evidence of other supernatural incidents as well.

Covering up after other supernaturals, from escaped demons to berserk vampires, is likely the hardest part of a cleaner's work. Other creatures don't operate the way mages do, and predicting what those beings are doing, or trying to do, can challenge even the most insightful mage. On the bright side, the worst offenders (vampires) have their own reasons for staying off Sleeper radar, and sometimes all that's necessary to take care of business is for the cleaner to discreetly notify the city's chief vampire, at which point the situation often resolves itself.

As a corollary duty (and occasionally a hobby) Inheritors also take responsibility for debunking Sleeper con artists who try to muddy up the picture by feigning supernatural powers or events. Some Inheritors see this as little more than a glorified version of marking their order's territory. The Guardians of the Veil have been putting on pageants of feigned supernatural activities for centuries at this point, and they don't care to have amateurs moving in on their territory and complicating matters.

The Most Dangerous Game

Mages of the Inheritor faction are well-known for their criticism of Sleepers. What the Inheritors sometimes soft pedal to their Awakened peers, however, is that the Inheritors find some of their fellow mages just as unworthy of the Mysteries as any Sleeper — and therefore equally valid targets for Inheritor enforcement tactics.

Putting those tactics to use against another mage is a *much* more daunting task than using them against Sleepers. Other mages have a much greater capacity to understand what's happening when the Inheritor starts taking action. Other mages also have a much greater capacity for striking back at the Inheritors if the mages realize what's happening. Inheritors, however, like the rest of their order, are quite adept at making sure their targets don't figure out what's going on — at least not until it's too late.

When dealing with sloppy or indiscreet mages, the goals of the Inheritors are, in some ways, the opposite of those of the Mysterium. Whereas the mystagogues are dedicated to discovering ancient lore and treasures and returning them to the hands of the Awakened, Inheritors are dedicated to taking that selfsame lore and those precise treasures *out* of the hands of mages who turn the treasures to flashy or hubristic ends, use them for frivolous purposes or otherwise abuse them. The Inheritors do this only with the greatest stealth and discretion, of course. While there are those among the Awakened who already suspect the Guardians of the Veil of taking an excessively parental role in the affairs of the Awakened, being caught relieving a mage of a favored toy (or, worse, his life) would remove all doubt and put the Guardians in general in a particularly fragile position, politically speaking.

When worse turns to worst — and there have been points where it has — the Guardians of the Veil can claim, rightfully, that they have always policed the Awakened as well as Sleepers, but it would still be "an incident." It would be an even graver incident were the other Awakened to realize that the Guardians happily take possession of all items they take from "the unworthy" during the course of their duties. Unlike these items' former owners, however, the (aptly named) Inheritors generally have the discretion necessary to possess these items without feeling the need to brag about them, show them off or use them at the drop of a hat.

Were other mages, particularly those of the Mysterium, to realize the full extent of the enormous collection of Artifacts and similar items the Guardians had accrued and cached over their centuries of quiet enforcement, there would likely be a great deal of consternation among the Awakened (to say the least) and an absolute furor among the mystagogues.

Optional Rule:

Artifacts and Imbued Items

The Guardians of the Veil have been relieving indiscreet mages of their Artifacts and imbued items almost since the fall of Atlantis (some claim even before that). After several centuries of this, the Guardians have come to have a great wealth of such items that have been passed down from mentor to apprentice for millennia. Certain generous Guardian mentors have seen fit to pass on some of this confiscated wealth to their favored apprentices. Accordingly, Guard-

ian characters may take the Artifact and Imbued Item Merits at character creation for one dot less cost than their indiscreet peers.

The caveat here, of course, is that the character must use the item with the same extraordinary discretion as her mentor and forebears within the order. Should the character brag about the item, wave it around like a trophy or make blatant or repeated use of the item, another Guardian (possibly her mentor again) will likely feel obligated to arrange for her to lose it — or at least misplace it for a long while until she learns a modicum of good judgment.

A player should feel free to ask the Storyteller if her Guardian character might benefit from this optional rule. The Storyteller should feel equally free to say no if he thinks it might unbalance his game or take it in the wrong direction.

Inheritors in Power

More than any other Guardians faction, Inheritors enjoy power for its own sake. They enjoy answering to no one but themselves. They enjoy the perquisites that come with prestige and status, the experience of giving orders and the satisfying feel of control that authority provides them. Since the Inheritors respect merit and earned authority as much as the next Guardian, Inheritors often force themselves to excel so that they are on the ones standing on the pyramid's peak without anyone to report to. They also tend to insinuate themselves well into the company of those in power, regardless of faction or order. They feel that they understand the burdens, the joys and the sense of entitlement that come with authority, and those in power appreciate that more than one might expect; so long as these figures don't slip into the category of "the unworthy," the situation often works to the advantage of both parties.

Even as they unctuously woo the local power structure, Inheritors tend to disdain those who are not in power. Inheritors particularly don't like Sleepers, whom the Inheritors often see as barbaric rabble. If any faction of the Awakened could be described as separatists wanting to abandon the unAwakened to their own fate (or most of them, anyway), that faction would be the Inheritors. These mages find themselves alternately disdainful of Sleeper ignorance and frustrated at the blinders worn by the unAwakened — despite the fact that the Inheritors probably put those blinders on in the first place.

Accordingly, in cities where Inheritors wield power, the tests for passing the three Veils tend to be particularly stringent (unless the Ordeal Keepers have some reason to push back against the Inheritors). Inheritors gladly hold Sleepers to a much higher standard than do other mages in their order (even the Ordeal Keepers), and the Inheritors insist that doing so results in a higher caliber of mage if and when the

Sleepers Awaken. Inheritors clearly feel that magic should be even harder to master than it already is. As they see it, stupid mages are a dime a dozen, and it's their hubris that is to blame for the strength of the Abyss — a problem that would not exist were all Awakened as discreet in their use of magic as the Guardians of the Veil.

Owing to the Inheritors' dedication to keeping magic out of the hands of the unworthy, they are most likely to volunteer for the role of Interfector. The position grants exactly the kind of power the Inheritors covet: control over life and death and the authority to weed out the unworthy who dabble with magic — Sleeper and mage alike.

Left to their own devices, however, many Inheritors often become so authoritarian and so intolerant of any Sleeper exposure to the Mysteries that the Inheritors alienate the Awakened community and find themselves unceremoniously barred from the Consilium.

Inheritors and the Veil

By far the most doctrinaire faction of an already conservative order, the Inheritors are against any Sleepers being aware of the Mysteries, including Sleepwalkers. As far as the Inheritors are concerned, Sleepers should be kept in absolute ignorance of the Mysteries until such time as they Awaken on their own, and even then they should be forced to undergo rigorous testing to weed out those who would use magic, especially vulgar magic, injudiciously. Out of sensitivity to the politics involved, Inheritors remain strategically silent concerning what should happen to mages who use vulgar magic too freely.

The Inheritors keep a keen eye out for Sleepers who stumble upon items they oughtn't, and when the Inheritors find such items, they gleefully and skillfully bilk the unAwakened of the treasure. When mortals are relieved of their imbued items or Artifacts, Inheritors see to it that the items disappear into Guardian vaults for Guardian uses — and that the objects definitely do not fall into the hands of the mages of the Mysterium.

Recruiters?

Despite their obvious anti-Sleeper bias, Inheritors are not always antagonistic to the unAwakened. On the contrary, when an Inheritor finds a Sleeper (or Sleepwalker) whom she considers worthy — in a Labyrinth cult, for example, or at the scene of some manner of supernatural event — the Inheritor is likely to do everything in her power to lead that rare worthy into mystery, possibly even becoming the Sleeper's mentor. For that reason, Inheritors are considered to be the highest caliber recruiters among the Guardians. If a Sleeper impresses one of these highly critical mages, he's likely to be truly talented and truly worthy of access to the Mysteries.

When an Inheritor takes note of a mortal, the Awakened of other orders also take note. Over the years, Inheritors have learned to be as discreet with their Sleeper protégés as the Inheritors are with infiltration and the use of magic, because other mages are only too happy to steal away the talented mortals favored by Inheritors.

Stereotypes

The Faceless: While their skills at infiltration are great, we'd be better off if they helped us guard the Mysteries better.

Messianics: They turn simple magical necessity into a religious experience.

Ordeal Keepers: Though it's a nice thought, some Sleepers just don't deserve a fair test. For that matter, some mages don't either.

Prophets: As close as members of our order come to heresy.

Appearance: Inheritors, like all Guardians of the Veil, excel at passing among any group they need to infiltrate. More than most members of the order, however, Inheritors like to take on the mien of authority. While one might prefer the uniform of a cop, another might prefer the vestments of a bishop and a third might be partial to the chains and tattoos of a gang leader, the common denominator is their fondness for positions of power — and usually cold, distant power at that.

Their favored Masque identities, accordingly, are unquestionably the Scepter, the Skull Priest and Lord Chain.

Sanctum: Inheritors take particular cautions to see to it that their sanctums are as bland and devoid of what Sleepers might see as magic or mystical in any way. For this reason, Inheritors are drawn to bland tract housing, mobile homes and large, unremarkable apartment complexes. They're also likely to invest an inordinate amount of time, money and effort (i.e., points in the Sanctum Merit) in security to keep out

unwanted visitors. Mages of some Paths, Moros in particular, often find themselves forced to choose between the sanctums they really want and ones that are more appropriate to their choice of faction.

When doing so is more convenient, Inheritors might make their sanctums in the main "temples" of their cult. This is certainly cheaper for the mage, but also presents certain security issues that most Inheritors would rather not have to deal with. On the other hand, should rumors leak about "funny things going on over at the Church of Eight Wisdoms," the cult itself stands to benefit.

Background: Inheritors fancy themselves the most pragmatic faction of the Guardians, but by "pragmatic," Inheritors mean the most devious and willing to deceive. While all Guardians of the Veil are obliged to engage in morally questionable behavior from time to time, the Inheritors allow themselves to derive pleasure from those behaviors. Tellingly, liars, sociopaths and con artists are drawn to this faction in disproportionate numbers, but then again so are police, politicians, ministers and therapists.

Organization: While the Inheritors is not the most populous faction of the Guardians of the Veil, the faction is, nevertheless, tightly organized. Whether they work together or not, Inheritors are likely to know (or at least know of) every other Inheritors in a 100-mile radius. When necessary, these mages can work together to contain a breech of the Veil. As usual among the Guardians, merit and experience determine where everyone ranks in the pecking order.

Concepts: Shrewd Cultor, psychic debunker, Man in Black, "cleaner," propagandistic screenwriter, Artifact hunter, minister of disinformation, exacting recruiter of talented Sleepers, author of cheesy, lurid books on "the occult"

Quote: There's nothing to see here. Please move along.

MESSIANICS

The Messianic faction of the Guardians might be thought of as the order's fundamentalist wing as well as its spiritual center. More even than the rest of the order, these mages experience their defense of the Veil as a spiritual calling and a religious struggle, and even though it may take a toll on their souls, they believe that their efforts and their pain are for the noblest of all possible causes: the defense of the Fallen World and, ultimately, the defeat of the Exarchs. For that reason, Messianic Guardians carry out their duties with the zeal of sacred soldiers in a holy war. Like the infantry in any army, Messianics know that they will have to kill, and they know that their own choices will inevitably take its toll on them, but they are convinced that they must play this role if the Fallen World is to last long enough for the Hieromagus to manifest and lead the Atlantean refugees to victory over the Exarchs.

For the members of the Messianic faction, the Hieromagus is the keystone around which the Guardians' philosophy takes shape. The work Messianics do, the lies they tell and the

murders they commit — all these they do in order that others may work to bring about the great deliverer of the Awakened and end the reign of the Exarchs.

While some other Guardians factions may interpret the Hieromagus as a metaphorical figure (at best), to the mages of the Messianic faction he (or she) is just as certain as the sunrise. For them, the arrival of the Hieromagus is not a matter of *if*, but *when*.

Messianics constantly monitor the Fallen World for signs that the Hieromagus has been born, and they work to preserve and prepare the Fallen World for the coming of this greatest of all mages.

Owing to their faith in the Hieromagus, and in their calling in general, mages of the Messianic faction take risks and push boundaries that wiser — or less certain — mages would not. The burdens Messianics take upon themselves in defense of the Veil are terrible. Messianic Guardians do not pull punches in their defense of the Mysteries. On the contrary, these highly

zealous mages go out of their way to mislead, manipulate—and, if need be, kill—Sleepers who learn too much of the truth of the Mysteries, and while Messianics know their deeds are evil, they do not think of themselves as evil. Messianic Guardians see themselves as holy deceivers and sacred assassins taking the most necessary and most extreme steps to preserve what is sacred. As Messianics see it, their entire *raison d'être* is to preserve the world, by any means necessary, until one of the other orders evolves sufficiently to produce the mage who will defeat the Exarchs—and then free the Guardians of their bad karma (or, in Western terms, absolve them of their sins.)

The Cult of the Hieromagus

Ironically, none of the sacrifices made by Messianics are offered in hopes of actually becoming the Hieromagus. According to beliefs long held by the Guardians of the Veil (and the Messianics in particular), the Guardians are the filth among the Awakened, bottom feeders and carrion birds who defile their own karma in defense of the Mysteries so that other mages will be free of that taint and have a chance at true ascension. Messianics see their own order, quite literally, as a necessary evil. They understand and accept that some of what they do is evil—it results in pain, suffering and death for Sleepers and some of the Awakened alike—but this is evil Messianics commit for the greater good. The dark deeds they carry out in defense of the Mysteries leave Messianics too tainted for any among their number ever to become the Hieromagus (although there are those who secretly hold out hope that their sacrifice will make them worthy of rising to that station). The Guardians are the Awakened who prepare the world, and Awakened society, for the coming of the Hieromagus. By assuming that role, however, all Messianics forfeit the possibility of ever becoming the one who will rise to save the Awakened. By sacrificing their own innocence and nobility, Guardians allow other mages to keep theirs intact. By sacrificing their own Wisdom in the commission of dark deeds that must be done to keep the Mysteries sacred, the Guardians of the Veil lift that burden from the backs of other mages—even though it is likely to crush them in the end.

Mages outside the Guardians are inclined to see this as a lose/lose situation: being a Guardian means giving up the moral authority that might allow a mage to become the Hieromagus, and, at the same time, any Guardian who has retained that kind of morality (i.e., a high Wisdom) is seen as insufficiently devoted to his cause, and therefore equally unfit to become the Hieromagus.

In general, the more devout a Messianic mage, the less concerned she is with morality or the loss of Wisdom. On the contrary, the more one of these mages expects the arrival of the Hieromagus, the more freely she allows herself to devolve in the name of her sacred mission. For those with faith in the Guardians' cause, extreme deeds are simply proof of extreme faith. The Guardians believe that those who show the least concern for their own degradation in their efforts to safeguard the Mysteries will sit closest to the Hieromagus' throne once he (or she) has defeated the Exarchs.

Magic

Though the worldly deeds of the Messianic faction may hasten their loss of Wisdom, their magical deeds generally do not. Messianic Guardians strive to use magic as little as possible, and vulgar magic not at all. Out of their dedication not to contribute to the dangers brought about by Paradoxes, Messianics often refuse to learn vulgar routes at all. While that makes their lives somewhat more difficult, it also assures them that they are not part of the problem that the Guardians are attempting to rectify.

The Humble One

Messianic Guardians tell of a hero, called "the Humble One," who might be the first of their number, or just an idealized metaphorical folk hero representing what all Messianic Guardians should strive for in their defense of the Mysteries. Tales of the Humble One—many of them, anyway—date back to Atlantis itself. The intervening centuries have seen the old parables change and grow. New tales of the Humble One have come about, and old ones have been muddled and confused with tales of other holy wanderers such as Shiva, Buddha and Jesus Christ, but the core of the Humble One's tale, his essence, has remained the same, and any Messianic Guardian will tell it the same, no matter where they're from:

The Humble One wanders the Fallen World wearing nothing but ashes and powdered bone; his head is bald and his heart is frozen. Because of his extraordinary cunning and stealth, his nakedness goes unseen, and there is nowhere he cannot be should the defense of the Mysteries require it. Every time the Humble One tampers with another's mind, every time he kills to protect the Veil, every time he gains a derangement or loses a piece of his humanity to his spiritual calling, he performs a small ritual in which he offers what he has lost as a willing sacrifice made in the name of those who come after him. While he may be wretched, he is so for the sake of others who benefit from his loss—and he would not have it any other way.

Whether the Humble One is a hero or just a didactic fictional character whose tales get passed along during apprenticeships, there now exists a large body of tales in which he models the behavior and attitudes proper for a Guardian belonging to the Messianic faction. Some Messianic masters memorize extensive bodies of knowledge of the Humble One, and apprentices are expected to memorize these tales as part of their studies.

Sabbatical

Many Messianics experience their lives as acts of ongoing martyrdom. The lengths to which they'll go to defend the Veil are known to erode their Wisdom at a frightening rate. Though some Messianic Guardians may romanticize martyrdom, and many of them lead lives aimed toward that conclusion, the reality of the matter is that there are too few Awakened and *far* too few Guardians of the Veil to let any of them fall utterly into moral ruin—or at least not quickly. The faction's ultimate goal is the defense of the Mysteries, and they'll never achieve that goal if their members all succumb to madness and moral implosion before even reaching Gnosis 3.

To extend the terms of service of Messianic mages, members of this faction observe a practice called Sabbatical, during which the mage hands off his heavier spiritual burdens (i.e., all forms of deception and murder) to others. During this time, which typically lasts at least one week, the mage may not engage in any of the "cloak-and-dagger" operations of the Guardians, and he may not use any Masques or use any magic beyond the Practices of Knowing, Unveiling and Shielding.

A mage on Sabbatical is not free to do as she pleases, however. Her obligations have changed, not fallen away. While on Sabbatical, the mage is charged with seeking out signs and portents hinting at the arrival of the Hieromagus. How a mage goes about doing this depends, to some extent, on the mage's Path. A Thyrus mage might observe the behavior of animals and the growth patterns of plants. A mage on the Path of Doom might listen to the gossip of the dead. A mage on the Path of the Mighty might attend to the subtlest changes in the flow of energy through the world. Reading news from the Sleeper world is another valid means of accumulating data about the world. While the truly important news rarely appears on the front page, a savvy mage understands that coincidence is the language of divinity and reads with that in mind.

The other part of this process by which Messianics regain Wisdom is simple atonement. While on Sabbatical, the mage strives to make amends in whatever way he can to those he has harmed in defense of the Mysteries (provided it doesn't undermine his own efforts in that regard), but all efforts in that direction must be carried out anonymously. Taking any credit for these actions prevents the mage from gaining any spiritual benefit from them.



So long as his character observes these limitations for at least one week, his player can raise Wisdom dots at a cost of (new dots x 2) instead of the standard cost. If the character uses proscribed magic, fails to seek atonement or allows any Sleeper to realize that the character is responsible for the good deeds, the mage falls out of Sabbatical and does not gain the price break. Regardless of success or failure, he cannot enter Sabbatical again until the beginning of the next season (the next Solstice or Equinox, as appropriate).

Messianics in Power

While the zeal and devotion of the Messianic Guardians might be expected to bring them to power on a regular basis, this is not the case at all. Their own inclinations and the active efforts of others have the effect of nudging Messianics away from positions of power. While these mages possess an abundance of zeal and devotion for defending the Mysteries, they have little of either for the drudgery of politics. Political machinations and Consilium intrigues don't interest them. Moreover, their tendency toward extremism and the purely amoral tactics they use to mislead and silence Sleepers also have the effect of alienating even mages who might be sympathetic with the Messianics' goals. Many mages fear the blatantly unethical tactics of the Messianic faction and actively work to keep them marginalized. Consequently, Messianics have very few political allies. If the Guardians of the Veil is the least popular of the Atlantean orders, the Messianics are probably the least popular faction within that order; consequently, they rarely wind up at the top of the political ladder.

As with every rule, however, there are a few notable exceptions.

When circumstances warrant it, Messianics don't rise to power in political campaigns, they usurp it with a kind of Machiavellian savagery. In places where the Mysteries have been repeatedly violated, where vulgar magic has become commonplace, where Sleepers regularly see too much for their own good, where the activities of other supernatural creatures threaten to nudge aside the Veil, Messianic Guardians assemble and do what needs to be done to take power and address the sloppiness of the local Consilium. More typically, political mages may step aside when they realize what's happening and what's at stake — or they may just be assassinated. More than one city has effectively been put under martial law by outraged Messianic mages, and while no Guardian wants to turn her well-honed cloak-and-dagger tactics on other members of the Awakened community, these mages will do so with an eerie alacrity if they feel that the policies of a sloppy Consilium have resulted in gratuitous violations of the Mysteries. If a Consilium gets too lax with regard to policing its mages, the Messianic wing of the Guardians of the Veil will not hesitate to turn its wrath on the Awakened establishment until the situation is rectified. Likewise, if the breach is the fault of other supernatural entities, Messianics will launch a nearly invisible crusade against those creatures the likes of which they've never seen.

Messianics and the Veil

For these mages, protecting the Veil isn't a matter of duty, but a matter of sacred calling. Their devotion to their obligation to the Veil transcends rationality or even self-preservation. One of these mages, when asked whether the things he did in defense of the Veil ever bothered him responded, "What I fight for is so much more precious than my own soul, that even if the Hieromagus never manifested, I would still be doing the right thing. Though I might be damned, the Abyss will still be farther away than it would be had I never been here."

Messianics know all about magic; they know about Atlantis and the Exarchs, but Messianics are happy to keep that knowledge to themselves. As a symbol of their devotion to the Mysteries, they often refuse to learn vulgar rotes so they need never worry about inadvertently causing Paradoxes. While they're capable of casting vulgar spells, many Messianics would rather die than do so, and the rest would have to be in extremis before they would resort to such tactics.

Stereotypes

The Faceless: It's good that they're so mysterious to others, but it's too bad that they're so mysterious to themselves.

Inheritors: While they lack our faith in the Hieromagus, they are dedicated defenders of the Mysteries.

Ordeal Keepers: Their violent tactics draw unwanted attention to our work.

Prophets: While their quest to educate the Sleeping masses is noble, some of their tactics verge on heresy. If they go too far, we'll have to step in.

Appearance: By and large, Messianic Guardians are just as subtle as their fellow mages, and they easily fade into the background wherever they go, but, among members of their own order, they do stand out for one minor reason. The stress of the Messianics' calling often shows through if they're not taking active steps to hide its telltale signs. They may look gaunt, have dark circles under their eyes or may seem a little unhinged due to the derangements their loss of Wisdom has garnered them. Many of these mages seem a little shifty, again due in part to the low Wisdom scores common to their number.

Guardians in the Messianic faction have particular Masques that they either favor or find easier to don than others; these include the Vizier, the Whip, the Factor, the Flame Tender and the Devout.

Sanctum: The monastic tendency of many Messianic Guardians regularly shows up in their choice of sanctum. Members of this faction tend toward small and simple digs. They rarely own much beyond their clothes and a few other favored possessions, so a simple cell in a cloister or a rented basement in a house is plenty for their needs.

Background: Holy men and thugs are equally drawn to the calling of the Messianics. The former because of their love for the world, the latter for the sacred cause to which they can turn their violence.

Organization: These Guardians have the least organization of any in the order. Their membership is spread over the planet, but their numbers are small, and often the only other Messianic Guardian many of these mages know is their mentor. More than a handful of Messianic Guardians in a single locale is rare, and only the largest cities will have even that many. This often leads to a sense of alienation; it's hard enough to follow the tenets of the Guardians of the Veil, to take on the sins of the Awakened community for the betterment of the world, but even harder is clinging to belief in the Hieromagus when even other Guardians treat you like you're a bit of a zealot or a nutcase. Those in this faction often pass as members of other Guardians factions just to avoid the stigma that comes with the Messianics' particular take on the order's philosophies. That, of course, makes it even harder for them to connect with other Messianics.

When these mages do find each other, however, they often have much in common, and they may find themselves opening up as they've never done before. Much of this faction's ties are based on a network of personal friendships. Still, the Guardians' reverence for merit ensures that a hierarchy of sorts develops between any group of Messianics, just so they know who gives directions and who takes them.

These personal friendships often lead Messianic Guardians to call on one another more than they would call on other members of the Awakened community, or even other Guardians of the Veil. This is particularly true if one of these mages feels that his local Consilium has become too lax in its defense of the Mysteries. A few phone calls by one mage can activate an entire network of Messianics into a full-fledged crusade.

Concepts: Awakened terrorist, itinerant monk, devoted defender of the Mysteries, jaded martyr, sociopath with a cause

Quote: *My sacrifice lets you hope for a better world and victory over the Exarchs. What will your sacrifice achieve?*

ORDEAL KEEPERS

All Guardians of the Veil value and reward achievement and individual merit, but none more than the Ordeal Keepers, who pride themselves on their constant pursuit of perfection. They don't just test themselves, however, but those Sleepers who would earn the right to study the Mysteries and the Ordeal Keepers' fellow mages as well.

Just as all Guardians of the Veil, Ordeal Keepers defile their own karma in their subtle crusade to prevent Sleepers from seeing the Mysteries at work in the world around them, but, unlike the order's other factions, the Ordeal Keepers seek to make up for that spiritual defilement by honing their minds and bodies to a particularly keen edge by way of compensating for their spiritual deficits — and keeping them sharp through constant quests and testing.

Ordeal Keepers are firm believers in the Greek ideal of maintaining a strong mind and a strong body so that the two can reinforce each other. The world throws all manner of tests at the Awakened, and those having only a single strength or skill set are less likely to master themselves and the world around them than those who strive to have a myriad of talents and abilities honed to an edge at any given time. Due to certain philosophical similarities, Ordeal Keepers are by far the most popular Guardians faction among Thyrus mages, who also tend toward a certain "survival of the fittest" mentality.

Of all the Guardians of the Veil factions, Ordeal Keepers are the most willing to enter into direct physical combat. While they aren't usually masters of direct physical conflict like the mages of the Adamantine Arrow, the high degree of mental and physical training among the Ordeal Keepers makes them fierce opponents. Any of the Physical Merits listed on pp. 110–114 of the *World of Darkness* Rulebook can commonly

be found in these highly trained mages, and some of them have trained themselves to the very edge of human physical potential through their rigorous physical regimens.

More even than other Guardians factions, the Ordeal Keepers are advocates of a strict meritocracy, or rule by the most competent and skilled. Consequently, they are ardent foes of cronyism or any system of assigning authority in which competence is not the sole criterion for assessing worth and fitness to lead. Even after an Ordeal Keeper's competence (in whatever arena) has been established, it is expected that such skills will be constantly tested and reinforced to ensure that the mage is not "resting on her laurels." The zeal shown by Ordeal Keepers for strict meritocracy has occasionally brought the faction into conflict with the local Consilium and even their own order when key figures in the local power structure, especially positions such as Epopt, Sentinel or Hierarch, rise to prominence for any reason other than sheer capability and talent. Ordeal Keepers have been known to lead the rest of the Guardians of the Veil into full-on rebellions when key Councilors are put into position without due attention being paid to their actual merit.

Testing and Ordeals

Ordeal Keepers believe that there is no merit without challenge. As one adage puts it, "On smooth water, all men are master pilots." The Ordeal Keepers arrange to stir up the seas a bit for those whose mettle they're testing, and they award prestige and standing to those who pass the most stringent ordeals, magical and otherwise.

In any community in which the faction is represented, Ordeal Keepers are usually the most eager to administer

the three Veils to Sleepers showing interest or talent in the Mysteries. Order Keepers don't entirely trust other mages to be as exacting as they are or to conduct the Veils with proper rigor. Accordingly, the members of this faction place a great deal of emphasis on the correct administration of the Veils, and they train their members very precisely on how to put Sleepers through the Gray Veil.

The initiation process is just one of many forms of tests studied and practiced by those in this faction. The Veils that they place between Sleepers and the Mysteries are just the first set of tests as far as the Ordeal Keepers see it. To these mages, writing one's name on a Watchtower is just the price of admission to the next level of (even more difficult) challenges. Ordeal Keepers believe that the right to Awakening must be constantly challenged and tested. It's a fine thing to be worthy of the Mysteries and Awakening, but the Awakened, freed of the mire of Sleep, are potential incarnate, and no mage can be allowed to sit on his laurels once he has seen through the Veil. Accordingly, the mages of this faction test themselves and each other on a regular basis to keep their various skills finely honed. Some of these tests are physical, some are intellectual, some are social and some are spiritual or mystical.

Members of the Ordeal Keepers have taken to standardizing at least some elements of these tests. This helps to introduce a degree of validity and reliability in the process so that faction members know that they can rely on members who pass the tests to possess certain skills or a certain understanding of the world and the practice of magic. Any mage may refuse a given test if he feels he is not yet ready, but he is not allowed to proceed any further up the order's hierarchy until he consents to the salient challenge; at least, not so long as an Ordeal Keeper is in charge of administering the tests.

While any facet of an Ordeal Keeper's fitness or competence is open to testing at any time, certain challenges or tasks are more common than others, depending on the mage's level of experience and her professed goals within the order. Though this list is far from comprehensive, the following "tests" (to use the broadest possible term) are among the most commonly practiced by the Ordeal Keepers:

- **Vision Quest:** Among the oldest and most primal challenges, the vision quest is a test of an individual's physical, mental and spiritual resources. The candidate fasts and goes alone into the wilderness (or, occasionally, another challenging – but not necessarily hostile – environment) for a number of days. Though primarily associated with Native American culture, versions of the vision quest have been used for millennia to challenge mages, mystics, wise men and crones from a broad array of cultures.

- **Ordeal:** These are the grueling physical tests for which the Ordeal Keepers are known (and sometimes feared). These ordeals push the minds and bodies to the limits of their endurance and sometimes push the one tested into an entirely new awareness of her body and soul. To the Ordeal Keepers, mastering an ideal is the best training one can get in preparation for the duties undertaken by the Guardians of the Veil. The uninitiated believe that ordeals are about withstanding

pain, and there may be some truth to that as well, but the Ordeal Keepers themselves maintain that the real challenge to physical ordeals is to discover how profound an ecstasy one can reach during the ordeal. Two traditional ordeals include suspension and Kavandi-bearing.

Suspension refers to the hanging of an initiate from hooks placed through her flesh. Hindu *sadhus* (or holy persons), for example, hung from a series of hooks set into the muscles of their backs and the backs of their thighs. The Native American O-Kee-Pa ceremony, in a similar vein, saw men hang from large bone hooks put through their pectoral muscles. Another ordeal, borrowed from Scandinavian mystics, mimics Odin's ordeal as he hung on the World Tree.

Kavandi-bearing is another form of ordeal in which an individual dons a large framework cage that is held in place by an array of long needles and rods that pierce the wearer's flesh to anchor the framework in the wearer's bones. As the ordeal continues, the bearer first stands, then walks and eventually begins to dance. With each step of the dance, the rods and needles sink further into the bearer's flesh and send the dancer deeper into a trance of ecstasy and transcendence.

- **Opening the Inner Doors:** Some mages challenge their preconceptions and their perceptions by altering their state of consciousness with peyote, ayahuasca and other traditional (and, perhaps, not-so-traditional) sacramental psychoactives or "entheogens." Some of these tests involve communing with the spirit of the plant and learning lessons from it, while others are all about letting the mage see through his false assumptions about the world.

Enlightenment or Recreation?

Ordeal Keepers are intensely critical of mages (or even Sleepers) who use drugs for mere recreation or escape, as Order Keepers insist that doing so is a defilement of a sacred process *and* doing so with any frequency leads to a weakening of the mind (and probably the soul as well). Misuse of entheogens is grounds for expulsion from the faction.

These mages reserve their unmitigated contempt for any so weak as to allow themselves to become addicted to *anything* – be it opiates, nicotine or PS2 – as it shows not just a weakness of will, but poor judgment and an ongoing character failure as well. Ironically, they also see addiction as an enormous challenge and respect those who master their addictions and leave them firmly in the past.

- **Goetia:** One of the ultimate tests a mage can experience is the challenge presented by her own inner demons. Ordeal Keepers are great proponents of Goetic practices (see *Mage: the Awakening*, pp. 323–325), although only under the strictest observation, lest the process go awry. Those who master their own inner demons are held up as icons among the

members of this faction, and they are considered more stable and trustworthy than those who have not yet met themselves on the field of (psychic) battle.

• **Psychodrama:** Another method of confronting inner demons that does not rely on magic, psychodrama involves letting the mage re-enact certain key traumatic experiences in his past in order to reframe the experience as a challenge rather than as a failure or trauma. While not as reliable as Goetia for accessing inner demons, psychodrama is not as dangerous – and it has the advantage of not relying on magic.

• **Spell Juggling:** A mage challenging herself through spell juggling strives to discover the maximum number of spells she can place on herself or have placed upon her at one time, to test her ability to withstand magic in excess of her tolerance. Once she has a vague notion of how many spells, she strives to discern the most effective combination of such spells. These spells are, obviously, are expected to be covert.

• **Antithesis Persona:** The mage determines the identity of the person most different from him in the world, and through wits, deceit and, sometimes, magic, the mage lives as that person for a month. This practice is renowned for revealing a mage's weaknesses, unconscious biases and false assumptions. Consequently, this practice is quite popular.

Reincarnation

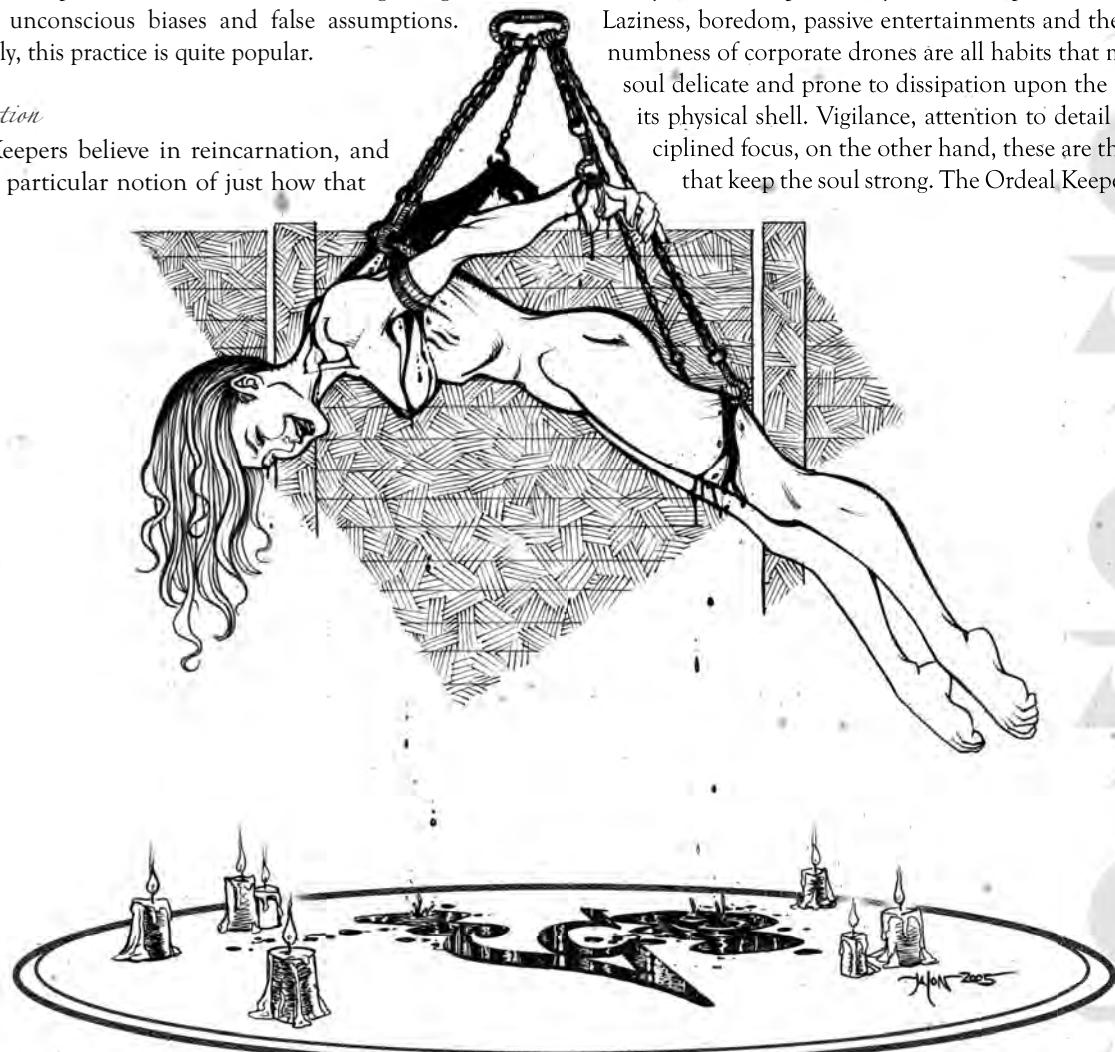
Ordeal Keepers believe in reincarnation, and they have a particular notion of just how that

process works. They hold that a strong soul is capable of making the difficult leap to a new incarnation, while a common soul is too weak to survive the loss of its old vessel and either dissolves or gets trapped as a ghost in Twilight.

Truly powerful souls, however, surf from lifetime to lifetime, incarnating in a steadily improving succession of lives, while lesser souls are stopped cold by the grave after only a single lifetime.

There is one key reason why members of this faction are enamored with the notion of reincarnation: they believe that this lifetime, their lifetimes as Guardians of the Veil, is a form of self-sacrifice that will pay off in their next incarnations. Ordeal Keepers believe that by sacrificing their morality and Wisdom in this life, they set themselves up to Awaken in the next life as well, and having completed this life of service (which is how they see their sacrifice), they are ready to go on to higher and more noble callings.

In order to make it to the next incarnation intact, however, the soul must be made strong and subsequently kept that way. In the eyes of the Ordeal Keepers, the soul is rendered fragile by ease, by habitual stupor and by mindless repetition and habit. Laziness, boredom, passive entertainments and the mental numbness of corporate drones are all habits that make the soul delicate and prone to dissipation upon the death of its physical shell. Vigilance, attention to detail and disciplined focus, on the other hand, these are the things that keep the soul strong. The Ordeal Keepers teach



that laziness and unfamiliarity with true spiritual discipline allow a soul to drift off to oblivion between incarnations, while a soul that is trained to remain alert and focused has the wherewithal to retain its coherence between incarnations.

Ordeal Keepers in Power

In cities where Ordeal Keepers have considerable power, mages are expected to keep their skills, magical and otherwise, honed and ready for use at a moment's notice. These mages take the notion of a meritocracy to its limits until it crosses over into a "survival of the fittest" mentality. Prestige is awarded based on one's performance in a series of tests.

Prestige among the Ordeal Keepers isn't handed out on the basis of magical accomplishment alone. Mundane skills – crafts, professions and other proficiencies – are valued as both important in their own right and signs of healthy and active minds. The Ordeal Keepers believe that since all members of the faction (and, indeed, the whole order) are Awakened, the simple fact of being a mage is not enough; the important question is what has the mage done since her Awakening? How effective would the mage be if she were to lose access to her Arcana? The last question is important given how strict the order is with regard to vulgar magic.

Ordeal Keepers and the Veil

Most Guardians of the Veil see Sleepers on one side of the Veil and the Awakened on the other. Not so the Ordeal Keepers. For the members of this faction, there are various shades of "Awakened," and those at the wrong end of the scale hardly deserve access to the Mysteries any more than Sleepers do.

As the mages who most frequently administer the Gray Veil to Sleepers, the Ordeal Keepers have a profound respect for this Veil and its function in the world. They are scrupulously fair in their testing of Sleepers. While Ordeal Keepers are adamant in their efforts to screen out the unworthy, they are equally insistent about admitting those who have shown themselves worthy of the Mysteries.

Stereotypes

The Faceless: They've clearly mastered the mysteries of identity, self and deception, but that's hardly the only challenge the world tosses our way.

Inheritors: They don't understand the difference between a fair challenge and a rigged game.

Messianics: So obsessed with fitting everything into their religious model of the world that they forget the basics.

Prophets: They like being liked so much that they sometimes forget the importance of judging others on their merit, not their popularity.

Appearance: Ordeal Keepers typically make a point of being in excellent physical condition, and they are often physically imposing. They are unquestionably the most athletic faction of the Guardians of the Veil, and not due to strategic applications of Life magic, either. Many of these mages wear scars from their tests like badges of office. The soft, the weak and the overweight do not last long amid the Ordeal Keepers, so such either stay away or adapt. Either way, not a single member of the Ordeal Keepers is likely to be mistaken for easy prey, either in the wild or in the urban jungle.

Ordeal Keepers don't dress to impress; they dress pragmatically. They wear only what is most durable and appropriate for the environment they're in.

While adept at any Masque necessary to carry out their duties, Ordeal Keepers are especially fond of three Masques in particular: the Unbowed, Lord Talon and the Eye of Mars.

Sanctum: Ordeal Keepers typically live in sanctums no less forbidding than themselves. Security is key for members of this faction, who often try to break into their own places just to see if it can be done – and to figure out how to improve their defenses. Whether mundane or magical, the walls of these places are often reinforced for strength and all portals are carefully secured. If an earthquake knocked down all but a single sanctum in a given city, odds are that the Ordeal Keeper's sanctum remained standing.

Many Ordeal Keepers engage in frequent and regular exercise and have home gyms and, occasionally, additional rooms for martial arts training and meditation. While this represents additional cost to the mage, it's sometimes the factor that gets a number of like-minded mages to share a sanctum, allowing them to split the cost of these extras among them.

Background: These mages often tend to come from particularly challenging and often violent backgrounds. Those who grew up in abusive households, soldiers who have seen war and those who have had to live in the harshest climes in nature and experience its deadly whims firsthand are often drawn to the strength seen in the members of this faction.

Organization: Ordeal Keepers observe a strict meritocracy. Those members who truly possess more competence in dealing with challenges and those who have survived more (and more rigorous) tests are accepted as leaders, while those who have not yet been tested submit willingly to the ordeals offered by more experienced mentors and leaders.

Unlike most so-called meritocracies, the Ordeal Keepers hold sacred the very notion of merit. They reward members solely on the basis of their abilities and competence, and not on any other basis. If there is an opposite of an "old boy's network," the Ordeal Keepers are it.

Concepts: Solo agent, high-performance athlete, crypto-fascist, theriomorph hunter, military intelligence officer, escape artist, neighborhood guardian

Quote: Challenges don't build character, they just lay it bare so all the world can see it.

PROPHETS

Often described as the most liberal of the Guardians' factions, the Prophets are easily the most diplomatic wing of their order. They are, without a doubt, more affable than most other factions of the Guardians, and much more adept at cultivating good will. When the Guardians need to reach out to other orders, they usually do so with mages from the faction of Prophets.

Prophets are not so concerned with ordeals, or punishment or even with preventing mortals from seeing through the Veil (at least not compared to their fellow Guardians). What Prophets *are* concerned with is gathering information. That information might be mundane or magical; they might get it from an informant or from a Tarot reading, but living, current, vital information is their stock in trade, and they are particularly fond of secrets.

Prophets are collectors and brokers of hidden knowledge and information, and they are veritable clearinghouses of secrets. They do not go on quests for lost lore, or stale knowledge; the dust of history they happily leave to the mages of the Mysterium. Modern, dangerous, urgent information is what Prophets trade in, and they go where they must to acquire it. The Prophets pass incognito among the enemies of the Atlantean orders where the Prophets gather what rumors and information they can from their enemies. Once it's theirs, they pass it on to those who can make the best use of it, frequently the mages of the Adamantine Arrow. Should a Prophet come across information that Pentacle mages just need to know, the Prophet whispers it in the right ears until the word gets around. Accordingly, Prophets are also "fixers" and networkers, introducing mages whom they feel, for whatever reasons, should know each other.

Prophets don't limit their spreading of secrets to the Awakened, either. As the Prophets see it, their function with regard to the unAwakened is the dissemination of harmless (but worthwhile) information that will benefit worthy Sleepers and raise the general level of consciousness just a bit. They do this in hopes that it will prepare the unAwakened for the real Mysteries. Ideally, the Prophets hope, the wisdom that they pass along will help Sleepers Awaken spontaneously, without the need for Labyrinths, Veils or any of the obstacles that Guardians are currently obliged to place in their way.

Prophets believe that even the most esoteric secrets, the most sacred knowledge, can be modified and "translated" into relatively safe wisdom that is both helpful and appropriate for less-advanced mages and even insightful Sleepers. While the goal is very lofty, others in the order make sure that the Prophets aren't spreading more than wisdom. By the time the Guardian has expunged all of the "questionable" material from this wisdom, there's usually very little left but parables, riddles and koans for the Sleepers to puzzle over, but even those, when properly interpreted and understood, can lay the foundation for greater wisdom and even Awakenings.

Prophets also disseminate knowledge and lore that has been deemed safe to share with other orders. This might include vague warnings based on hastily performed divinatory practices, like "things are going to get a lot more interesting come next week; you might want to keep your head down," or it might be very specific information about events the Awakened community needs to know about: "the vampire chief has disappeared and we're about to get caught in a turf war." Prophets have even been known to provide current information to certain carefully chosen Sleepers. Although Prophets would never show the unAwakened glimpses of anything they shouldn't know about, that doesn't keep the Prophets from providing vague guidance when it might clearly help avoid trouble or loss of life. Anonymous tips like "Evacuate the Haverghast Tower now" or "If you follow the mayor tonight, you'll learn exactly where her re-election fund is coming from" can go a long way. Some Prophets may even dole this information out strategically so as to give a nudge to the careers of favored reporters or cops.

Prophets are the friendly face of the Guardians of the Veil. Prophets are less intimidating and more sympathetic than others in the order, and if any one faction within the Guardians could be considered "mainstream" with regard to Awakened society, the Prophets would be it.

The Prophets are the "go-to" guys in the Guardians. Prophets gather information through all the standard mundane channels. They also use the spycraft for which their order is so notorious. Prophets, as their name implies, do not limit themselves to strictly mundane methods of information gathering either. Just as members of the other Guardians factions learn skills particular to their duties, so do the Prophets. The Death Arcanum lets Prophets learn secrets even from the dead. The Fate Arcanum tips off the mage that something big is coming up, while the Time Arcanum lets him know exactly when the event will take place. The spells of the Mind Arcanum are, of course, among the best secret-gatherers known to the Awakened and a basic understanding of Space lets the mage monitor people and places unseen and at a safe distance. Other Arcana have their own reconnaissance and espionage uses as well, but these five are the favored information tools of the Prophets.

On a mystical level, Prophets constantly monitor the world around them to gain information and insight. In addition to keeping an eye out for good leads and blackmail info, they also watch the world, the stars and the Shadow World for portents, odd coincidences, synchronicities or clues provided in the world around them. They are, among other things, their order's most accomplished diviners. Prophets are inclined to see everything as being connected; consequently, they monitor coincidence and synchronicity to make sure that Fate isn't being stretched or torn by magical or other means. Prophets believe that nothing big can happen, for good or ill, that doesn't cause ripples far in advance of coming to pass. Important people and events can be spotted well in advance by those skilled in

the Fate Arcanum, but mages of great insight often grow to recognize the same marks without relying on magic.

Casting a Wide Net

Just as they accrue knowledge, the Prophets also accrue contacts — lots of them. Information is a form of capital, and the Prophets are filthy rich in that respect. Some of their many contacts are allies for whom Prophets have done favors (or provided information); others are casual victims of Prophet curiosity, unfortunate bastards who were a little too slow to hide the evidence when a member of the faction stopped in for a visit. Blackmail could be considered a hobby for many Prophets. Few mages know quite how to wield information like a weapon the way Prophets do. Worse for their targets, they're not afraid to drive hard bargains, so if one of these mages wants something, they're not shy about asking — after telling you why it is you should want to give it to them. Unfortunately for those Prophets caught in compromising circumstances, killing the Prophet who's blackmailing you doesn't usually work especially well, since these crafty mages are as forthcoming with one another as they are stingy with everyone else. If one Prophet has turned up a good piece of dirt, it's likely that all other members of her faction know it by the time she even approaches her target.

For this exact reason, many Prophets tend to be financially comfortable. At any one time, one of these mages might have several revenue streams coming in, from blackmail victims ranging from a wealthy socialite to a priest with desires he can't stop indulging to a (literally) bloodsucking financier who has the town in his pocket.

Optional Rule: Network Spider

Prophets act as hubs in extended webs of contacts and informants. They are the folks you go to when you have to know something. They know people and people know them. Better yet, there's something about these affable mages that make people *want* to open up to them. To reflect the extensive network of informants available to the Prophets, a player with a *Guardian* character in this faction may purchase the *Allies and Contacts* Merits at half the normal cost (rounding down), so long as the character can successfully network with other members of her faction who already possess the purchased ally or contact. This cost break does not apply to the purchase of those Merits at character creation.

As always with optional rules, the word "optional" rules. The Storyteller is not obligated to let a player have any ability that detracts from other players' enjoyment of the game (that includes her own).

An Arsenal of Knowledge

Though Prophets are generally talented investigators, they don't necessarily have *all* the answers at their fingertips, but

that seldom troubles them. Even when they don't know the information in question, they're likely to know where they can get it. If, as has been said often of the Prophets, they can read people like books, then that makes the community around them a library — and them the card catalogue. They know who knows what, and more often than not, they know what it's going to take to get that person to open up and share that information.

These mages understand all too well that information without strategies for using it effectively is little more than a burden — and a dangerous one at that. They are, therefore, discreet in their revelations. They dole out secrets judiciously so as to maintain the value of their wares — and as a safety measure. Just because a Prophet has information doesn't necessarily mean she'll share it. These mages don't tell every secret the moment they discover it, and they might not tell it at all (especially if they're paid not to). Not only would that make their secrets worthless, but it would ensure that no one ever told them anything ever again. The Prophets, therefore, never say upfront that they do or don't know something; they say they *might* know something, and then they see where negotiations go from there. The power in secrets is knowing how to keep them until they're ripe. Some secrets need to simmer a while before they're ready to be put to their most effective uses.

By way of example: A mage can think her misdeeds are far enough in the past that they went unnoticed, and that she got away with, let us say, murder. But if, some 10 years later, she rises to the position of Provost, then she might suddenly learn from a local Prophet that her misdeeds hadn't gone as unnoticed as she had hoped. And, at that point, she's *much* more useful to the Prophet and his order than she would have been prior to her move up in the world. Knowing the right timing in such circumstances is another talent cultivated by these cunning mages.

A Prophet's interests are not limited to collecting and sharing information. Sometimes all a Prophet does is make connections between mages who need to know, want to know or should know one another. Prophets are fixers extraordinaire. Some mages would kill, literally, to gain access to Prophets' Rolodexes — but since Prophets keep every last name, address and phone number in their heads rather than on paper, that's not much of an option, even for most of the Awakened.

Prophets in Power

Though Prophets try never to make it too glaringly obvious to others in their communities, the simple fact is that *people owe them*. The Prophets have the information that mages want; consequently, those mages want the Prophets to be at least somewhat positively predisposed to them.

More than that, Prophets know how to cultivate good will. They do small favors for people here and there, pass along good gossip or let a mage know when it might be a good idea to lay low for a while. They give away these "free samples" so that when others are in the market for information or contacts, they know whom to go to.

And it works.



Between being the information specialists and the master networkers (and notorious blackmailers), Prophets almost always have a great deal of power in their communities that they generally downplay to avoid the appearance of being too dangerous (which, of course, they really are).

Though Prophets usually prefer to keep low profiles and avoid the offices of the Consilium, when not hunting for information they're under no obligation to stay in the shadows (like some other factions). When Prophets choose to make their move and call in favors, they can quickly find themselves rising through the Awakened hierarchy with an alarming alacrity.

Better yet, this rise is authentic. The political capital they wield is valid. The good will they cultivate (and the blackmail information they accumulate) 365 days a year come in handy when a Prophet wants to make a move up the food chain.

The other means at their disposal is wide-scale blackmailing. While this is hardly a stretch for many in this faction, it's not the approach that most Prophets choose to take. That's not to say that it hasn't been done — or that it isn't notably effective when done properly, just that Prophets like to be liked, especially by other mages.

Prophets and the Veil

Prophets have an awkward and sometimes tortured relationship with the Veil. They're much more interested in seeing the worthy brought into the Mysteries than keeping the unworthy from seeing the Mysteries. Still, Prophets are Guardians of the Veil, and they're tasked with seeing to it that the unAwakened don't know anymore about the Mysteries than they need to.

Prophets are great supporters of the Labyrinth system used by the Guardians, but not in the same way that, say, the Inheritors are. Prophets don't view it, as many in their order do, as a weapon with which to bludgeon uppity Sleepers into docility or an easy means of generating revenue, but as a constructive tool for bringing together the worthy and the curious and as a finely tuned instrument with which to educate and challenge seekers. While the Guardians don't teach the Mysteries to Sleepers, there is a great deal of wisdom and lore separate from the Mysteries that can lay important groundwork for mortals who might conceivably Awaken. And many of these wise principles are helpful even if the individual in question *never* Awakens.

Stereotypes

Faceless: What they do is ugly but necessary.

Ordeal Keepers: Their efforts keep us all stronger.

Inheritors: They make our relations with the other orders a lot more difficult.

Messianics: They form the ideological backbone of our entire order.

Appearance: The stereotype of an information-peddling blackmailer is something along the lines of a nervous, shifty-eyed rat in human form. Whether or not that image has ever

had any validity, the fact is that nobody wants to talk to that guy. People like to get their stolen information by — and pay their hush money to — nice, sanitized sources, people who look respectable, whether they are or not. Prophets give people what they want. Prophets take great pains to look like anything but the creepy little information peddler. They take pride in their appearance and smile a lot. Most go in for a vaguely collegiate or professorial look. Truth is, they're the best-liked members of their order, and they tend to be relatively wealthy.

Prophets gather information under a myriad of guises and coax secrets out of those around them through their expert use of a wide array of Masques. They'll use any Masque they deem necessary to get the job done, but the ones they feel most comfortable with and, therefore, the ones they use most frequently, are the Crown of Eyes, the Weaver of Whispers, the Opener of Ways, the Runehold, the Sighing Tower and the Prince of Feasts.

Sanctum: Knowing just how easy it is to obtain information from a mage's sanctum, Prophets tend to be a little paranoid about their own, so when it's time to find places of their own, these mages often invest in high-end security systems, and not just easy-to-crack electronic ones. They have dogs, traps and, more often than not, a whole array of magical defenses lined up to greet would-be trespassers. When Prophets have the option, they invest a great deal of time and effort in warding their sanctums from the scrying of other mages.

Background: Prophets often come from backgrounds in which education and the dissemination of knowledge is key. Professors, teachers, researchers, librarians and the like may be drawn to the Guardians while preferring this most liberal of its factions. Many Prophets are used to being mentors of one sort or another. Those whose approach to the world centers around gaining and manipulating information, especially information about other people — biographers, private investigators, paparazzi, stalkers — also find themselves called to this faction.

Organization: Prophets have a reputation for being well networked, not just with other Guardians, but with mages from

the full range of Pentacle orders, including the Free Council. Within the faction itself, Prophets make a point of sharing information with their peers in other cities. If communication is going to take place between two distant Consilii, it will likely take place between two Prophets. If something big goes down in a distant city, the Prophets often hear about it first, usually from members of their own faction.

The respect for merit and competence is just as strong among the Prophets as it is among the rest of the Guardians, and information travels up the ladder. Younger and less-established Prophets ingratiate themselves with their superiors by passing along particularly interesting gossip, developments and secrets. The Prophet at the top of this information pyramid is exceptionally well placed to know *everything* that's going on in his city and elsewhere, and he's also well placed to monitor the information gathering abilities of those beneath him.

Concepts: Wise master of the Tarot deck, well-known information broker, prescient journalist, lovable party guy, ambassador to the Consilium, professional blackmailer, master of an informant ring, avid collector of scandalous secrets

Quote: *You're a murderer, a liar and a very wealthy man. How about we discuss a mutually beneficial arrangement over coffee?*

Example Factions

Guardians who do identify themselves with a particular faction don't always do so in a general sense; they often join a particular organization, group or society whose express purpose is to further a certain factional goal or aspect of a faction's philosophy. Not all of the example factions given below are worldwide, although a Storyteller can find an excuse to introduce a cell in nearly any region. Omphalos, for instance, might not be active in a given locale — until a Scout from that group arrives to declare the location of a new underground labyrinth. How this group's arrival will affect local politics is for the Storyteller and players to determine.

FACELESS: THE ID

The most notorious instantiation of the Faceless is the extraordinarily violent organization that calls itself the Id. Its members, called Id operatives, or just "Id ops," carry out the secretive and undercover operations common to all those affiliated with the faction of the Faceless. Unlike most of the faction, however, the Id isn't content to correct a situation and be done with it. The Id is by far the most violent of the Guardians offshoot groups. This group likes to make statements with its activities — gruesome, sadistic and spectacular statements — and there's little likelihood of the Id's handiwork being mistaken for any other group's. The Id sees to it that those who cross its path — Awakened, Sleepers and other supernatural entities alike — become examples for what happens to those who insist on wantonly endangering the Veil.

The Id uses terror and paranoia like a weapon to isolate and manipulate others — and keep them in line.

While Id ops generally only target those who blatantly or repeatedly violate Guardian tenets, members of the group target their victims for the most gruesome, painful and dramatic executions the Id ops can craft. Given that they make ample use of standard Faceless tactics to gain access to their target and make the hit, they are terrifying enemies.

The other element that makes the Id such a symbol of terror for the Awakened is the grisly array of techniques, mundane and magically enhanced, with which they torment their victims. Members of the Id want the Awakened to know that coming to their attention is the *worst thing* that could happen to them, and they treat those they make examples of accordingly.

Paranoia is an almost inevitable side effect of any campaign by the Id. Being slowly and relentlessly stalked by mages who can take the shape of any ally or loved one is enough to unhinge nearly any mage — and that's often why Id ops do it. Not only does the stalking reinforce their message, but the paranoia gives the Id a tactical advantage. Nervous or panicking prey make stupid moves much more commonly than calm ones, tipping the balance of the game to the Id's favor.

The Id's targets are, for the most part, the standard targets of the Faceless: arrogant mages accruing too many Paradoxes (especially at others' expense), tactless and obvious vampires (other supernatural entities as well, but vampires are by far the most frequent transgressors) and any Sleeper who acquires some evidence of the Mysteries — and then can't shut up about it.

History

While the Faceless as a Guardians faction has a history going back all the way to Atlantis, the Id is one of the faction's most recent offshoots, having formed sometime in the mid-'30s in Indianapolis, during the city's big boom phase. The first cell was formed of five highly intellectual members of the Faceless who felt that the Mysteries (and other supernatural threats) were becoming a danger to the average Sleeper, whom they saw as blissfully ignorant of the supernatural forces around him. Taking their lead (and zeal) from the temperance movement of the '20s, they pledged themselves to a new standard of enforcing the Veil that was unrelenting in its determination and terrible in its ferocity.

For many decades, the Id had mages throughout the Midwest terrified. By the '50s, some were comparing the Id to the McCarthy trials (although members of the Id were never that sloppy in their finger-pointing). By then, the original cell felt they had achieved their goal in the Midwest, and so the cabal split, and the five spread the Id among Guardians around North America and Europe.

For a while, the Id was so quiet that many of the Awakened thought that the group had disbanded. The resurgence in the supernatural that took place in the late '60s and early '70s, accompanied by a generation of mages who thought that magic should be practiced openly, however, led to a series of vicious attacks by Id cells across the globe, revealing that the Id had not only not disbanded, but that it had taken root seemingly everywhere.

Philosophy

The Id's first cabal synthesized the philosophy that would later become the core beliefs of the organization. This philosophy, codified as "the Razor Manifesto" is secretly passed on to members of the Guardians who show frustration at anything that might be seen as "half measures."

The Razor Manifesto contains a number of tenets, most of which are observed by all members of the Faceless, and some of which are particular to the Id. Among these latter points are the belief in ultimate tactics and karmic reversal.

Ultimate Tactics

The phrase "ultimate tactics" refers to acts that are as extreme as is possible to be — mass mayhem, torture and murder among them — and they are the chosen mode of operation for the Id. As Id ops see it, the Abyss is the single gravest threat faced by the Fallen World, and no tactic, no matter how extreme, is to be overlooked in fighting the Abyss. Those who would invite the Abyss even nearer must pay the price in the most horrible and spectacular way possible, as a deterrent to others. No act of mayhem or sadism is too gruesome if it gets the message across. Since the Faceless (and most Guardians) already accept that they are obligated to taint their own karma so that other mages don't have to, this is a difference of degree more than any radically different calling.

Karmic Reversal

The principle of karmic reversal stipulates that if and when the Hieromagus leads Atlantean mages to victory over the Exarchs, that he will invert the karmic debt of those who served him (and by extension, the Guardians of the Veil) most loyally. Those who have succumbed to the greatest callousness in pursuit of their duties will be raised to the greatest virtue, as befits their uncompromising dedication to the defense of the Fallen World. While this notion isn't exactly a heresy of traditional Guardians of the Veil beliefs (though the Messianics do take exception with it if the subject is brought up), most Guardians do see it as taking a great deal of unwarranted license with the faction's traditional view of the Hieromagus.

Traditions and Laws

Members of the Id use the most extreme methods in their ongoing vendettas, and for that they are often accused of being mindless psychopaths.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

As Id ops see it, they aren't breaking laws, they're following a higher, more important law in the execution of their duties, and they hold themselves to rigorous internal standards of accountability — those standards just have nothing to do with having mercy for their targets. Id ops do, however, have everything to do with choosing targets judiciously.

Assess Before Engaging

Members of the Id are not blind to the horror they inflict. Before taking any action, they perform a very precise calculus in their heads to determine whether the message of enforcement they are about to send to the Awakened (or whomever) is going to be worth the damage they are about to do to their own soul. That is why they watch targets for a long time before taking action. Members of the Id wield far too much power to be loose cannons, and they accept that responsibility with all due gravity. A single slip of a spell, even one resulting in a Paradox, is not enough to get a mage targeted by the Id. On the contrary, a mage needs to accrue a long history of hubris and damage to the Veil before she is worth the Id's karmic sacrifice.

That said, there are those targets who, in the eyes of the Id, are automatically guilty: Scelesti, Tremere liches and any vampire who kills a mage have forever traded away their

rights to fair assessment, and they will usually be an Id cell's primary targets.

Rites

Id operatives channel their dramatic urges into their terror campaigns and don't have a great deal left over for pomp and circumstances, but there are two rites they conduct that they take very seriously.

The Transfer of the Manifesto

Once a candidate has been tested and accepted for admittance into the Id, he undergoes the Transfer of the Manifesto, during which an initiated Id op telepathically uploads the Razor Manifesto into his mind. The new initiate then recites the entire Manifesto (which takes about 10 minutes) and swears to uphold its tenets.

Vow of Discretion

This rite is a formal part of a mage's acceptance into the Id. Before he can be accepted into the group, he must swear an oath of fealty and discretion to the cell and allow a member of the cell to place a *geas* on him not to reveal the secrets of the Id to anyone. If none in the cell know that powerful Fate spell, then lesser spells (usually Mind magic) may be substituted until the cell encounters a suitably powerful Id op.

Emplacing the Tranquil Masque

An Id op who dies in the line of duty is said to have donned the final Masque: the Dead Man, an identity free of all Virtue and Vice and infinitely secretive. The rite called Emplacing the Final Masque entails conducting a vigil for the lost mage and the casting of a spell to place the mage's soul beyond all chance of summoning, capture or interrogation by any means. This is almost always done with powerful conjunctional Fate and Death magic that sends the ghost on to Lethe and its next (hopefully gentler) incarnation.

Titles and Duties

In keeping with the Guardians' emphasis on merit, the most competent members of a cell lead and choose the cell's targets. These members also get to choose any other roles they play in the cell, what Masques they wear on missions and the tactics used by the cell.

The Hub

The leader of a local cell of Id operatives is called the Hub. The Hub directs efforts in a local cell and often does this at a distance, never even meeting face to face with the mages he's directing.

The Hub need not be the most experienced Id op in a community, although she should be the most competent and the one most aware of the challenges inherent in orchestrating a unit of incredibly secretive and protean mages. It's considered moderately better for a Hub to stay behind the scenes and not join the cell's operations, but many Hubs miss working in the field and stay with the cells anyway.

The Hub has the responsibility of being the cell's moral conscience as well as its operational leadership. When feasible, the Hub maintains ongoing telepathic contact with at least one

member of the cell, and may use this as her primary mechanism for monitoring and directing the efforts of the team.

Appearance: Id ops generally find it easier to pass as members of some other faction, or even another order, as many mages judge affiliation with the Id as barely better than being one of the Scelesti. If it need be said, there's not a look that defines members of the Id. Most initiated Id ops find one another through a careful conversational dance wherein they casually drop comments and observe how the other responds. Some cells have taken to wearing subtle (but distinctive) identical identifying marks: an opal pinky ring, a mole on the left wrist (for those with the Life Arcanum), a diamond (representative of the Diamond Wheel) tattooed beneath the right thumbnail or other similar mark. These marks vary from cell to cell, so no group can be compromised if another cell gets caught.

Sanctum: Like any Faceless, members of the Id can live anywhere, and that anywhere can (and often does) change from week to week. Members of the Id pick unorthodox places as their sanctums when they can, places that wouldn't be pegged as likely places for habitation: caves outside of town, forgotten basements, large storage lockers, unused retreat centers and the like. One cell working in Seattle removed a large room from a hotel's computer system so that the room could never be rented out, and, with the help of just a little covert magic, lived there quite comfortably, rent-free and with daily maid service, for several months until their target had been neutralized and they were ready to move on to their next base of operations.

Background: Members of the Id are almost always older and established members of the Guardians. The Faceless don't want young, disposable burnouts looking to commit wanton violence in the name of any convenient cause. Anyone can be that zealot with the proper Masque, after all. Gaining members through such unethical and sloppy recruiting techniques does not fit the stringent ethical tests of the Faceless. In their eyes, such tactics are philosophically bankrupt. The path that leads to membership in the Id is far more often a slow, inadvertent one, with members getting there in small steps as their zeal eclipses their moral restraint. Members of the Faceless often find themselves unmoored by their lack of solid identities, and, after a few years, many find their dedication to Guardian ideals to be the strongest element in their psychological makeup and the one they embrace most vigorously.

Organization: The Id is not popular, even among those of their own order who may understand why they need to do what they do. Many Guardians refer to this group as the Id-*ots*. And among mainstream mages, if it need be said, they're seen as dangerous psychopaths. Consequently, membership in the Id is, necessarily, a secretive matter. Organization is along the lines of cells of operatives, who work together at the direction of the cell's Hub. Some are cabals that have worked together before, other cells are groups of strangers, brought together by duty and successfully working together only due to the careful orchestration of the Hub.

Concepts: Awakened vigilante, assassin of Banishers, doctrinaire zealot, jaded enforcer of "proper" magic use, relentless stalker of vampires, rogue agent, disciplined psychopath

Quote: *Somebody has to do the nasty shit, right?*

INHERITORS: THE XORAN FRAGMENT

One faction of the Inheritors has taken responsibility for guarding and maintaining what its members believe is the most powerful enchanted item left over from Atlantis. Complicating their responsibilities is the fact that this astonishing device is not in a single piece, but in several pieces into which it has been disassembled for safe keeping, until the Hieromagus comes to claim his rightful weapon.

Using the cloak-and-dagger tactics common to all Guardians, members of the Xoran Fragment keep the pieces of their so-called sacred burden either in constant movement or in incredibly secure and warded vaults so that the Seers of the Throne can never undermine the Xoran Fragment's efforts to safeguard the pieces of the weapon.

Almost as a side interest, members of the Xoran Fragment make an effort to reclaim any and all Atlantean enchanted items they can track down, and they are quite accomplished at tracking such objects down. With the zeal of any collector, Xoran mages track down items that have fallen into the hands of those the Xoran consider unworthy, and they "revoke" them. Truth be told, most Artifacts really are safer and better cared for in the hands of the Xoran Fragment, but that does little to ease the ill will induced by these mages.

History

Members of the Xoran Fragment have a history that dates back to the fall of Atlantis. Each piece of the weapon has a lineage of mages that goes along with it, a frequently interrupted (but never entirely broken) pedigree of caretakers, those who have guarded, recovered and, quite often, died to protect (or regain) the piece of the weapon they are tasked with defending.

The mages affiliated with the Xoran Fragment have their hands full. The fate of the weapon whose pieces they are guarding is of a grand enough scope that there are many, many parties who would like to get their hands on the devices in the faction's keeping. Only constant vigilance keeps these pieces of the weapon in the hands of the Xoran Fragment. On those occasions when a piece is taken, it is an enormous crisis for Xoran mages, akin to the Pope or the Dalai Lama being taken captive. On those occasions, the members of the Xoran fragment put their reconnaissance and espionage skills into overdrive to find out who stole the piece in question (they're under close enough supervision that they don't just get lost at this point), and then find out how they even learned of the piece in the first place. When they can be found, interrogators from the Id (see pp. 150) are brought in to question the thief, and answers typically flow quite freely at that point.

The most recent crisis in the guardianship of the weapon took place during World War II, when the Thule Society told

Adolph Hitler about powerful magical weapons being stored in secret sanctuaries around Europe. Hitler claimed three pieces of the weapon before his death and the end of the war in Europe, and it took members of the Xoran Fragment nearly a decade to track down the last of those three. With the help of several cells of Guardian cabals, the components were recovered and placed under much tighter security.

The Fragment

The Xoran Fragment (the group) is named after a shard of Atlantean glyphs that addresses the flight from Atlantis that took place just before the shattering of the Celestial Ladder. The shard is made of a durable and super-lightweight ceramic of a type that was common before the Fall. The writer identifies himself by name (or, perhaps, title) as "Xoran," and thus the fragment is named.

The text on the fragment deals with the exile of Atlantean mages before the Exarchs ascended the Celestial Ladder. A band of aged but incredibly powerful weaponsmiths, the makers of some of the mightiest Atlantean weapons, sensed the impending doom of Atlantis, and stole away as many items of power as they could liberate, including one of their most powerful creations, and fled the island with the aid of what the author calls a swift spirit of winged transportation (a reference that some historians say alludes to a vehicle and others say refers to an old and powerful transportation spell).

Philosophy

Just as members of the Xoran Fragment are very attentive to details, so are they attentive to the details of the philosophy that drives them. The entire doctrine by which the mages of the Xoran Fragment conduct their hunt for, and defense of, Atlantean items requires nearly 20 minutes to recite. The key points are included here.

Siblings in Responsibility

All members of the Xoran Fragment see themselves as sacred brothers and sisters united by their extraordinarily difficult mission of monitoring and safeguarding the fragments of the arc spear (see "The Weapon," below). This means comporting themselves with the utmost professionalism and compassion toward other members of their organization as well as being

accountable to them. The bond shared by members of the Xoran Fragment is expected to take precedence over all other connections in the mage's life, including those to family, spouse and cabal. Failure in this regard can lead to a mage being demoted and given less access to and responsibility for the Artifacts the group guards.

Understand the Burden

Members of the Xoran Fragment are expected to learn as much as possible about the creation of enchanted items. While the most powerful secrets of Atlantean item creation are lost, possibly forever, it yet remains possible to repair and maintain even some badly damaged treasures. In other cases, severely damaged enchanted items claimed by the Fragment mages cannot be saved, but to keep these items from being dangerous, they must be competently dismantled and disenchanted. Members of the Xoran Fragment are responsible for knowing how to do that as well.

Burden Bearing

As far as this organization is concerned, the highest calling a mage can follow is the defense of Atlantean enchanted items, especially the pieces of the arc spear. Those who do not have the understanding or wisdom to use these devices right aren't safe guardians for them, and so it falls to the members of the Xoran Fragment to collect these devices from the unworthy and reallocate them among their fellow Inheritors.

The Weapon

The mages of the Xoran Fragment guard the 37 components of a single Atlantean weapon of almost unthinkable destructive power. According to the mages of the Fragment, this was the greatest weapon that was not destroyed in the sinking of Atlantis, and the only enchanted item thought to be powerful enough to kill an Exarch. The weapon is believed to be the device called the *arc spear*, which appears in various tales of Atlantis. Such is the power of the arc spear that even the very Atlantean glyphs for its name nearly crackle with power.

When the arc spear was first smuggled out of Atlantis, the weapon was complete and in perfect working order, a masterwork of interlocking crystal Artifacts. Its original custodians, however, were fearful that the Exarchs would easily be able to see through their concealment magic and track down such a powerful weapon long before it could ever be used against them. At the same time, it was fated that a mage would someday be worthy to wield the arc spear against the Exarchs. (This figure was later determined to be the mage the Guardians call the Hieromagus.) Because of the arc spear's power and potential importance, destroying the weapon was not an option, but keeping it intact raised the risk of the

Exarchs finding the weapon's keeper or, worse, the weapon falling into the hands of those unworthy of touching it. The course of action they finally agreed upon was to disassemble the weapon into its most basic component pieces.

Though each piece of the weapon is a potent Artifact in its own right, no single component would be as difficult to hide from the Exarchs as the assembled weapon. Once the mages had taken the weapon apart, they spent several weeks creating ornate (and durable) boxes in which to house the weapon's components. They then wrote directions for its assembly on clay tablets (all they had to work with given their refugee status at the time) in Atlantean and a handful of other languages, which they included in every box. The boxes were then given to mages to keep, and these custodians scattered to the ends of the earth. Some of these mages hid their pieces of the arc spear; others established a dynastic guardianship for safekeeping the components in perpetuity.

According to the Xoran Fragment, though several pieces of the weapon have passed into and out of historical record, in the intervening years, the mages of the Fragment currently have all 37 pieces accounted for (though this could be a lie to preserve the honor of those mages who currently make up the Xoran Fragment). There are those who pose the question, "If the members of the Xoran Fragment have all the pieces of their sacred weapon, then why do they continue to covet and hoard other enchanted items?"

Traditions and Laws

Mages of the Xoran Fragment observe a number of strict rules pertaining to the gathering and defense of Atlantean enchanted items, with special emphasis given to the defense of the fragments of the arc spear. Those mages found incapable of carrying out their duties effectively are demoted to lower positions.

Relieve the Unworthy of Their Burdens

To members of the Xoran Fragment, Atlantean items are sacred, just as the Vatican might consider relics of a saint to be sacred. Atlantean items do not belong in the hands of any not worthy to handle them. In the case of Fragment members, the only ones worthy of handling the actual portions of the arc spear are the Hands, the senior and most competent members of the organization.

Defend the Collection with Your Life

To the mages of this organization, defending the fragments of the arc spear is the most important service a mage can perform. Dying in service to this ideal is an honor.

Rites

The Xoran Fragment has developed a number of rites that reinforce its mages' bond with the items they acquire and guard.

Linking

When a mage of the Xoran Fragment is given responsibility for watching over an enchanted item, a rite called "invinculation" or linking is performed that bonds the mage to that item with powerful Fate magic, so that even if the mage is separated from the item, fate will make every effort to reunite the two. A mage thus linked to an Artifact ring, for example, might lose the ring in the Pacific Ocean only to have it show up at an auction he attends or even in the belly of a fish he catches a year later.

Consecration

Consecration is the care of Atlantean items given the feel and tone of a spiritual event. The actual function is the cleaning, care and maintenance of the Atlantean items, especially the pieces of the arc spear, but members of the Xoran Fragment carry out their duties as though they were cleaning a sacred idol. By reinforcing the sanctity of an item, Fragment mages believe they reinforce the spirit of the item and ensure that it continues to function well.

Titles and Duties

Ceremony and ritual are important within the Xoran Fragment. Which item(s) a mage takes care of carries a lot of weight with these mages, as it's a direct reflection of their perceived competence. An older, more experienced mage will usually be put in charge of a more powerful item if she's earned that right, but if she reveals herself to be unworthy of that responsibility, she will, instead, be given a weaker or less important item to take care of. Promotion and demotion, therefore, are major issues within the Xoran Fragment, and the politics can be explosive if members let their egos get in the way.

Keeper

A Keeper is a mage tasked with the care and defense of the Fragment's stock of lesser enchanted items (if that's not an oxymoron). The position is responsible for researching, cataloging, testing and maintaining these items. Though the Keeper has a great deal of discretion in determining how these items are kept, and may even use the items himself, under the guise of "testing the item in the field," the Keeper is informed, early in his tenure and with no room for doubt, that the items he keeps are not his to do with as he pleases, but a sacred charge put into his protection.

Keepers vie with one another to prove themselves more competent than their peers, because the best Keeper in an

area is chosen to be the new Hand when the old Hand dies or transfers his burden to a younger mage.

The Hand

Only one mage in any cell is allowed to actually handle, touch or (on rare occasions) wield the fragment. This mage has one duty, and that is to maintain the fragment until such time as he either passes it on to its next Hand, or until he convenes with the other Hands to reassemble the arc spear in preparation for the coming of the Hieromagus. There are 37 pieces of the arc spear, each one defended and cared for by a Hand. Those mages number among the most competent, clever and powerful mages in the Guardians of the Veil. These Hands, like the items they guard, are spread across the globe, and each is surrounded by a number of other members of the Xoran Fragment. Attaining the position of Hand is the result of years (if not decades) of diligent service to the Xoran Fragment, and these Master Guardians are as shrewd and wily as can be found anywhere in the Fallen World.

Many Hands either come from or choose to learn the Legacy of the Votaries of the Ordained (see p. 169-171), choosing the Fragment to which they have been entrusted as their sacred charge.

Appearance: Members of the Xoran Fragment, like most Guardians of the Veil, look like whatever they need to look like in order to safeguard the enchanted items for which they're responsible.

Sanctum: The sanctums used by these mages may or may not be the same places where the pieces of the arc spear are stored, but when they are, they are extraordinarily carefully guarded and extensively warded.

Background: The Xoran Fragment appeals to detail-oriented, technical individuals: doctors, lawyers, engineers, hackers and those with similarly astute minds. Those with an interest in Atlantean history and magic find themselves more comfortable among the mages of the Xoran Fragment than anywhere else.

Mages traveling the Path of the Mighty are well represented in the Xoran Fragment. They are put in the position of the Hand more often than mages of any other Path due to the ease they have in mastering all manner of enchantments.

Organization: Merit is key. The most competent and experienced members of the group watch over the most important and powerful items. The 37 most powerful members of this organization are the designated Hands, who, along with their subordinates, watch over the Artifact components of the arc spear.

Concepts: Magical technician, tomb raider, Artifact thief

Quote: You don't need to know what it is. That's my job.

MESSIANICS: OMPHALOS

Omphalos is a Messianic sodality of mages who don't just await the arrival of the Hieromagus, they dedicate themselves to preparing for it. The members of Omphalos are dedicated to building and defending secret and highly defended crypts and tunnel systems across the planet in which to hide and raise

the child who will become the Hieromagus. Though they call these tunnel systems labyrinths (as distinguished from "the" Labyrinth, the network of cults maintained to protect the Veil from Sleepers), some of the more recently constructed "labyrinths" are little more than a simple series of nine or

10 chambers. Still, the oldest labyrinths (those that haven't been abandoned) have been constructed by generation upon generation of devoted mages, and these labyrinths truly have grown labyrinthine in their extent, some honeycombing their way beneath as much as 10 acres of land.

The mages of Omphalos also travel the world in their quest to find clues to the identity of the child who will grow into the Hieromagus. The sutras that even mention the coming of the Hieromagus are exceedingly vague, and none provide much guidance to the members of the Omphalos, so they are forced to cast a particularly wide net. Though they rely heavily on the vague direction of the Harbingers for guidance, the members of Omphalos are the mages who actually follow up by investigating possible leads.

At this point, most Guardian legends state that the coming of the Hieromagus is still quite a while off, but some of these mages feel that his birth could occur any day.

History

Omphalos is, quite literally, an ancient sodality. While it doesn't claim a pedigree all the way back to Atlantis the way the Xoran Fragment does, Omphalos' mages have records of labyrinths already built — and abandoned — in Egypt during the time of the pharaohs and in Sumeria during the reign of Gilgamesh (about 4,500 years ago).

Owing, perhaps, to their calling as guardians and defenders, the mages of Omphalos are among the most stable and well-documented mages in the Guardians of the Veil. They use the subtlety of their order to stay beneath the notice of all but the most curious and perspicacious of investigators.

Throughout history, there have been many instances of cooperation between Omphalos mages and members of the Xoran Fragment (see pp. 153). On rare occasions, the mages of Omphalos have allowed Fragment members to hide their enchanted items in abandoned labyrinths, though only in crises, and never for very long. Because of that, and the items that Fragment mages sometimes provide for members of Omphalos, there is a close alliance between these two groups.

Labyrinths

Omphalos is an old, old sodality, and they've been preparing the way for the Hieromagus for a very long time. There are labyrinths hidden beneath the sands of Iraq that were old when the pyramids were built.

The exacting laws according to which Omphalos builds labyrinths make them extraordinarily safe. They are, after all, built to be the crèche of the most important mage ever to be born. Even the resonance of the magic within labyrinths is carefully tuned to be nurturing and fortifying. All labyrinths are furnished with the furniture and furnishings required for a nursery so that all of the needs of the Hieromagus can be taken care of.

A labyrinth is always a Demesne so that

members of Omphalos can safely use vulgar magic to create, reinforce and defend the place.

Given that a labyrinth is often constructed by many cabals, and that its members almost always leave their soul stones to reinforce the Demesne when they die, some of these places are extraordinarily potent places of magic.

For that reason, among many others, labyrinths are carefully sealed away and warded when they are not in use. As far as the Guardians of the Veil are concerned, poorly guarded Demesnes are a recipe for disaster.

Philosophy

The philosophy of Omphalos is simple: the Hieromagus must be found and defended at all costs so that he may Awaken in safety. Labyrinths are among the best-defended sites known to the Awakened, and should the Hieromagus ever come, he will be as safe in a labyrinth as any place in the Fallen World can be. Although the Hieromagus must be given over to another order upon his Awakening (he cannot be a Guardian), he can at least be given a safe upbringing.

Traditions and Laws

Almost all of the laws of Omphalos have to do with the sorts of place a labyrinth can or cannot be built. Of these, one stands out in particular.

Labyrinths Must Be Wisdom-Placed

Among members of Omphalos, "Wisdom-Placed" is a term meaning that a place is well situated geomantically and not prone to any natural disasters. This means labyrinths cannot be built in places with volcanism, seismic activity, on floodplains, areas prone to hurricanes or similar threats. Labyrinths also may not be built too close to a city. Beyond basic common sense, this reflects the belief that when the Exarchs sense the presence of the Hieromagus, they will send every natural disaster at their disposal in an effort to destroy him before he comes into his power.

Several labyrinths have been sealed and abandoned (but not forgotten, in case they're ever needed) during the last three centuries as cities have sprung up in places the tunnels' original builders could not have foreseen.

Many Guardians, One Cause

Members of Omphalos, like all members of the Messianic faction, take their role as spiritual exemplars to their order very seriously, and one way they fulfill this responsibility is by emphasizing the bond shared by all Guardians of the Veil. This would be little more than a warm, fuzzy sentiment were it not for one key policy on the part of Omphalos: any Guardian of the Veil may use Omphalos' abandoned labyrinths (though not active ones) as safehouses or places of retreat. All that is requested in return is that the mages spend their time in the labyrinth constructively: maintaining the place or the spells that protect it. Since those are the same spells protecting them, few mages have a problem with this request.

Rites

Omphalos is perhaps the major organization arising from the Messianic wing of the Guardians of the Veil, and the faction's religious impulses make themselves evident in many of Omphalos' rites, which often feel like religious services as much as mystical processes. At times, priestcraft almost seems to eclipse spycraft, which is quite remarkable in an organization such as the Guardians of the Veil.

Dedication

On initiation into the sodality, members of Omphalos take a magically augmented vow to dedicate their lives to preparing the world for the coming of the Hieromagus, and to defend him through whatever means possible. This is a serious pact, and members are advised not to join unless they're very serious about following through on their commitments. Challenging though the calling may be, the Messianic wing of the Guardians has many highly dedicated mages for whom such a vow is asking very little.

Consecration

This is the formal title for the series of rites performed by members of Omphalos to determine the suitability of a site where a labyrinth is being considered and, if the area is deemed acceptable, to begin preparing the nearby area, in both the Material and Shadow Realms, for its purposes as a crèche for the Hieromagus. Usually performed by a mage on the Path of the Mighty, the rites of the Consecration are also sometimes used to redirect local ley lines so they channel good resonance and Mana to the area, allowing for the creation of a Hallow. The final phase of Consecration is the establishment of a Demesne in the vestibule, the first in what will eventually be many rooms in the labyrinth.

Deconsecration

When members of Omphalos decree that a labyrinth must be permanently and completely abandoned, they perform a rite of deconsecration so that the powerful magical aura of the place doesn't present any threat to the Veil. Deconsecration is a rite performed with great sadness, as it represents the loss of the work of many generations of mages. The labyrinth is first emptied of all furnishings, then tunnels are filled in using whatever vulgar magic is necessary, and, lastly, all soul stones that have been invested in the place are removed.

Titles and Duties

Omphalos has many roles for its members to step into, ranging from those mages who follow up on tips that might lead to information on the Hieromagus to mages who perform Consecrations on new labyrinths. The sodality's two key posts, however, and the ones most appropriate here, are the roles of Scout and Trapsman.

Scout

The Scout is responsible for locating suitable new sites for labyrinths, should such be necessary. The position gauges the terrain, geographic isolation and geomantic suitability of potential labyrinth sites. While scouting out new labyrinth locations has been necessary in recent years, as certain established labyrinths have to be abandoned when the area around them gets too crowded, it's not common enough to require a dedicated position. The designated Scout is also responsible

for keeping records of old, abandoned labyrinths, seeing that they remain sealed and occasionally reinforcing some of the basic wards, so they don't have to be cast all over again should the labyrinth ever need to be reactivated.

The Scout opens up old labyrinths for Guardians in need, and Scouts are the gatekeepers for the Guardians' extensive network of safehouses. Most Guardians of the Veil, consequently, try to make a point of knowing a Scout and remaining in her good graces, because she could very easily be the difference between life and death for a Guardian in trouble. While the position of Scout can be tedious, there's also a lot to be said for being the person everybody wants as a friend.

Trapsman

These are the mages who cast and maintain the spells that guard Omphalos labyrinths. More generally, Trapsmen are also the members of Omphalos who monitor the land above and around the labyrinth and take steps to see that it doesn't suffer from excessive Sleeper traffic. Trapsmen keep away Sleepers through a variety of subtle tactics of the sort at which the Guardians excel: misdirection, deception and, when necessary, strategic murder.

Obrimos mages are often recruited for this position, as they understand the magical techniques for implementing potent magical traps and defenses. Mastigos mages are also often called upon to use their understanding of the Space Arcanum to ward the labyrinths from discovery and for their potent abilities to cloud the minds of those who might bring Sleepers into the area surrounding the labyrinth.

Appearance: While not perfectly content in the wilderness like members of Ariadne's Chosen, members of Omphalos are more than capable of trekking across difficult terrain. Likewise, while they are not the consummate masters of the Masque that the Faceless are, they are well acquainted with the subterfuge and deception required to pass through strange locales unnoticed. They dress in sturdy clothes appropriate to their surroundings, but, other than that, they make a point of blending into their surroundings.

Sanctum: More often than not, members of Omphalos reside in the labyrinths they are preparing for the Hieromagus. This typically provides them with Hallows, ample defenses and risk-free use of vulgar magic. Labyrinths are exceptionally safe and surprisingly comfortable, but those members of the sodality who reside in them for long tend to find them more than a little tedious.

If stationed in a city, members of Omphalos try to replicate at least some of the benefits of living in a labyrinth, especially the security, although only a rare few will make the sacrifice necessary to establish a Demesne.

Those Omphalos members who are investigating tips that might lead to the Hieromagus rarely stay in any one place long enough to establish a sanctum of any note.

Optional Rule: Labyrinth Living

Living in one of Omphalos' labyrinths is more monastic and isolated than many young mages can stand. Labyrinths are rarely near even small

towns, no less large cities, they're not especially comfortable and they require a great deal of work to maintain the wards, monitor for changes in geomantic forces and the like. On the other hand, labyrinths are among the safest places a mage can live, they're conducive to vulgar magic use, they typically have Hallows and they're free. A labyrinth automatically provides five dots of Sanctum Security and *at least* two dots of Sanctum Size for those residing in them. It's common for a labyrinth to have at least a one-point Hallow.

A cabal beginning a game either hiding in a labyrinth or as labyrinth tenders for Omphalos might, at the Storyteller's discretion, get a break on the cost of the Sanctum and Hallow Merits.

Background: Women mages compose nearly three-quarters of Omphalos' membership. A good number of those attracted to Omphalos are in "helping vocations": clergy, therapists, doctors, nurses and the like, who see constructive service to the Diamond Wheel as a better alternative than some of the Guardians' more violent operations.

Organization: Most of Omphalos' organization is at the local level and takes place within the labyrinth itself. Each labyrinth has its own hierarchy based on individual merit and competence. The ranking mages of a given labyrinth are likely to maintain contact with their peers in other labyrinths so that there's some degree of coherence between labyrinths.

Concepts: Awakened spelunker, combat surgeon, feng-shui master, thwarted parent, shrewd safehouse operator

Quote: *You may be more powerful than I, but if you attack me here, you will lose.*

ORDEAL KEEPERS: ARIADNE'S CHOSEN

Tough, exacting and constantly striving to improve themselves, the mages of Ariadne's Chosen are living embodiments of the Ordeal Keepers' emphasis on attaining new heights through constant challenge. These mages are dedicated to reaching great mastery of themselves, and while others among the Awakened may pity Ariadne's Chosen's relentless drive and unceasing study, others also envy the faction's results.

Many Guardians see Ariadne's Chosen as a survivalist organization, and that's true as far as it goes: these mages are definitely adept at surviving. But these mages are much more than that. It is not simply surviving, *per se*, that they claim as their true calling, but achieving their maximum potential through self-discipline so that they can master any situation they find themselves in.

Ariadne's Chosen take their name from the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur. They state that Theseus had to surmount three obstacles: gaining the affections of Ariadne (a test of social merit), navigating his way through the Labyrinth (a test of intellectual merit) and defeating the Minotaur (a test of physical merit). Though the organization itself is formally called Ariadne's Chosen, individual members typically refer to themselves and others in the organization as Theseans.

Ariadne's Chosen is not a large organization, partly due to its exceedingly rigid membership requirements and decidedly unglamorous image. Of all the Awakened organizations a mage can belong to, Ariadne's Chosen is probably the most difficult and the least comfortable. While the mages of this sect are often physically attractive (owing to the fact that they are constantly pushing themselves to greater levels of physical fitness), Theseans are also seen as workaholics and uncompromising ascetics who never take any time to enjoy themselves. This is true in a

sense. Ariadne's Chosen do not, at any time, stop working to improve themselves. They do, however, derive a great deal of satisfaction from their efforts – far more than they would by doing something passive like watching television, for example – rendering those passive recreations unnecessary.

History

The philosophies of Ariadne's Chosen were central to many mage's lives before they ever came together under the umbrella of the Ordeal Keepers or allied themselves with the Guardians of the Veil. The Greeks taught the importance of developing both mind and body. Indian yogis teach that self-discipline leads to power. Zen monks praise the mastery and insight that come with practice and meditation.

Until just over a hundred years ago, those mages now known as Ariadne's Chosen didn't have an identity separate from their larger factional identities as sympathizers with the Ordeal Keepers, although those Guardians who shared such sentiments often knew one another. In the late 19th century, a British Guardian gave them their current label, and though the mages to whom the label applies may or may not use it, the term is at least there for those mages who want to refer to them. The term has caught on more in Western Europe and North America than anywhere else.

Once the name stuck, those mages for whom the name fit began taking note of one another and working together more frequently. Not only were mages who shared their particular ethos of self-improvement more empathetic to their myriad disciplines, but they also made more reliable companions in harsh or dangerous situations. When they learned that they could also learn new skills and disciplines from one another,

that brought the organization to the tipping point, and they began operating as a more cohesive organization.

Philosophy

Members of Ariadne's Chosen aren't particularly philosophical, on the whole, at least not in the vague, cerebral sense of the word. As they see it, they don't lead theoretical or philosophical lives, they lead actual lives, so they are concerned entirely with pragmatic issues of survival and mastering themselves in the present moment. What philosophies they subscribe to are very basic.

Beneath many of the actions of Ariadne's Chosen is the sense that the time until the arrival of the Hieromagus will be a challenge, albeit a necessary one, for the Awakened – and it's only going to get more difficult as the Exarchs start pulling out all the stops to undermine their efforts. Accordingly, it only makes sense to maintain the greatest degree of readiness possible, as reflected in the social, physical and thinking skills that these mages push themselves to develop.

The Most Fit Survive

Though the philosophies that underlie Thesean practices antedate Darwin by millennia, the scientist captured the notion quite elegantly. The world is a harsh place, especially when one has enemies or hopes to distinguish oneself from the crowd, and the best way to survive the greatest number of life's inevitable challenges is to develop all one's facilities to their maximum extent.

Ease Corrupts

Not exactly "idle hands to the devil's work" but close enough that you can see it from there, the phrase "ease corrupts" defines the Theseans' notion of what is bad or dangerous. Ease, and its twin, leisure, represent time that is wasted in non-constructive pursuits. Watching television, playing video games and any aimless social activity are all seen as corruptions of the behavior that is fitting for one of the Awakened. Theseans see all of these, and a range of other unfocused activities, as time cancers that fill potentially constructive moments with empty gaps, wasted chunks of the mage's lifespan. From the Thesean perspective, one is either purposefully going forward and making strides toward one's goals or one is drifting; there is no middle ground. They discern no difference between one waste of lifespan and another; watching television is no different from lying in an opium den in a narcotic daze.

Wisdom Embraces Frugality

Self-mastery allows a mage to do without a lot of the luxuries that most mages have come to rely on in this age of weakness – being an endurance biker obviates the need for a car, for example, while learning to work in the heat makes air conditioning unnecessary – and the money saved by avoiding these luxuries can be spent in ways that directly advance the mage toward his goal. Theseans renounce comfort for attainment.

Traditions and Laws

The Chosen of Ariadne have plenty of traditions, but no laws beyond "master yourself and your circumstances."

Self-Mastery Through Challenge

By challenging oneself through greater and greater challenges, the body, the mind and the soul are all made stronger. The unchallenged mage quickly loses his edge in combat and life, while a mage who constantly presents herself with an array of challenges constantly develops new skills and competencies.

When Called, Answer

Probably the greatest benefit of being affiliated with Ariadne's Chosen (aside from those obtained through sheer self-discipline) is being able to call on other highly skilled mages for assistance in challenging circumstances. Though not obligatory, it is customary to go to the aid of a fellow Thesean with all due haste the moment the call is received. Such requests are never made lightly. Given the organization's emphasis on self-reliance, any request for help is likely to be extremely serious.

Eschew Weakness and All That Causes It

Challenging the self is not enough. Developing oneself through one's behavior while tearing oneself down in other ways is unproductive. Theseans are also expected to stay away from anything that induces mental, physical or spiritual weakness. All drugs ranging from nicotine to alcohol to heroin are strictly forbidden.

Sex

While some philosophies that share a lot in common with the Chosen of Ariadne define sex as something that induces weakness, Theseans explicitly do not believe or accept this. On the contrary, sex is a popular outlet for these mages. The constant challenges they endure keep them in excellent physical condition and make them capable of long bouts of passion and certain activities that would be difficult for anyone not in excellent physical condition.

Since sex is one of the few "vices" Theseans can indulge in, they make the most of it. Based on their behavior, most would probably be considered bisexual. They are often quite promiscuous, and sexual in an array of other transgressive ways as well.

Rites

For the most part, Theseans see rites, and ritual in general, as theatrics that disrupt self-improvement. However, there is one ritual that is not only observed, but enjoys a great popularity among Ariadne's Chosen.

Competence Determines Standing

When two Theseans come into contact and it's unclear which of them outranks whom (they tend not to keep very good track), they are to engage in a trio of challenges – one mental, one physical and one social – to get rid of any doubt. The Duel Arcane may replace any one of these tests if both

challengers agree to it. Physical challenges may be combat (a duel to first blood), or could just as easily be a foot race, a test to see who can climb a steep cliff overlooking the ocean, or any other test of physical might. These challenges aren't meant to be hostile, but done in a spirit of good sportsmanship to see who the ranking Thesean is.

Titles and Duties

Beyond knowing who is more competent (and therefore of higher rank), Theseans don't care for titles or particular duties. There are only two classifications within the Chosen of Ariadne: the best and the one working toward being the best.

Appearance: Focused as they are on improving themselves, members of Ariadne's Chosen are usually both fit and attractive. They dress well (or at least appropriate for the circumstances). As with all Guardians of the Veil, Theseans are adept at looking like whatever they need to, but they stress the Masques slightly less than many Guardians organizations.

Sanctum: Ariadne's Chosen can live almost anywhere, although many members of the group forego any form of sanctum and live outdoors, or live in some form of mobile sanctum that they can take down and put up easily, like a yurt or a teepee. This option isn't as convenient in cities as it is in rural areas, however, and urban members might choose sanctums that they feel challenge them in some way, though how that might be expressed can vary. For one mage, this might mean the top floor of a six-story walk-up apartment building, while another may interpret that as living in a dangerous ghetto where she has to regularly stay on her toes and be aware of her surroundings to avoid trouble.

Background: Over the course of history, many of the mages who subscribe to the tenets of the Ordeal Keepers are those who have come of age (or at least spent time) in less-developed or more violent societies. That's equally, and sometimes especially true of the mages who join the Chosen of Ariadne. They don't see self-improvement as a hobby (like many Americans), the Chosen of Ariadne see it as a strategy for survival and a means of mastering a dangerous environment. While the Chosen of Ariadne come from a variety of backgrounds, many come from

indigenous peoples. Native Americans, Maori, Aborigines, Zulu warriors, Inuits and similar people make up a significant percentage of these mages. Athletes, ascetics and those who renounce a life of ease for personal reasons also make up a chunk of Thesean membership.

Ariadne's Chosen don't accept members into their ranks readily. They err on the side of caution. They would rather turn away a potential member than admit a potential failure, and all of the Ordeal Keepers' emphasis on challenge and testing makes them quite adept at screening out mages who really aren't cut out for the challenging life of a Thesean.

A Thesean character is likely to devote a lot of time and energy into improving himself, so investing heavily in Attributes and Skills is appropriate.

Organization: Theseans are so few and far enough between in First World countries that it's unusual to have enough of them for a cabal even in a large city. The ethic of the Chosen of Ariadne has spread around the world, however, and they're particularly well represented in regions of the world where their ascetic lifestyles serve them well, including the Australian Outback, those frigid areas within the Arctic Circle and the forbidding mountains of Tibet, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. A thin network links these mages, but it's a powerful one, and members of the Chosen of Ariadne happily accept the opportunity to work with one another. It is common to find these mages working in pairs rather than full cabals. They don't make a big deal of the fact, but they have a much greater respect for other Theseans than for most mages, whom Theseans see as soft. Most mages would rather not endure the constant challenges of being a Thesean, but those who are drawn to the lifestyle are powerfully drawn to the organization. Some Paths (and Legacies) are notably over-represented among the Theseans given their relatively small overall membership; included among these are Perfected Adepts, Orphans of Proteus, Uncrowned Kings, and mages on the Path of Ecstasy.

Concepts: Itinerant monk, high-performance athlete, obsessive perfectionist, hyper-disciplined yogi, self-reliant survivalist

Quote: *I'll do it. I'm used to this kind of challenge.*

PROPHETS: HARBINGERS

Guardians of the Veil are adept at sneaking their way into secrets and finding out things that they need to know to maintain the integrity of the Veil. There are other "places" where secrets seem to accrue throughout the Fallen World, places where normal investigation techniques are not sufficient to collect the information these mages need. The Harbingers read the signs around them to learn how things *really* happened — and how they *really will* transpire at a later date.

The soul is one of those places where secrets accrue. Harbingers read minds, souls, auras, hearts and cards, and then they synthesize all that they've seen to paint a coherent picture, a prognosticative dossier, of what the soul in question has seen,

its current state and what it is capable of.

Another one of these "places" the Harbingers scour for answers is the future, where all answers are laid bare — eventually. Another of these places where Harbingers look for their answers is the spirit courts, where some of what is to happen has already been decided by the forces larger even than the collected Awakened; gods, demons and stranger entities often possess vast troves of knowledge, and talented Harbingers can access that and bring it back to the Material Realm.

These are not the only places where the Harbingers seek the more difficult answers, although they are some of the richer veins these mages tap in their search for mysteries.

Harbingers are masters of coaxing secrets from synchronicity and information from coincidence. They may not be able to predict precise events, but by comparing disparate streams of information, they can triangulate on the general theme of the future, and they know when something big is on the horizon and what its general effect will be – and they can tell you what it might be if you’re willing to pay their price. This price might be money, but it’s more often information or a service of some sort, usually a seemingly innocuous favor that furthers the Harbinger’s ends.

Like all Guardians of the Veil, Harbingers are not afraid to endanger themselves, or their moral integrity, in the quest for the answers they seek. This has sent many of them in directions some have called dangerous and others have called mad. Some of them are known to traffic with vampires, werewolves and stranger forces. Some members of the Harbingers specialize in going deep undercover as members of these creatures’ society to bring back information that the Awakened need.

Some Harbingers regularly act as ambassadors to the spirit courts, where they converse with entities that are effectively gods in order to gain all manner of strange and useful knowledge. While members of the Prophet wing of the Guardians of the Veil are renowned for their plentiful contacts and strategic alliances, the Harbingers focus on developing contacts in the Shadow Realm.

Some mages see the Harbingers as busybodies, poking into everyone’s business. It’s true. By the time a Harbinger first speaks to a mage, the Harbinger has probably already looked into her future, studied the shape of her destiny and possibly even rummaged through her mind for loose secrets.

Those mages attached to the Harbingers don’t shy away from taking roles in the affairs of Sleepers, either. Some Harbingers have been known to “take inventory” of the destinies and inclinations of local movers and shakers and take action according to which of them supports the goals of the Harbingers. They may even see to it that mortals with goals congruent to theirs rise to positions of power, while those whose destinies might thwart theirs meet untimely ends.

History

The Harbingers were originally founded in Italy in the 13th century as a fraternity of Necromancers using ghosts to bring back information from the Shadow Realm. The two or three cabals of these mages were not allied with the Guardians as tightly as Harbingers are today, although that quickly became the case.

For centuries, the Harbingers operated under a series of names, and their philosophy and tactics spread across Europe, and then to those places colonized by Europe. Whenever anything big happened – the Black Plague, for example, or the discover of the New World – the Harbingers were already prepared to roll with it and make it work to their advantage.

As more Guardians factions took shape, the Harbingers slowly moved away from being magical generalists and instead became very focused on reading fate and synchronicity and gathering information that others could not. By the middle of

the 19th century, the Harbingers were one of the Guardian’s strongest assets, both for their investigative talents and their diplomatic functions. The last 150 years have only seen them gain in prestige.

Philosophy

Mages working with the Harbingers are focused primarily on obtaining knowledge, and not just safe knowledge. While they take definite risks in their quest for this knowledge, they also know enough to take appropriate steps to mitigate their risks as much as possible.

All Knowledge Is Fair

In the eyes of the Harbingers, there is no “bad” knowledge, and nothing that cannot be used for information under the right circumstances. Harbingers have no qualms about looking through tomes of diabolical lore; they just take the necessary precautions to protect themselves ahead of time. Harbingers have a favorite phrase that refers to this inclination: “It is not when the water is dirty, but when it is shallow that the wise man refuses to venture in.”

Traditions and Laws

Harbinger law is very loose and forgiving up to a point, but where it is strict it is very strict. This is necessary to give the Harbingers the opportunity to do their work unfettered by unnecessary obstacles, while seeing to it that they understand where their ultimate loyalties must lie.

Gather Knowledge Others Cannot

Harbingers can’t be bothered to get information that other Guardians of the Veil can get with little difficulty. That is not the Harbingers’ purpose. Their role, as they see it, is to serve as a kind of divinatory special forces, specializing in gathering the difficult knowledge.

Blurring the Line Is Acceptable. Crossing It Is Not.

In their deep-cover operations, Harbingers are often put in positions where they need to at least appear to be double agents. So long as they remember where their loyalty lies, and which side they ultimately serve, there is much to be said for temporarily joining the other side (when that’s possible), but the Harbingers are very aggressive about hunting down those who truly defect, and they’ve been known to call in favors from other Guardians, especially from the Faceless faction, to see that justice is carried out.

Rites

The key rites practiced by the mages of this group are those that mark the two most traumatic points of a Harbinger’s work cycle: leaving mage society for a long period of information gathering and returning from the same.

Kiss of Faith

This rite is observed just before the mage goes into strange or dangerous territory for an extended period. In a formal ceremony, the mage’s Mainstay(s) (see below) gives him one ritual kiss, which may or may not be magically augmented, that will serve as a reminder of what he’s leaving behind. A mage with

no Mainstays is rarely allowed to go on extended missions of this type, but if it has to happen, and the mage can't think of anyone else, the area's Nexus delivers the Kiss of Faith.

The other rite practiced by the Harbingers is the debriefing after a mission among hostile forces. This is described below.

Titles and Duties

Harbingers have a myriad of titles and duties, some pertaining to their ambassadorial duties among the spirit courts, others having to do with the particular function played by mages within the Harbinger hierarchy. The titles listed here are but a fraction of those used by the mages of this sodality.

Mainstay

Anyone close to the mage who serves as a reminder of what the mage has left behind: a close friend, lover, child, even a pet will do. Anyone whose memory might bring the mage back if his distance from home (and humanity) tempt him to cut his ties.

Divine

The mage with the greatest facility with the Arcana of Fate and Time is the area's Divine. The Divine, almost always a mage on the Path of the Thistle, is responsible for seeing that the local Guardians aren't taken by surprise – by anything. By probing the web of destiny for critical points of change and divergence and then looking into those points more closely with Time magic, the Divine keeps the Harbingers up on what's about to come.

This is probably the most difficult, demanding and underappreciated role that a Harbinger is likely to play in her community. Rare is the mage who sees *everything* that's in store for an area, or even her own cabal, and while nobody ever seems truly thankful to know what troubles are brewing on the horizon, everybody feels free to be very vocal about their displeasure when she misses *anything*.

Debriefing Agent

This position, sometimes colloquially called a "soul doctor" or "sniffer" is the Harbinger responsible for checking other mages for mental damage, infection, corruption and the like after they've returned from undercover missions among the enemy. Immediately upon returning from such a mission, especially one among the most dangerous enemies of the Pentacle orders (Scelesti and Tremere in particular, but vampires as well) – and before the returning mage interacts with others in the Consilium – the returning agent submits himself to a complete battery of physical, spiritual and psychological examinations by the debriefing agent – some magical, others not – to make sure that he has not been compromised in any way during his absence.

Among other things, the debriefing agent checks to see that the mage has not fallen to either the Tremere or the Scelesti, to see that he hasn't been programmed through the use of Mind magic or other means and to ensure that the mage hasn't been changed in any way by contact to vampire blood (the Harbingers are familiar with the state of ghouldom and

know how to scan a mage's aura to check for that condition). "Soul doctors" are also accomplished exorcists.

Debriefing agents are also consulted after a Harbinger has dealt with any dangerous lore (tomes of demonological lore and the like), to make sure the investigating mage has been unscathed by his studies.

At points in the past, debriefing agents have had a relatively high mortality rate, particularly given that they are specifically disallowed from going out in the field. Because of this, the debriefing is almost always done with at least one other mage present.

Nexus

The Nexus is the chief Harbinger in a given area. All Harbingers report everything to him, making him the main clearinghouse for all of the information gathered by local Harbingers (and some other Guardians of the Veil as well).

The Nexus synthesizes the information he obtains from returning Harbingers. If one mage has just returned from spending time in the spirit courts, another has been divining the future with Tarot readings and a third has been dealing with a cult of vampire mystics, the Nexus analyzes each of their reports in the context of the others. Looking for correlations between such disparate sources of information is seen as a means of getting the "big picture," and lets the Nexus see trends and patterns of coincidence that no other mage would have the opportunity to see.

The Nexus alerts other Nexi from other areas if and when she notes interesting patterns in the data she collects. Nexi are the nodes of connection in the network of Harbingers and the Prophet faction in general.

Appearance: Like all Guardians, Harbingers have a particular talent for appearing as whatever, or whomever, they choose. Appearances, therefore, can be deceiving. When not modified by artifice, however, their appearances often take on a haunted mien. Harbingers do not have the luxury of believing the comforting illusions or pleasant platitudes about the world that insulate other mages from the ugly, alien truth. Unsurprisingly, they are often prone to insomnia; they are often gaunt, and may have dark circles under their eyes as their badge of office. One glance at a Harbinger's true face, and one realizes that these are the mages who see too much, who learn more than they want to and who do both on a regular basis.

Sanctum: Left to their own devices, members of the Harbingers are prone to establishing their sanctums anywhere they can observe the local landscape, such as on the top floor of a tall building or the top of a mountain. These mages accumulate a good deal of information on occult events and occurrences, some of which is in material form; because of their concern for the integrity of the Veil (among other reasons), they are extremely security conscious. Knowing, as they do, the lengths to which they'll go to gain information, they take no chances on letting others rifle through their hard-earned secrets.

Background: The number-one quality for a member of the Harbingers to possess is curiosity, preferably of the persistent, relentless variety. Accordingly, members of this group might be investigators, journalists, busybodies, spies or even voyeurs. Like their fellow Prophets, Harbingers tend to be quite social.

Many mages allied with the Harbingers walk the Path of Thistle, as their aptitudes are perfectly suited for the group's work. Many more mages than just those of the Acanthus Path are members of the Harbingers, however. Because the spirit courts are one of the sources of information used by the group, those mages with well-developed spirit lore play a key role in the organization. Moros mages are also drawn to the Harbingers, as their necromantic skills grant them the ability to coax secrets even from the dead.

Organization: Within a locality, all Harbingers are ranked in order of competence and general experience. The highest

ranking of these is the Nexus, who acts as both an information analyst and link to other Harbinger cells.

Individual cells of Harbingers operate independent of one another, although all Harbingers are theoretically linked by the Nexi, who create the backbone of communication between all Harbinger cells.

Concepts: Unhinged fortune teller, itinerant exorcist, investigator of demon cults, ambassador to vampires, master of a ghostly spy ring

Quote: *I looked into this and I think there's something I think you should know . . .*

The Bearers of the Eternal Voice

Human history records countless individuals who could alter the fates of nations and the hearts of kings with their words. Great orators like Pericles of Athens made speeches that touched the depths of their listeners' hearts and spirits. However, not all amazing orators were great political leaders; some were inveterate con artists like Cagliostro, or figures of mystery such as the Comte St. Germain. The ability to lie convincingly and to convince others that the speaker is both truthful and worth listening to is not uncommon among Sleepers; truly great orators, however, who can convince people to change long-held opinions or cause those they speak with to trust their own senses less than the speaker's words are rare indeed.

For many, the attainment of such verbal excellence is too difficult and subtle a path to power. Most people find the more obvious language of violence, threats and bribes to be easier, as well as exceedingly powerful and effective. However, even the most dire threat or the most tempting bribe only serves to control the subject's actions – in their hearts, they still know and understand that they are being coerced and may someday learn to resist fear or temptation and disobey the person offering the threats or bribes.

Threats of disobedience soon start a vicious cycle, in which the individual who wishes to remain in charge must continually offer ever more extravagant threats or bribes, or sometimes both together, to make certain that their subjects continue to obey them. Realizing the difficulty and the ultimate futility of such endeavors, some would-be rulers seek to find ways to convince their subjects to follow them willingly and to accept the ruler's pronouncements as the ultimate truth. Long ago, Machiavelli said that it is better to be feared than loved, because love is more ephemeral, but wise rulers, as well as skilled con artists, advertising agents and some mages understand that being trusted and believed is best of all.

Whether Sleeper or mage, the path to gaining a listener's trust is similar – the speaker must understand the secret language hidden in every person's unconscious. This language of pupil dilation, posture, stance, vocal tone and many similar cues is exceedingly subtle and difficult to master, but the rewards are correspondingly great. While mortals who master these methods can become great orators and equally impressively liars, mages who pursue this Legacy can become greater still. Legends speak of a Bearer of the Eternal Voice being found at a murder scene clutching a bloody knife in his hand, but who was released solely based upon his account of the events leading up to his discovery with the knife.

In the ancient streets of Atlantis, the Bearers of the Eternal Voice walked among the populace, reassuring them about the wisdom of their rulers and convincing them of the urgent necessity of opposing the enemies of Atlantis. In this long-lost era, the Bearers of the Eternal Voice also went in secret to other nations, convincing both leaders and important members of the populace of the folly of opposing Atlantis and of the great benefits that would swiftly follow an alliance with this great power.

Since the Fall, those who study this Legacy are often called *Whisperers*, because of the hidden and secretive role they must now play. However, the necessity of secrecy has in no way lessened their powers. In the millennia since the Fall, Whisperers have found additional uses for their talents. The most important are being able to reduce Sleepers' Disbelief and halting the spread of knowledge of magic.

There are far too few Whisperers to talk to every Sleeper who has ever seen evidence of magic, much less the many thousands who have merely heard of such acts. However, Whisperers do their best to convince Sleepers that the most obvious damaging evidence for vulgar magic has some completely natural and

reasonable explanation.

Because Whisperers' abilities can also be used against other mages, especially mages less skilled in the Mind Arcanum, Whisperers are a somewhat secretive and insular group. This tendency is further exacerbated by the fact that their ability to manipulate others gives many Whisperers, particularly those who follow the Mastigos Path, a sense that everyone else is nothing more than will-less pawns whom Whisperers can manipulate as they will. This sense of superiority influences many Whisperers' dealings with Sleepers and sometimes carries over to their dealings with other mages. This same feeling also produces the intrinsic paradox that all Bearers of the Eternal Voice must find some way to come to terms with. Their Legacy is an intensely social one and to use it they must interact with Sleepers, often with large groups of Sleepers. However, Whisperers are also keenly aware they are manipulating the people they talk to, and some Whisperers regularly manipulate their fellow mages. While many Whisperers genuinely like people and simply have no problem lying to individuals they like, most are highly social misanthropes who do not particularly care for or about others.

While some Legacies are declining in favor as the 21st century marches on, the Whisperers are growing more popular — the growing prevalence of advertising, political spin, online con games and the increasing number of mages who realize the power of the ability to manipulate communication and belief all combine to cause mages to flock to their ranks.

Parent Path or Order: Mastigos or Guardians of the Veil

Nickname: Whisperers

Appearance: Although this is by no means always true, the stereotypical Whisperer is blandly attractive. One of the more basic ways to gain others' trust is to fit in with them. Unless they are attempting to specifically convince members of a fringe sub-culture of the truth of their statements, followers of this Legacy do their best to remain well-groomed and presentable, while not being so distinctive or unusual-looking that they make anyone notice them as anything other than an upstanding and honest, but otherwise average, individual.

Since there is also power in status and conformity, the business suit is the unofficial uniform of the Whisperers. The style, cut and quality of the suit depends upon individual taste and gender, as well as the circles that the Whisperer travels in. However, unless circumstances dictate otherwise, a Whisperer is usually found in a suit.

Background: Although they can come from almost any background, all Whisperers share a casual disregard for the truth and a comfort with lying. Many come from families in which one or both parents worked as con artists, advertising agents or in other professions in which the truth was considered to be highly flexible. Although in the past, Whisperers traditionally came from either the highest or the lowest classes, today Whisperers come from every social class and income bracket.

Organization: There is no real hierarchy beyond the basic bond of tutor and student for many Bearers of the Eternal

Voice, especially for Mastigos who have no association with the Guardians of the Veil. Because some con games and similar deceptions require more than one participant, most independent tutors require their students to periodically help them pull a con. Similarly, students who need another participant can either call upon their tutors and give them a substantial cut of any profits for their trouble, or seek out another of the loose association of Whisperers.

In contrast, Whisperers who also belong to the Guardians of the Veil are part of a tightly knit organization. These Whisperers are typically deeply enmeshed in the intricacies of the Labyrinth and are often important members of one or more of the central groups. Few Whisperers are willing to take sufficient time away from their magical studies to actually run any of the many groups involved in the Labyrinth. However, a surprising number of the important guest speakers and other major peripheral figures involved in everything from UFO cults to organizations of professional skeptics are skilled Whisperers. The most skilled and powerful Whisperers are exceedingly important figures in the hierarchy of the Guardians of the Veil, and their actions regularly causes large numbers of Sleepers to ignore incidents that might otherwise become serious problems for the Guardians.

Suggested Oblations: Going out among the crowd at some event or gathering and both observing and talking to people, doing a survey (either door to door or by phone), listening to charismatic speakers in person or on television and analyzing how they speak

Concepts: Con artist, pathological liar, advertising agent, corrupt religious official, politician, lawyer

Attainments

Bearers of the Eternal Voice must comprehend the subtle mysteries of the Mind Arcanum. In addition to understanding the various physiological responses involved in lying, they must also study the basics of the Life Arcanum. In the world of modern communications and mass media, knowledge of the Space Arcanum is also useful but not essential.

1st Attainment: *The Perfected Conversation*

Prerequisite: Gnosis 3, Mind 2, Life 1, Subterfuge 2

By simultaneously monitoring the mental state of the person the character is talking to and precisely controlling her own verbal and non-verbal communication, a Bearer of the Eternal Voice can become inhumanly convincing when talking to a single individual or to a small group (up to one extra person per dot of the character's Manipulation) with whom the character can hold a two-way conversation. Whenever Whisperers attempt to lie to such a group, they can reflexively add a number of successes equal to their dots in Mind to the Wits or Manipulation + Subterfuge roll needed to successfully tell the lie. The mage can invoke this power a number of times per scene equal to his Gnosis.

Alternatively, the Voice can convince a Sleeper that an incident of vulgar magic was in fact something perfectly normal,

3rd Attainment: Spoken Reality

Prerequisite: Gnosis 7, Mind 4

The mage has now learned how to use her voice to literally change people's memories. By conversing with someone, the mage can alter that person's memories of events that occurred within the last two days. Similar to the Mind 4 "Breach the Vault of Memory" (Mage: The Awakening, p. 214), the mage can convince someone who witnessed a cold-blooded murder that the murderer instead attempted to prevent the victim from committing suicide.

If the mage knows Space 2, this Attainment can be used via telephone, video conference,

Internet chat and any other direct and immediate, two-way media.

A short conversation is required, and an instant Intelligence + Persuasion + Mind roll is made. The consequences of success and failure on this roll are the same as those for casting the spell.

Optional Arcanum: Space 4

The power of her speech allows the mage to forge a lasting Intimate sympathetic connections with anyone on whom she has used her Spoken Reality Attainment. This use of the Attainment also alerts her any time the subject talks about events closely related to the memories the mage altered. If the mage wishes, she can listen in on both sides of any conversation the subject is having if she spends 1 Mana and succeeds at a Wits + Empathy roll, modified by the -2 dice penalty for an Intimate sympathetic connection. If this roll succeeds, the mage can listen in to the conversation for the next scene without needing to make another roll. If she fails, she cannot attempt to listen in again using this Attainment, although she can use other magics to do so.

Optional Arcanum: Space 2

If the Whisperer also knows Space 2, she can create a sympathetic connection between herself and someone she is communicating with via phone, video conference, Internet chat or some other direct and immediate, two-way media. As a result, she can influence anyone she talks to via any of these methods.

2nd Attainment: Gilded Speech

Prerequisite: Gnosis 5, Mind 3, Expression 2

Instead of being limited to intimate conversations, the character can now address a large audience and fill them with the burning conviction that she is an honest and righteous person who is telling the absolute truth. If the character attempts to either lie or to convince people that her ideas and point of view are correct, she can reflexively add a number of successes equal to her dots in Mind to the Manipulation + Expression roll involved in making a speech.

Optional Arcanum: Space 3

If she also knows Space 3, her Attainments are no longer limited solely to audiences who are physically present. The character can use her Attainments to address a group through any live broadcast medium, such as a live radio or television broadcast. She can affect the listeners just as easily as if she were standing right in front of them. Characters with this ability could potentially use this Legacy to influence the minds of many tens of thousands of listeners.

Only a thicket of lies can fully hide the truth.



THE ELEVENTH QUESTION

A 19th-century Mysterium philosopher, Lucy Caspian, coined the phrase “the Eleventh Question.” She believed that, at their cores, each of the 10 Arcana supplied the answer to a single question. Space provided the answer to questions of location. Matter could determine or shape the composition of a material object. However, she knew that even the Arcana had their limits. Therefore, an Eleventh Question could provide answers beyond the scope of magic.

Caspian’s cabal attempted to banish a ghost from its residence so that they could use the country manor as a new home. Incensed, and possessing a will and powers beyond most restless spirits, the ghost inhabited the bodies of each of the cabal in turn, using their mortal shells to murder another member of the cabal. The ghost then used the wizards’ own magic to complicate the murder scenes, making them impossible to solve, even by advanced magic. A reclusive Guardian of the Veil known only as “Sullivan” emerged from his hermitage to solve the mystery. Caspian’s protégé, Dr. Jeremiah Moon dubbed Sullivan “the Eleventh Question.” Together, the two solved numerous occult mysteries before Sullivan returned to his hermitage. Before doing so, he passed on his teachings to three Guardians of the Veil. These three Guardians did their best to continue Sullivan’s work, and their modern-day heirs continue on, answering the Eleventh Questions.

The Questions are considered, at best, eccentrics and, at worst, outcasts by the rest of the Guardians of the Veil. Publicly, they will defend the Questions as befits a member of their order. Privately, Guardians deride the Questions for unorthodox methods and an inattention to the priorities of the order. The Questions are driven to learn the truth at any cost, while the Guardians’ primary focus is to keep the Atlantean mysteries a secret. The Questions maintain that they are true defenders of the ideals of the Visus Draconis. In Atlantean times, the Eyes of the Dragon protected Atlantis from the subtle threats other orders could not hope to comprehend, much less confront. Only by honing the mind to the degree that the Questions do, are they able to face the threats that other mages (even other Guardians) can not. Only their continued successes have kept the Legacy alive. Many within the Guardians would prefer for the Questions to fail (either individually or en masse) so that the best minds can be brought back into the mainstream of the order. The rest will suffer the same fate as all failed Guardians.

Parent Order: Guardians of the Veil

Nickname: Sherlocks

Appearance: The Questions usually cling to some idiosyncratic tic that shapes their appearance and demeanor. Some are impeccable dressers who prefer a timeless, classic look. Others lose themselves in their work and ignore most aspects of personal upkeep. In either case, the lack of attention to detail (or hyper-attention) often focuses the attention of those watching

the Question. These eccentricities may not necessarily be in the realm of fashion. Some are obsessed with playing musical instruments. Others may cultivate rare plants or create works of art. These obsessive hobbies are outlets for the focused and dedicated minds of Questions, ones they attack with the same determination they do their investigations.

Background: The Questions frequently come from a law-enforcement background, though many also come from the scientific community or any background that requires mastery of specialized knowledge (the law, the priesthood, or even advanced mathematics). The common thread that joins all of the Questions is a dedication to discovering the truth, even if the truth is inconvenient or unpleasant. They were the police officers who would pursue the politically sensitive suspects or the reporters who file stories their editors are afraid to print.

Organization: The Questions have no formal hierarchy, though the sense of meritocracy that pervades the Guardians remains true for them. Questions will defer to another mage with more real knowledge of an issue. On the other hand, their inquisitive nature forces them to question an authority, just to make sure that the expert hasn’t missed something. The only constant in Question relations is the connection between tutor and pupil. Questions who are ready to take on pupils tend to retreat to their sanctums. The tutor then relies on his student to be his eyes and ears in the world. Pupils often find themselves haring all over creation, doing all of the hard work (and facing all of the danger) while their teachers stay safely at home.

Suggested Oblations: Solving a riddle or puzzle, studying esoteric scientific or magical theories, explaining a mystery to a colleague, obsessively practicing a musical instrument or odd hobby, disguising one’s appearance

Concepts: Detective, computer programmer, professor, lawyer, textbook writer, reporter, scientist, wealthy dilettante

Attainments

The Questions use their Attainments as one of their many tools. As a matter of course, they tend to use their Attainments to first eliminate all other possibilities before seeking out the underlying answers at the heart of a mystery.

1st Attainment: The Unobvious Answer

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Time 2, Matter 1, Investigation 3, one of the following Skills at two dots or higher: Academics, Larceny, Medicine, Occult, Science

Also known as “Sherlock Holmes’ party trick,” the Question simply looks at a subject or location for a round. By examining the subject for physical clues using Matter to instantly identify various infinitesimal traces of mud or stains, and then using Time to gaze backwards along the objects’ timelines, the Ques-

tion is able to deduce seemingly impossible facts about the subject. Roll Intelligence + Investigation + Time.

Dramatic Failure: The Question's interpretation of the target is completely inaccurate, not just failing to provide information, but specifically misinforming the mage.

Failure: The Question fails to gather any useful information from the subject's appearance.

Success: The mage learns basic facts about the target's life, as well as specific facts about the subject's recent activities, up to the previous 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: The mage knows intimate details of the subject's life, including secrets no other person knows. In particular, the mage is able to reconstruct the subject's activities for the past 72 hours.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 1 or Death 1

If the mage also knows Mind 1, the Question can also ascertain emotional cues, akin to the Mage 1 "Aura Perception" spell. He also can combine the Attainment with the Death 1 spell "Forensic Gaze," when using the ability on a corpse.

2nd Attainment: The Chance Answer

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Time 3, one of the following Skills at two dots or higher: Academics, Larceny, Medicine, Occult, Science (this must be in addition to the Skill chosen as a prerequisite for the 1st Attainment)

Time is of the essence to a Question on the hunt. A Question must often act quickly even when careful study would be preferred. The mage considers all of the possible answers that they are aware of to a specific question about something that has already happened

("Did this man murder the Colonel?" "Was Heinrich in this building the night of the 24th?" "Which of the three suspects owns this wand?"), and then uses his understanding of Time to pick the best answer. The question should be a simple "yes/no" question, or one that has a limited number of possibilities. It cannot be used to determine motives, thoughts or emotions, only facts. Make an instant Wits + Investigation + Time roll. Depending on how well he succeeded, the mage then discovers a clue or has a hunch that leads them to the correct answer.

If the true solution to the answer is not one of the potential answers the mage has, then The Chance Answer only works to eliminate one false answer. For example, the mage asks the question from above, "Which of the three suspects owns this wand?"

However, unbeknownst to the character, the wand actually belongs to a fourth party. If the mage's roll is successful, the Storyteller informs the player that none of them owns the wand.

On a dramatic failure, the Attainment provides false information, either giving a false answer, or, if there are multiple



possibilities, falsely eliminating one of the possibilities. On a simple failure, the Attainment fails to provide any result.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 2

In addition to the factual Chance Answer he receives above, with Mind 2 the Question knows something of the motives behind the person involved in the question; basically, he gets an answer to the question of *why*. For example, the question, "Did this man murder the Colonel?" would not only reveal whether the man performed the murder, but why he did it (or did not do it, if he's innocent – he might not have even known the Colonel, for instance). The question "Was Heinrich in this building the night of the 24th?" would reveal why he was (or was not) there.

3rd Attainment: Timely Answer

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Time 4

This Attainment requires the Question to have some degree of sympathetic connection to the subject, usually the Question's quarry. However, this connection could be entirely secondhand, via examination of evidence or studying the quarry's personal

effects or place of residence. The mage's understanding of her target becomes so fundamental, that she knows when her target will perform a certain action in the future. The mage must declare the action, such as "When will Hargrave kill again?" or "When will Margo return home?" The Storyteller makes a secret instant Intelligence + Empathy + Time roll, modified by the degree of sympathetic connection the mage has to her target (see pp. 114–115 in *Mage: The Awakening*). If successful, the mage knows when the subject of the spell will perform the action. The most common use of the spell is to accurately predict when a murderer will strike next.

If the mage also has Space 2, she can perform an instant Wits + Empathy + Space roll to discover *where* the person will act next. This roll is made by the Storyteller in secret, and is modified by the mage's sympathetic connection to the target.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 3

The mage is not only able to connect the quarry to a particular place and time, but she understands *why* the quarry will be there. This can be used to great effect to understand a subject's motives.

**Observe the weaving
of the resonant flow.**

**Can you sense that the third arc
is hidden between the primary two?**

**You were meant to believe
this was the work of the Seers.**

VOTARIES OF THE ORDAINED

In all times, there have been those whose task it was to watch over an object, a place or even a person, keeping it safe and apart from the outside world until the time is right for its return or the foretold bearer has come to claim it. The Lady of the Lake held Excalibur for King Arthur, and a bard is said to now watch over the king's sleeping body until the time when England needs him. The musketeers once swore themselves to the safety of their king, and men once became eunuchs so that they could focus on the safety of their Egyptian masters to the exclusion of all else.

A person can realize that there is something more important than she, something that must be kept safe for a fate that may not be known but must be protected. When this occurs, when a person understands it in her essence, she can do nothing less than dedicate the entirety of her life to safeguarding that fate, ensuring that the required event takes place. Mages, privy as they are to the very threads that compose all creation, are better able to take this view than most mortals. With the ability to ascertain the ultimate fate of a person or object with little chance of error, they cannot be fooled by empty promises or false appearances. Only a true destiny — or one cleverly disguised — warrants the full devotion of a mage.

But even with this Awakened perspective, alerting the mages to the relative importance of different people, places and things, there are few mages willing to divorce themselves from their other desires and ambitions in order to spend their lives defending destiny. Mages have the power within them to forge their own destinies, and it is a difficult choice to completely suborn such an unwritten fate to the needs of the Fallen World. Those few mages who make that choice are the unsung heroes of Awakened society. They give up their freedom and choose to be forever at the whim of others' destinies.

Votaries of the Ordained spend their lives moving from one person or object, which they call a "charge," to another, safeguarding it and its destiny against supernatural disturbance. Some stewardships pass without incidence, and the Votary moves on to another charge once the first charge meets its fate. Many Votaries of the Ordained are less fortunate. Because the things and people they guard are those that will, at some point, have an important and significant impact on the world, it is not uncommon for others to seek out these charges and tamper with their destinies in an attempt to manipulate the future to their own benefit. To this end, a Votary of the Ordained practices the physical arts of self-defense as well as the magical arts necessary to ensure the safety of her charge.

Young Votaries of the Ordained tend, at the recommendation of their teachers, to set themselves watch over smaller fates. An heirloom ring destined to become the symbol of engagement

for a couple who will perform great feats cannot be lost, else their fortune will dim. A bank vault will one day be used to safely contain a world-shaking secret, but only if the vault is not proven insecure. These are the destinies that moderately affect the future of the world but, if disturbed, can be repaired or replaced by an adept or master of the Fate Arcanum. More experienced Votaries of the Ordained, those who have mastered at least the second Attainment, take upon themselves the stewardship of greater destinies. Older Votaries of the Ordained sometimes watch over a single charge for decades.

Parent Path or Order: Moros or Guardian of the Veil

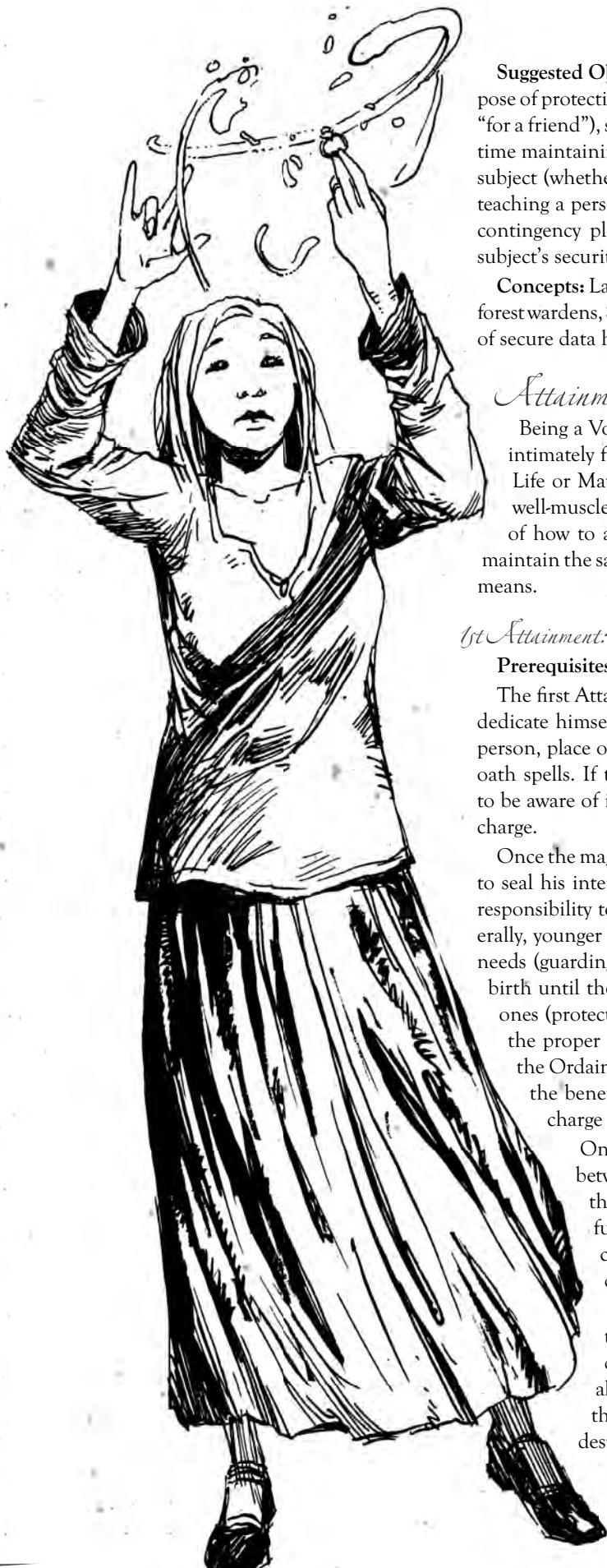
Nickname: Rooks

Appearance: A Votary of the Ordained is accompanied by an air of the eternal. Her demeanor tends to make those around her feel as though she is the proverbial immovable object. Votaries tend to favor no-nonsense, utilitarian clothing and style, as well as an often-unsettling stillness. Others, those who see the Votary more often, may begin to feel a sense of security or safety from the Votary's reliability.

Background: Kings have been known to give their lives for their subjects. Bank managers have refused to share combinations with thieves. Mothers have stood in the way of terrible violence to shield their children from harm. Soldiers risk death or dismemberment defending a spot of ground. A Votary of the Ordained can come from any walk of life. All that is required is sufficient dedication.

Organization: A Rook's life is a lonely one, though few ever regret the lack of companionship. When the time comes that his charge no longer needs him, a Votary of the Ordained may choose to temporarily dedicate himself to guarding the Legacy from being lost. In this, as in all things, a Votary is direct. He seeks out an interested party and begins helping the student mold her soul as the Legacy dictates. After the initial shaping is complete, the tutor generally returns to his duties, whatever they may have become.

Because of this haphazard method of passing on the Legacy, the connections between different Votaries of the Ordained are quite similar to those of a family tree. One Votary begets two Votaries, each of whom teaches others while passing on the information. By this point, the Votaries of the Ordained make up their own genealogy, which some make a point of remembering and teaching to new students. Once a student has achieved the third Attainment, there are usually few communications along these lines. Still, a Votary's only goal is to protect something, and if calling on old mentors and "cousins" in the Legacy may save an otherwise lost situation, it must be done. Most will be too busy with their own tasks, but one never knows.



Suggested Oblations: Guarding an object for the sole purpose of protecting it for a short period (such as holding a chair "for a friend"), standing stock still for an hour, spending some time maintaining or improving the integrity of the protected subject (whether by reinforcing an oaken door with steel or teaching a person the rudiments of self-defense), developing contingency plans for potential breaches in a hypothetical subject's security

Concepts: Law enforcement officers, security guards, fire or forest wardens, Swedish bank managers, escrow agents, owners of secure data havens, dedicated private doctors, archivists

Attainments

Being a Votary of the Ordained requires that a mage be intimately familiar with the Mysteries of Fate. Space and Life or Matter are also advantageous. Most Votaries are well-muscled, large and healthy, with a strong knowledge of how to apply natural forces effectively, though some maintain the sanctity of their charges by utilizing more subtle means.

1st Attainment: Soldier of Fortune

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Fate 3

The first Attainment allows the Votary of the Ordained to dedicate himself to a single charge of his choice, whether a person, place or object, in a variation of the Fate Arcanum's oath spells. If the charge is a living being, it does not have to be aware of its new status, or even be willing to become a charge.

Once the mage has declared his charge and spent one Mana to seal his intent, from that point on it is the Votary's sole responsibility to see that his charge meets its true fate. Generally, younger Votaries of Fate take on charges with simpler needs (guarding the asp that would bite Cleopatra from its birth until the event) while their elders see to the difficult ones (protecting a scroll for 100 years to ensure that only the proper person learns its secret). Once the Votary of the Ordained has dedicated himself to a charge, he gains the benefit of an Intimate sympathetic bond with his charge at all times.

Once the charge's fate has been met, the bond between the Votary and his charge dissolves. If the charge has another important destiny in the future, the Votary may re-dedicate himself to the charge. Otherwise, he is expected to find a new destiny that needs his assistance.

For each scene in the story, the Votary gains the benefits of Fate 2 "Exceptional Luck" on dice roll per dot he has in the Fate Arcanum, although this benefit must be used to protect the charge or ensure that it meets his ordained destiny.

3rd Attainment: Fate Defends Itself

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Fate 4

When someone threatens the Votary's charge, this level of Attainment in the Legacy allows the guardian to hinder that threat's every action with fate itself. The cords of destiny act to prevent the intruder's victory, causing her to stumble over nothing and catch her knife in her coat. The Votary can inflict an aggressor with a massive streak of bad luck, as if she were subject to the Fate 5 "Great Curse" spell. The Votary's player rolls Resolve + Intimidation + Fate as an instant action, and she must spend one Mana per use, although the effect is covert rather than vulgar. She can increase the number of targets affected by suffering dice penalties to her roll, per the rules for Target factors on p. 118 of *Mage: The Awakening*.

If the roll is successful, the target(s) suffers a -1 dice penalty per dot of the Votary's Fate Arcanum; this penalty only applies to those attempts by the target(s) to affect the Votary's charge. The effect lasts for the remainder of the scene.

Optional Arcanum: Space 3

The Votary may choose to summon his charge to him through use of the Space 2 "Apportation" spell. If the charge is a location or person, he may not use "Apportation" at all but may instead instantly take himself to his charge through the Space 3 "Portal" spell. Neither of these requires any roll.

What is through this portal
is for none to see,
unless you are the one.

Left-Handed Legacy: The Austere

The Guardians of the Veil sacrifice their own moral status so that other mages are free to cultivate Wisdom. It's a difficult way to live, balancing the positive virtues that the order expects all mages to pursue against the immoral actions required for the greater good. Guardians must always be mindful of the line between necessary evil and self-serving cruelty. The legacy of the Austere crossed that line long ago. Theirs is a creed that eschews compassion and self-sacrifice, whose members seek to replace morality with machinelike detachment even as they modify their own bodies with mechanical constructs.

The first of these Clockwork Mages, an agent of the Dragon's Eye who became known to his followers as the Prime Mover, developed a metaphysics that envisioned the Tapestry of Creation and the Diamond Wheel as an immense and intricate clockwork mechanism. In his view, the Abyss was a misalignment of key elements in this Eternal Movement. To restore the smooth functioning of the Mechanism of Creation, he concluded, mages must become Austere: pitiless, free of sentiment, even machinelike in their outlook. They must reject all trappings of mercy and compassion, which obscure one's ability to perceive and correct the flaws that prevent the smooth functioning of reality.

Further contemplation — or derangement — convinced the Prime Mover that simply attempting a detached, mechanistic view of Creation was not enough. He and his inheritors would need to become machines in fact as well as in outlook. By replacing their body parts with superior mechanical analogs, the Austere would advance their detachment from their own humanity and increase their sympathetic connection to the Eternal Movement. While the Guardians nipped at the edges of the Abyss with their subtle and ineffective schemes, the Austere would seize control of it by spilling blood without hesitation or remorse. Mages careless about Paradoxes would be eliminated; Sleepers who glimpsed hidden truths would be sacrificed. Murder, torture, terrorism and other immoral actions would be used as tools to shift the Eternal Movement into its proper configuration.

Parent Path: Any

Parent Order: Guardians of the Veil

Nickname: Clockworkers, Clockwork Mages

Appearance: Superficially, a Clockworker can look like anyone. His mechanical implants and enhancements are designed to mimic the appearance of actual flesh (at least when inactive). However, certain commonalities do tend to crop up. Scars from when they acquired their Attainments are not always easily concealed; a Clocker hoping to keep his affiliation secret will be careful to create a plausible excuse for his disfigurements. Also, many Clockers favor tattoos, body piercing and other

mundane physical modifications — either because a penchant for such things attracted them to the Legacy, or because such activities express their willingness to modify their bodies.

Background: Any mage proficient in the Matter and Life Arcana can find a place among the Austere, though there are few healthy reasons for wanting to do so. Some who seek the Legacy have pre-existing obsessions with body modification and/or machinery. Others are physically or emotionally damaged and see the Legacy as a way to replace what they've lost. Some desire to shed their humanity in order to indulge in secret vices and compulsions. Tutors have their own reasons for seeking pupils. Some wish to pass the ideology of the Prime Mover to a new generation of mages. Others merely desire a source of cheap labor.

Organization: The first generation of the Austere cooperated closely as followers of a greater cause, but today many Clockwork Mages now operate solo, following a personal agenda that includes acts of wanton cruelty and violence intended to test or reinforce their lack of humanity. Some Clockworkers do seek to improve the functioning of the Great Movement, based on their particular understanding of it. Among these Austere, observing, disrupting and damaging the operations of the Guardians is a primary goal. One favored tactic is to infiltrate the ranks of the Labyrinth and steer the Sleepers toward the Austere's agenda. Clockworkers who are skilled at disguising their mechanical nature (or eliminating those who become suspicious) have been known to infiltrate the order itself.

Concepts: Creepy antique dealer, eccentric tattoo or piercing artist, wandering handyman, maverick surgeon, maimed car accident survivor, traumatized war veteran, heartless assassin

Suggested Oblations: Observing the function of a large, mechanical structure such as a Ferris wheel, watching the movement of the stars and planets in the night sky, disassembling and reassembling (without using magic) an object with complex moving parts (such as a pocket watch), committing an act of minor but dispassionate cruelty against a stranger, receiving a permanent or semi-permanent body modification (such as tattooing, piercing or scarification), performing the former on another according to that person's specifications, vivisecting a living creature

Attainments

Clockworker Attainments require that the mage achieve a degree of dissociation from conventional morality and her own humanity in order to internalize the precepts that make the Attainments possible.



3 3rd Attainment: *Mainspring*

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Life 2, Matter 2

With this Attainment, the mage creates a small device (slightly less than Size 1) that represents his personal understanding of the Great Movement. Designing and constructing the device requires one week of uninterrupted work. Once the Mainspring is created, the mage enters a trance-like state in which the device magically implants itself somewhere in his chest or abdominal cavity, where it will establish a connection to his nervous system.

The Mainspring grants the mage these abilities:

Body Control: The Mainspring can override the function of the Austere's body in a manner similar to the Life 2 spell "Body Control." For each dot the mage has in Life, he can halve the amount of oxygen he needs, double the time he can go without checking for fatigue or deprivation, add one to his Initiative, double the time it takes for poison or toxin to affect him and halve the healing time of bashing wounds. Each use of this ability lasts for one scene.

Hidden Agenda: The Mainspring acts to shield the mage from any use of Life or Matter magic that might reveal his true nature. Whenever the mage is a target of a Life or Matter Practice of Knowing spell (such as Life 1 "Analyze Life" or Matter 1 "Discern Composition"), the spell is automatically contested by the Austere's dots in the relevant Arcanum. If the spell fails, the caster detects nothing out of the ordinary about the Clockworker.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 2

If the mage possesses at least two dots in Mind, he can apply his understanding of part-whole interactions to a social context, enabling him to pass himself off as an anonymous member of any large organization or group. The Attainment only operates within the target group's own territory — the hallways of a corporate office building or police station, for example — or among an assembly of the group's members, such as a union hall meeting or cult ritual. When the power is active, those who witness the mage will assume he's one of the group and will barely notice him (as per the Mind 2 spell "Incognito Presence"). Should the mage choose to speak or interact with any group members, he adds one die for each dot in Mind to his first Social Attribute-based roll (an effect similar to the Mind 2 spell "First Impressions"). Activating either ability is a reflexive action.

The Body Eclectic

A Clockworker's mechanical enhancements have the following properties:

1. Anachronistic design. The Austere are not cyborgs. Their mechanisms are not high technology, but exquisitely complex mechanical parts designed along Atlantean-based engineering principles that blur the line between science and magic. As their name implies, the Clockwork Mages favor a baroque assemblage of gears,

cogs, wheels, pins, springs, shafts, wires, jewels and similar moving pieces.

2. Mundane appearance. Except when performing an obviously unnatural action, a Clocker's artificial body part is indistinguishable from the real thing. The artificial part's magical nature prevents it from triggering metal detectors.

Viewed by x-ray or other imaging devices, the implants appear as featureless blurs that could be ascribed to scanning errors (which may raise suspicions, depending on the circumstance). Enhancements that have no human analog will, of course, never be mistaken for natural. If an enhancement is damaged, its organic façade is revealed for what it is: a thin skin covering a host of mechanisms within.

3. Mundane function. As long as the parts are functional, artificial parts are able to perform the mundane functions of the part they replace. An artificial hand is as sensitive and dexterous as the original; an artificial eye sees at least as well as the real thing. This is true even if the original was lost long before its replacement was added. A part that's been damaged won't heal, but may be repaired magically (with Matter 3 "Repair Object," for example) or by mundane means. A damaged part may or may not maintain its mundane function, depending on the circumstances (Storyteller's call).

2nd Attainment: Obj in the Machine

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Life 3, Matter 3

Note: Acquiring this Attainment causes a Wisdom degeneration roll for any mage whose Wisdom is 6 or higher.

Studying the intricacies of the Great Movement grants the mage insight into the way that parts reflect the whole. He gains mechanical insight that mimics the Matter 3 spell "Jury-Rig." For each dot in the Matter Arcanum he possesses, the Austere may transfer one quality from one mechanical object to another. The effect persists for one scene.

Alternatively, she can transfer qualities from a mechanical device to herself, mimicking the device with her flesh. For instance, she could borrow a screwdriver's Phillips head and turning capability and transfer it to her index finger, so that she can unscrew things with her hand. During the scene in which she uses the device's qualities, she is immune to harm from any deleterious effects the qualities may cause, such as an electric heater's ability to heat a room.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 3

If the mage possesses Mind 3, she can use the Mainspring to subtly reinforce her thinking and perceptions, enabling her to function normally while performing morally dubious acts. Whenever the mage fails a degeneration roll, she can make a

second roll; if it succeeds, she does not gain a derangement, but if the roll fails, she gains a derangement normally.

3rd Attainment: Major Enhancement

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Life 4, Matter 4

Note: Acquiring this Attainment causes a Wisdom degeneration roll for any mage whose Wisdom is 5 or higher.

With this Attainment, the Austere can replace or modify part of his body. A body part that's replaced cannot be restored, so if the device breaks the mage suffers the consequences of living without the original (though the Attainment allows the inert device to remain in place without triggering an immune response). Should the mage's Mainspring ever be destroyed or removed, his artificial body parts become partly inert, performing only mundane functions.

Before performing the Attainment, a Clockworker must design the desired device. This is an extended action with the target number depending on the body part mimicked (eight successes for a limb, 10 for an internal organ, 12 or more for a sensory organ). The mage rolls Intelligence + Science, with each roll representing a half-day of research and experiment. Once the design is complete, constructing the device is another extended action, with each roll representing one day of uninterrupted work and meditation. The mage rolls either Intelligence or Dexterity + an appropriate skill (typically Academics, Crafts, Medicine, Occult or Science), with bonuses or penalties dependent on the equipment mage has available. If the mage is assisted during the design or construction process by another Clockworker — usually a tutor or pupil — apply the Teamwork rules from the *World of Darkness* rulebook, p. 134. (The mage receiving the device must be the primary actor.) The number of successes required for construction is the same as that for design.

For construction, failure to acquire enough success in a number of rolls equal to the mage's Attribute + Skill indicates that the device fails and must be discarded. A dramatic failure indicates that the device seems to function, but once implanted will fail, becoming completely inert. The character will only discover this after undergoing the full, painful implantation process.

Once the device is constructed, this Attainment allows her to enter a trance state during which the object is activated and then implants or attaches itself to the mage's body. This bloody and painful process takes one hour, after which the Clocker Mage must rest for at least 24 hours. A constructed device need not be implanted immediately.

Below are some possibilities; Storytellers are encouraged to create their own variations. Each mage can choose only one of these options. Should a mechanism be destroyed or damaged beyond repair, the mage can replace it with a similar device, but he must again undertake the full design and construction process.

Independent Hand

Effect: The mage's hand can detach itself and function somewhat autonomously, with Durability 3, Structure 4 and Speed 3 (by crawling or climbing). The mage can send the limb on a pre-assigned task — "Crawl over there and bring

back that key" – or he can reflexively direct it mentally by sight or touch (the mage can feel through the hand as if it was still attached). If he is controlling the hand directly, the mage must take an instant action for the hand to perform a task. In addition, the mage can use his Cog in the Machine Attainment to temporarily add additional functions to the hand, either while attached or while it's separated.

Variation: Independent Eye. Instead of his hand, the mage replaces his eye. The mage's eye and optic nerve can detach from his skull, and extend small legs allowing it to scuttle about (with the same traits as the hand, above). The mage can see whatever the eye sees. If the mage possesses Space 2, he can reflexively direct the eye's movements regardless of distance; otherwise, if the eye leaves sensory range, he must concentrate to maintain contact with the eye (and he can't regain contact if his concentration is ever broken). In addition, the mage can use his Cog in the Machine Attainment to temporarily add additional functions to the eye, either while attached or while it's separated.

Prehensile Eyes

Effect: The mage's eyes can extend from their sockets on articulated stalks up to four feet long. This allows the mage to see into a small space, around corners or anywhere else the eye can fit. The mage can enhance the eyes' vision with appropriate sensory spells. If she chooses to extend both eyes at once, she can duplicate the effects of the Space 1 spell "Omnivision." The mage can use the Cog in the Machine Attainment to temporarily add additional functions to the eyes, either while they're extended or while in place.

Implanted Weapon

Effect: The mage installs a single melee weapon, or several small ones, inside his body. Examples include a blade or spike inside the arm, razor-like teeth that retract into the jaws or a strangling wire inside the wrist. The weapon can be accessed or hidden at will as an instant action and remains attached to the mage when in use. Once per scene, the mage can bestow the armor-piercing quality upon the weapon. Per the Matter 3 spell of that name, for each dot of Matter the mage possesses, the next and subsequent dice rolls made using the object are granted armor-piercing status.

Circulation Upgrade

Effect: The mage's circulatory system has been altered, so that when this enhancement is activated, her blood is infused with a sticky, viscous oil. This fluid causes any tears in the mage's skin to seal themselves, stopping blood loss. For each point of Mana the mage expends, she may heal one lethal wound or two bashing wounds. Note that this doesn't repair damage to the Austere's mechanical body parts.

Secondary Body

Effect: The mage creates a tiny automaton that is stored in his chest cavity. Once released, the device unfolds itself into a human-like form that stands one-fifth the size of the mage. While the mage enters a trance state and concentrates, he can project his awareness into the puppet, operating it and perceiving through it as if it were his own body. The device has the same Physical and Mental Attributes as the mage, including Health and Defense (except that the device's Size is 1), and uses the mage's Mental Attributes when active. The mage cannot cast spells while he is operating the small body, but any spell that he casts upon himself before activating the device will affect the automaton as well. As the device has no mind of its own, it can only operate under the mage's direction. If the automaton moves out of sensory range, the mage must concentrate to maintain contact with it unless he has Space 2 or greater (in which case maintaining control is a reflexive action). If the automaton is destroyed or contact is broken, the mage's consciousness returns to his body without harm.

Sum of its Parts

Use of the Cog in the Machine Attainment with a Clockworker's mechanical parts is always limited by the Size of the added device. The mage couldn't graft a full-size refrigerator to his hand as a way to keep food supplies cold, for example (though he might be able to transplant some of the fridge's parts to give the hand cold-producing properties).

Flesh is weak,
compassion is nothing,
only the Movement is eternal.



CHAPTER FIVE: MAGIC

When he entered the alley, his predator's smile widened. The woman had reached the high fence that blocked the alley's exit. He approached slowly as she scratched and clawed at the chain link fence like a trapped animal. She kicked off one shoe, tried to find purchase on the fence with her stocking-clad foot.

"Please," she whispered. "Please don't hurt me. Please . . ."

The man tilted his head back, letting her see his fangs.

"AWAY!" a voice cried.

The vampire flew backwards. When he scrambled to his feet, he faced a tall man who wore a long, black coat, and a gash, demonic mask. The masked man carried a long-handled sword with a thin, curved blade. The front of his coat was emblazoned with a large, blue, five-pointed star.

"These streets are under my protection." Behind the masked stranger, the woman had sunk to the ground and was sobbing quietly.

The masked man moved impossibly fast, becoming a dark blur that rushed past the vampire, knocking the knife from his grasp. The sword scraped along the ground as he moved, tracing a circle of blue flame around the two of them.

Then the masked man lowered his weapon, confused. His opponent was . . . dissolving? The thug's bulky frame seemed to be fraying apart as if it were made of gossamer.

"How nice to meet you at last." It was the woman's voice, all traces of fear gone now. She pressed her palms together as if closing a book. "Make yourself comfortable," she continued. He raised his sword, but then she was gone. Everything was gone. There was only blackness.

"When you wake up," he heard her voice telling him, "You and I and some friends of mine are going to have a little chat about all this flashy magic you've been doing around here. And then you're going to . . ." Her voice grew fainter, until it was gone, along with the sounds of the street, the noise of his own breathing. He could hear nothing, see nothing, could not even feel his clothes against his skin or his feet on the ground.

A policeman's lot is not a happy one.
— W. S. Gilbert

Magical Methods

Every magical resource the Guardians of the Veil command is devoted to protecting the integrity of sympathy between the Supernal and Fallen Worlds, whether that means upholding the Veils, adding a wing here and a "minotaur" there to make the already-complex Labyrinth even more mazy or watching fellow mages for breaches of conduct. The Guardians recognize that all their effort leaves them no time to use magic for the betterment of the human situation, something most of the Guardians imagine would have been a natural application of their power before the Fall. They understand that they cannot attempt such endeavors, because magic will not be able to improve the world at all if it completely disappears.

Some of the Guardians' greatest foes are Paradoxes. They believe that every act that incurs a Paradox deepens the Abyss and makes the connection to the Supernal ever more tenuous. The order recognizes that the greater a mage's inherent connection with the Supernal, his Gnosis, the harder it is for him to *avoid* creating conflict between the higher and lower laws, and that conflict is what lets the Abyss warp the Tapestry. Mages are therefore strongly encouraged by their Guardian companions and acquaintances to master the use of Arcana or Path tools, and they consider the use of Mana to mitigate Paradoxes almost compulsory.

As one method of reigning in the amount of the Abyss Guardians allow into the Fallen World, they meditate upon harsh lessons. They fast, starving themselves of food as the Abyss starves the world of Supernal influence. Self-flagellation brings harm to their Patterns as Paradoxes bring harm to the Tapestry and simultaneously steels them for the pain they feel when accepting a backlash to reduce a Paradox's effect. Some Guardians serve their fellow mages for a period of time in order to remind themselves that they serve the Supernal rather than ruling it; other Guardians create situations in which they are never unobserved, to remind themselves that (a) they probably never *are* truly private and (b) one cannot hide vulgar magic from the Abyss.

Practicing Paradoxes

Guardians of the Veil accept that they must, at times, in order to prevent Paradoxes, invoke them. While none *want* to harm the Tapestry, casting vulgar magic becomes more acceptable to a Guardian when doing so would prevent another mage from causing greater harm. When a Guardian of the Veil faces the consequences of several mages' vulgar spells, either one obvious spell cast into the midst of a mob of Sleepers or even just a single spell by a single, high-Gnosis mage, Guardian doctrine demands that action be taken to mitigate the harm; if the most efficient response to the present danger is a vulgar spell, then so be it. The goal is to allow the Abyss the minimum access into the Fallen World.

Even on those rare occasions when split-second decisions must be made, the order insists that every mage consider the full ramifications of her spells carefully. A mage using vulgar magic to manipulate shadows may not be as obvious to Sleepers as the attack spell a Guardian must throw in order to stop him. When a Guardian of the Veil casts a vulgar spell, she can never be sure that her reasoning will not later be questioned by the rest of her cabal and caucus.

When a Guardian does incur a Paradox, he often draws the damage onto himself, by suffering a backlash. In part, it is the Guardian's punishment for resorting to vulgar magic or allowing himself to cast before Sleepers. Better to suffer pain and the disruption to his own Pattern than let the damage ruin the local Tapestry. There are few events outside of direct (and important) combat that make it acceptable for a Guardian of the Veil to let a Paradox he has caused to spill out and harm the Fallen World. If a mage can convince his peers or superiors that allowing a Paradox to impair his ability would have caused significantly greater harm to the Veils, he may escape penance. If they believe (or have proof) that he neglected to use any means to reduce the Paradoxes he incurred (by ignoring available magical tools or casting in front of Sleepers when he could have quickly found privacy), his reputation in the order suffers.

Combat Magic

The Adamantine Arrows do not hold a monopoly on the use of magic in combat. The Ordeal Keepers, especially, practice battle magic in order to better surpass the challenges they set themselves. Still, even in war, the Guardians attempt to remain covert. They are thankful that most Shielding spells, even those that protect others, are covert.

To actually strike out at others, Mastigos Guardians of the Veil favor the Mind 3 "Psychic Assault" and Mind 4 "Psychic Sword" spells. There are many ways for a creative mage to harm a foe, but only a few that can be done covertly, and using the mind as a weapon is one of the best. When a Moros Guardian enters battle, a favored tactic is to combine the Death 3 "Destroy Object" with Matter 3 "Alter Integrity" (both covert) to harm or destroy her enemies' weapons or shape the arena into something more advantageous for her.

Obrimos who see the conflict coming use Forces 4 "Change Weather," if they can and need to, to prepare the region for their Forces 3 "Call Lightning" spells, and they may set the stage to their own advantage by casting Forces 1 "Nightsight" and influencing the light to make it too dark for their foes. Some who think themselves clever use the Prime 3 "Imbue Mana" spell to kill Sleeper foes by overloading them with Supernal energy; besides the exorbitant cost in Mana, such mages inevitably face censure for their rash actions when the magic becomes Improbable.

Guardians walking the Acanthus Path most often use the Fate 1 spell "Sharpshooter's Eye," and the Fate 2 spells "Exceptional Luck" and "Evil Eye," to dominate a fight. Fate 3 "Lucky Coin," used on a weapon, can make it nearly impossible for the mage to miss. Time 1 "Momentary Flux" or Time 2 "Flip of the Coin" can sometimes tell a mage the perfect time to start a fight, and the Time 1 spell "Perfect Timing" offers a slight boost to any attack, as does the Time 2 "Glimpsing the Future."

"Control Base Life" provides a useful method for surreptitiously harming or distracting a Thyrus' Guardian's foes. Although most other Life spells suitable for combat are vulgar, Thyrus can easily heal themselves to remain in the fight longer. Though Spirit magic is not always much help in battle, a Guardian may be able to summon a combative spirit to him and ask or command it to fight.

Guardians understand that the circumstances are different during combat, where they need all their resources. It is acceptable in combat to choose not to mitigate a Paradox or absorb it with a backlash. The Guardians understand that not every mage can be a disciple of Mind, that physical conflicts cannot always be avoided and that, in a showdown, a mage must use his strengths to best an enemy without hobbling himself by cleaving to the covert. Such battles often wrack the mages and their surroundings with Paradoxes, and masters of the order do not expect Guardians to doom themselves by forcing Paradoxes to tear their Patterns to shreds.

Countermagic is a common and important tactic. The ability to unravel an opponent's spell before it has been completed is a strong advantage in any conflict, but the Guardians especially appreciate its ability to completely dissolve a vulgar spell before any nearby Sleepers get a chance to see it. Apprenticeships in the Mystery of Prime are highly valued among the Guardians, especially by those who are likely to enter conflict with other mages. Many consider the time spent learning how to unravel enemy magic before it is completed a good alternative to learning the fundamentals of all 10 Arcana.

Paranoia

Privacy is very important to the Guardians of the Veil. They have many secrets that must be kept from the Sleepers, all the millions of tiny clues that could set the curious on the trail of more important, dangerous mysteries. Then there are the secrets that the Guardians keep from everyone, mortal or mage. Guardians hide enchantments that Silver Ladder hands would shape into power over men, spells that the Adamantine Arrow would turn to war and occult mysteries that the Mysterium would inadequately protect; though the Guardians often cannot use these enchantments, it is better for them be locked away than wielded unwisely. The Guardians of the Veil also have numerous agents occupying sensitive positions in Sleeper governments and the other magical orders. If mages of the Veil let their guard down, they could inadvertently cause the apprehension or elimination of many valuable sources, or even other Guardians.

The methods used by Sleepers have improved over the years, and especially since the Renaissance. This is yet another reason

for the Guardians' dislike of the Free Council, because their encouragement of the zeitgeist of science and technology has pushed the Sleeper's capabilities to the point where ever-increasing measures must be taken against them. The United States, for example, has an extensive network of satellites with cameras pointed at the Earth, many with astounding resolution. The order could arrange it now and then for satellites to point in the wrong direction, or for the appropriation of undesirable photos once they've been taken, but this requires resources in legwork and favors, and the Guardians can't ensure that information won't still get past their net. It is much more cost-effective to utilize the Forces 4 "Change Weather" spell, summoning a thick cloud cover to confound the cameras.

Still, a photo taken from miles above can only reveal so much. More dangerous are the electronic tools the Sleepers have devised for listening to private conversations. Since the Guardians of the Veil habitually take the basic precaution of writing nothing down, they usually communicate information and orders orally. Of course, they then live in perpetual fear of electronic bugs. In their wisdom, Guardians use many of the same methods that Sleeper intelligence agencies do to defeat such things. White noise generators create a background of random sounds, making it harder for an eavesdropper to understand what's being said. Those without access to a white noise generator can turn the radio on loudly or speak in the bathroom under cover of running water. Another tool can broadcast gibberish signals on a broad range of wavelengths, muddying the waters even further. Mages with the Forces 1 "Influence Sound" spell can perform such functions themselves, but using the non-magical tools is less risky and less suspicious (should someone be watching as well as listening).

Some Guardians of the Veil prefer to avoid letting any potential surveillants know that the mage suspects she is being observed. A simple glance around the room using Forces 1 "Read Matrices" can tell a Guardian whether or not any of her lamps or light sockets are transmitting signals. A use of Forces 1 "Tune In" can confirm suspicions by allowing her to eavesdrop on what the spies are hearing. Some such signals are encrypted, but agents often have the proper training to decipher them. Guardians also understand that misinformation is a powerful tool, and they use Forces 2 "Transmission" to feed their enemies false leads whenever feasible.

Some bugs only broadcast after recording a set amount, firing off a burst transmission that is difficult to detect and nearly impossible to forge. They are hard to find through magic without getting extremely lucky. Instead, a mage uses Mage Sight to intensely scrutinize his home, looking for any trace resonance that doesn't belong or that wasn't there the last time he looked. Unexpected resonance on familiar objects might be indication of an intruder. Mages who take this precaution tend to be extremely picky about whom they allow into their homes or sanctums, where those visitors sit and what they touch.

Things can get more complicated when surveillance becomes live. Parabolic microphones can be defeated, to a degree, by white noise, but it is better to use Forces to diminish or

entirely eliminate the sound of a conversation before it can reach the eavesdropper. One listening device can bounce a laser beam off any surface near where a conversation is taking place, picking up the vibrations caused by sound and turning them into a reasonable facsimile of what's being said. Only by ensuring that the sound travels only from the speaker's mouth to the listener's ear does the mage have a good chance of defeating these.

Defeating magical spies is almost pitifully straightforward in comparison. No mage can peer into a region protected by a Space 2 "Ward" without overcoming it, so the Guardians protect their sanctums and most sensitive secrets with powerful, permanent wards, sometimes built up over weeks of extended casting. Such strong protections usually foil the first few attempts at penetrating an area, but a dedicated assailant will then spend time building up increasingly powerful spells with which to pierce that protection. For this reason, the willworkers who placed the wards usually make sure to utilize their Prime 2 + Space 2 "Sense the Threads" ability (pp. 222-223 in *Mage: The Awakening*).

Police Work

The Guardians of the Veil are unsurpassed secret police. They insinuate themselves or their agents into as many aspects of Sleeper and Awakened life as possible. Guardians are constantly trying to stay three steps ahead of the Sleepers who threaten to discover and expose the Mysteries. But the real challenges come from other mages. Mysterium mages make it their business to uncover ever-deeper mysteries and solve the riddles that keep power out of the hands of the unworthy, constantly releasing into the world more remnants of the Supernatural to be corrupted by the Sleeping Curse or abused by the Seers of the Throne. They are only the worst in a collection of fools and idealists. As far as the Guardians are concerned, no mages make enough effort to conceal their sorcery or avoid using vulgar magic. The only way the Guardians can keep the world safe is to always be watching.

And watch they do. They make great use of Space 2 "Scrying" as a first step for surveilling targets. When there is an important meeting, the Guardians may well designate a team of mages to work together for an extended casting, building up a powerful spell in order to break through the ward they expect to be in place. These attempts are accompanied (when possible) by the Prime 2 "Unseen Spy" spell in order to prevent a mage able to monitor his enchantments from noticing. Guardians also use Sleeper bugs and surveillance extensively, but never exclusively. Mages of other orders are generally not quite as suspicious that that sort of activity may be taking place, but when they catch on, they are just as familiar with many of the spells that the Guardians use to lay false trails; only the most arrogant mage assumes his targets will not think to use them. Relying on multiple media for spying and using each to corroborate the others' validity is much safer.

Infiltration is another major source of the order's intelligence and leverage. Having agents in so many different positions, both expected (governments, embassies, the Stonemasons)

and eclectic (Alcoholics Anonymous, neo-Nazis, the American Psychological Association), the Guardians of the Veil can siphon information from nearly anywhere and, when they must, sabotage another order's efforts. In this line of work, the Guardians utilize the Mind Arcanum so often that it almost seems as though they use it exclusively. Not only is Mind one of the most covert Arcana, but is simply one of the most effective for espionage.

Sneaking a peek into some confidential records, an undercover agent would be wise to activate Mind 1 "Sense Consciousness" or Life 1 "Sense Life" to ensure that she can get back to her desk (or hide) before someone comes close enough to catch her in the act. An agent uses Mind 1 "Aura Perception" to know when his superior is angry or suspicious, and he uses Mind 2 "Alter Aura" to help himself appear unworried. The mage trying to get an innocuous position in a Seers' financial front may, if she believes she won't be detected, use Mind 2 "First Impressions" to warm up the interviewer and Mind 2 "Emotional Urging" to make him feel impressed. The Mind 2 spell "Incognito Presence" is a staple of the Faceless faction, and Mind 2 "Memory Hole" is one of the most-used Mind spells, often cast with extended Duration to aid a lasting cover.

Guardians using Mind to infiltrate organizations of other mages, whether fronts or the orders themselves, focus on their facilities with another Arcanum and downplay their skills with Mind. Any master of Mind who has not already proved his honesty is a target of suspicion. One of the Guardians' most frighteningly effective uses of the Mind Arcanum is also one of the most hated (and therefore least used). Several mages strong in Mind corner a mage of another order and use the Mind 4 spell "Breach the Vault of Memory" to convince their victim that he is a deep-cover Guardian agent. The Guardians, all disguised and prepared to sever sympathetic connections with the victim, let him spill his guts about his order's secrets for as long as the spell lasts. Victims of this technique usually become enemies of the Guardians of the Veil for life, so enraged are the victims at what has been done to them.

Only the most superb manipulations, making victims believe that the "returned" memories will soon go away so that the mage may return to his cover assignment, may prevent victims of this technique from becoming such implacable foes. Though the technique is well-documented in the Guardians' parables, these ancient tales come with warnings of the danger. Only in the most pressing need do Guardians abuse another mage's mind in this way, because the act will enrage all mages in the Consilium, and they hardly need another reason to hate the Guardians of the Veil.

Guardians with faculty in the Spirit or Death Arcana may make deals with the local ghosts or spirits, offering them things they desire in exchange for warnings, reconnaissance or actual spying. Mages with less regard for the entities' goodwill may use their magic to command them without any need for recompense. Doing so, however, creates an agent significantly more willing to lay a trail back to the mage, if such behavior isn't expressly forbidden by the commanding mage. It is also a good way to make enemies, whose actions the Guardian will

likely need to clean up later. Irresponsible mage-spirit relations are a good way for a Guardian to earn censure from his fellow Guardians or, after a real disaster, the Epopt.

The Guardians of the Veil always have a need for more "spotters," people using various Mage Sight spells to look for unspecific anomalies and dangers, reporting them to a Guardian, usually through some form of dead drop (brown paper bags in trash cans at specific times, notes in newspapers left at a certain coffee shop) or other disconnect (leaving the note or tape recording with someone who will pass it on, calling a message service to leave a coded report). Some spotters are young mages of the order or mercenary apostates who are being paid for their services, but mages are far too valuable resources to spend every day watching for odd occurrences. Most spotters, by far, are Sleepwalkers; the Guardians sometimes enchant these spotters with long-lasting Mage Sight spells. Simpler, but less surreptitious, are the imbued glasses or sunglasses that the order gives other spotters.

Preventing a Paradox can only be done if the spell is never begun, so the best tactic is to prevent other mages from loosing their wills in harmful ways. Some attempt reason, describing the danger and appealing to the mage's common sense. When reason fails (or when disillusioned Guardians ignore that step), they alter prevailing conditions to make the results of the vulgar casting undesirable for the mage. For example, a mage who is planning to use vulgar magic to appropriate a legendary Artifact will abandon the effort when he learns that the Artifact has been moved. Creating a firestorm in downtown Tokyo no longer becomes worth the risk when the Seer of the Throne the firestorm was meant to kill has been warned and is no longer there. If the Guardian learns that a mage is planning to invoke a certain dangerous spell in private, but not before Sleepers, she may arrange for witnesses by ordering pizza to that address or scheduling a block party to interfere, forcing the mage to back down. There is usually little Guardians can do when the offending mage chooses to cast his spell within his own sanctum.

When dealing with mages who cannot be convinced or coerced into restraining themselves, Guardians can do nothing more than limit the damage. Countermagic is a valuable tool. While it will not prevent a spell from incurring a Paradox, a successful counterspell eliminates any prolonged exposure of magic to the Sleeping world and protects lasting effects from being eroded by Disbelief (and, in turn, eroding the power of magic). Prime 2 "Counterspell Prime" is exceptionally useful for this purpose.

Guardians of the Veil cannot always be on the scene when a troublesome spell is cast. When a mage irresponsibly (or deliberately) creates a visible effect with an extended duration and parades it around before the Sleepers, the Guardians try to locate and defuse the situation as soon as possible. Whether a mage is raising dinosaurs from the dead to terrorize New York or just wandering through London with an invisible umbrella to keep the rain off, the Guardians want to cut their losses. The first order of business is to prevent the mage causing the trouble from creating more trouble. When a powerful mage or incredibly blatant magic is involved, the Guardian caucus may convene to organize its members more effectively.

Keeping Sleepers away from the disturbance is a prime concern. Mundane means come first: Guardians may pose as police officers or other officials to shunt traffic away from the afflicted area. If possible, they use contacts in government to get the real authorities on their side. While causing panic (with bomb threats or fake quarantines) is a last resort, it has been known to get the job done. Guardians avoid trouble for such "pranks" by manipulating the phone lines with Forces, if possible. With luck, the visible spell soon disappears. If not, Guardians have been known to trade favors to whatever available mage can use Prime 1 "Dispel Magic" to dissolve the troublesome spell. Guardians who reach the rank of Adept in Prime are valued for their ability to unravel any spell, regardless of Arcana involved, with "Supernal Dispelling." When the object of Disbelief and Paradox is an imbued item, the simplest course is usually for the Guardians to appropriate it.

A Paradox isn't always the issue at hand. There are numerous supernatural creatures who display abilities obviously not derived from the Supernal World. While they do not cause Disbelief, interaction with these creatures can prompt a mortal to begin an investigation into the occult. When this is the case, Guardians follow the same protocol as they do for witnesses to vulgar magic. Still, preventing these interactions instead of just covering them up is preferable. Guardians of the Veil spend significant time and effort tracking the living dead, ghosts and spirit-creatures and keeping them from causing too much trouble. Sometimes, disturbingly parallel goals cause mages to form odd alliances — cooperating with theriomorphs who want to destroy an infestation of spirits or siding with one faction in a vampiric conflict — but such events are extraordinarily rare.

Sleepers may be troubled by disturbing dreams of the witnessed supernatural event, and far too many for the Guardians' comfort are catapulted into a search for more information on that which the Sleepers witnessed. This is when the Veil must be emphasized most. Guardians descend on the affected Sleepers with liberal use of the Masque, often playing opposite sides of their own morality play, in which the moral is apathy and forgetfulness. Covert Mind spells are carefully applied to gain trust (or distrust, as desired). Eventually, the subject is led into the Labyrinth.

Soul Stones and Demesnes

In the Guardians' eternal fight against Paradoxes, Guardians of the Veil have gained a small reputation for using soul stones to create Demesnes whenever possible. Many caucuses encourage their members to create a soul stone and use it to bring the higher laws closer to the Fallen World. The caucus' master willworkers then use the Demesnes as safe locations for practicing the most vulgar magic, assuming the Demesnes' owners allows it. Access to Demesnes is a valuable resource and often used as leverage. Guardians use their Demesnes when they need to perform experiments in the gross Arcana, such as developing a new form of life or conjuring vast machines out of nothing. Careful to keep their magic away from the eyes of the Sleeping, Demesnes are kept within Guardian

sanctums and only rarely made as large as the sanctums that contain them.

Some Guardians manage to make use of a Demesne's special properties to aid them in their work. Guardians use Demesnes sympathetic with Arcadia as operational headquarters, ensuring that no one loses track of time when it's at a premium and taking advantage of enhanced Time and Fate magic to predict the right choices for agents in the field. Demesnes carrying the aspect of Pandemonium are appreciated for the clarity of mind they bestow and see use by Guardian think-tanks and data analysis centers.

So great is the Guardian need for Demesnes that some Guardians consider it a duty to offer pieces of their souls for that purpose. They sacrifice their greatest potential enlightenment by scarring their souls, increasing some of their flexibility now and giving trusted members of their order greater power to leverage against the Abyss. The mages even recognize the harm it does their outlooks, tempting them to hubris, and accept it for the good of the order. More than one Guardian of the Veil, knowing she is soon to die, has spent her last breaths pulling a soul stone from her breast and turning it into a Demesne before she expires.

Rote Specialties

Masters among the Guardians code special knowledge, passed down by the order's mages since time out of mind, into the rotes they create. When they teach these to other Guardians of the Veil, trained in the order's methods, the rotes have a special effectiveness. Some claim that the order's unnamed founders created the Rote Specialties; others argue that Rote Specialties were simply developed over time through excessive use. Whatever the truth, mages of the Guardians who learn rotes for Investigation, Stealth or Subterfuge are able to cast them with a subtly greater effectiveness.

Motions used in the rotes to make them more effective are a combination of external actions and proper mental training. A foreign mage can imitate a Guardian's visible casting habits as much as she likes without getting any sort of advantage from it.

Investigation

Guardians spend their lives searching for breaches in the Gauntlet, in the thin veil between the Abyss and the Fallen World, and in the law of secrecy. They seek out too-curious Sleepers and investigate them thoroughly to make risk estimates and decide how to treat them. Mages who are too frivolous with their powers must be found and dealt with.

Investigation applies when reading through a Silver Lander mage's file cabinet at night to find his records or while plundering a Mysterium database to judge whether their new discovery is a threat to the Veil.

Investigation rotes coded by the Guardians of the Veil involve minuscule twitches of the fingers that cue rapid internal correlations between relevant bits of information to form a clear mental picture of the situation. To an onlooker, the mage might appear to be absent-mindedly counting on his fingers;

he might also look like someone far too used to working at a computer, his fingers twitching at imaginary keys.

Stealth

Being seen is foolish and dangerous. Observing an event changes it if the people involved know they're being watched. In order to gain quality information, Guardians must evade detection by the spirits, creatures and mages who need to be watched. To allow otherwise is to invite the sort of misdirection that the order prefers to bestow upon others.

Among mages, the Guardians of the Veil are well-known but not well-liked. While no other order would go so far as to destroy the Guardians, other orders would surely do much to discomfit the Guardians' vital efforts for the safety of the Fallen World. The Seers of the Throne would like nothing more than to destroy every last vestige of the order, and few other members of the Pentacle would mind seeing the Guardians of the Veil's plots suffer a setback. Some of these enemies have memories stretching back to the original Fall. To prevent the order's demise and aid its tasks, the Guardians must remain unseen.

The rotes that utilize this specialty include tensed leg muscles (as if one is walking silently) or sliding the thumb behind the palm and refocusing one's eyes beyond a nearby object or the spell's target.

Subterfuge

Trusting is an unnecessary risk, but *being* trusted is an immense advantage. Some say that there can be no safer mage than one who is surrounded by people who trust his words. And there are many whose trust the Guardians can put to good use, especially Sleepers with too much time on their hands.

Not all information can be stolen from an office in the dead of the night. Some things can only be learned from those who know them, and many mages are strong enough not to respond to torture or similar pressures. The only recourse is to attain the trust of those who know what the Guardians must, and that requires subterfuge.

The Guardian's Subterfuge rotes feature twisting or rolling the tongue in ways that call upon a fork-tongued legacy. The fingers may be briefly crossed, or a motion may draw the hand across the heart.

Rote Mudras

Every order guards its secrets jealously, unwilling to give any mage with an opposing philosophy the chance to use the order's mysteries for a purpose of which the order members don't approve. The Guardians of the Veil turn this withholding into an art. They begin by concealing themselves *en toto*. The Guardian's favorite place is in the dark, whether the dark of the light or the dark of the mind. To the Guardians of the Veil, no spell should ever be seen, especially by a Sleeper but also by other mages. The techniques the Guardians use for their rotes are valuable tools in rooting out hubris and protecting the Awakened from their own lack of wisdom, and the techniques are made all the more useful for their secrecy. To utilize them in public, where a foreign mage might learn to recognize them, is to weaken the tool.

A common tactic for concealing an order's mudras and roteteck, one that the Guardians forgo, is to muddy the water by intermixing the true, meaningful gestures with hand wiggles, postures and twitches that only the casting mage knows to be the physical equivalent of gibberish. Guardians of the Veil refrain from such dangerous absurdity. Acting the fool when enacting a rote may provide adequate cover to prevent a foreign mage from recognizing the method behind the madness, but in no way helps hide the existence of magic and the Supernal from the Sleeping masses. To facilitate this necessary precaution, the masters of the order create their rotes with subtlety in mind.

Over the years since the order was founded, the Guardians have moved away from the ancient mystical symbols of old and replaced them with more innocuous motions that can be more easily hidden from spectators. Centuries of development have made the Guardians' mudras what they are today, but even the most inventive order of this order have found it impossible to eliminate all of the traditional gestures of power from their rotes. Today, as a general rule, the Guardians' mudras are ones that can be easily mistaken for everyday activities. Guardians are often taught how to make their mudras unsuspicious in the context of conversation, though the words are not part of the rote. This tactic may prevent the mage from enhancing his spell with the High Speech, but such a language would defeat the purpose of disguising a rote with conversation anyway. The mudras themselves are motions, not actions, and can be performed without any paraphernalia. There is nothing restricting a Guardian from actually using a relevant piece of equipment when performing an action; clever Guardians of the Veil dedicate magical tools that can fill these roles.

The mudras listed below are largely those used in vulgar rotes; covert rotes are incredibly subtle, like a single wink, a lick of the lips or a twitch of the fingers. Mudras used in a rote are usually relevant to the spell's purpose: the gesture for a spell to assist one's hearing may involve cupping an ear, and the mudras for improving vision may include squinting. This is not an exhaustive list; Storytellers can use it to help create their own appropriate rote mudras.

The simplest Practices—Compelling, Knowing and Unveiling—have general mudras that Guardians of the Veil can apply across the spectrum of Arcana.

Practice of Compelling: *Exerting manipulative influence.* Stating a secret relevant to the spell's target(s); sharing a secret handshake; producing fake identification indicating authority.

Practice of Knowing: *The trappings of being "found out."* Displaying shock at being photographed or caught on video; giving a thumbprint; signing a confession. The *shuni* mudra, touching the flat of the middle finger to the thumb, also figures in some rotes of this Practice.

Practice of Unveiling: *Acts related to surveilling.* Utilizing a vision- or hearing-enhancement device, from a glass held to a wall to wielding a parabolic microphone; taking photographs, perhaps covertly.

Death

Guardians use mudras that imitate assassination attempts: a knife to the back, planting or drinking poison, firing a sniper rifle. Also common are innocent motions that can be used for very subtle assassinations: each finger placed on the knuckle of the next-larger finger while elegantly drinking from a teacup or wineglass, a particular difficult melody on the piano while entertaining, beating a specific tattoo on a page while turning it at a poetry reading.

Examples: "It's like she was just twisting the knife (accompanying gesture)." Aiming an imaginary rifle (or a real one) to activate a single-target rote, such as Death 4 "Consign to the Mausoleum."

Fate

The mudras that the Guardians of the Veil use to enhance their Fate magic usually denote in some way what is the final fate of a spy: death, generally by execution. For smaller blessings, the order still uses the Jupiter mudra, clasping both hands together with the forefingers pointing out. Also viable are actions that traditionally trigger or are triggered by minor unfortunate events, like stubbing a toe or spilling salt.

Examples: "Sorry to bother you with this, but my boss'll hang me if I don't get those reports (makes gesture to hang himself)!" Scraping one's shoe against a stair, as if scraping off dog feces.

Forces

Guardian of the Veil rotes for the Mystery of Forces invoke the forces they must apply in their line of work. Placing one's hands flat together, then creating a cavity between them as a knife might pierce skin, tracing the circuit diagram for a simple electronic bug or noting on one's fingers the chemical interactions in a two-element sleeping gas. Because the Jupiter mudra also symbolizes breaking through barriers, this mudra also sees use here.

Examples: "Huh, do you hear that (gestures listening to something)?" Tracing out the path of electricity in an imaginary wiretap.

Life

An agent's life is never her own. She lives other peoples' lives, mimicking them in appearance and manner. Mudras for the Life Arcanum emphasize this. The motion of donning a portion of a disguise, whether smearing on some spirit gum and a fake mustache or painting on a scar, is common in Guardian rotes.

Examples: "I heard that Joanne's beauty mark is a fake (the gesture of licking a fake mole and sticking it on)." Trying on a wig in a store. Faking a brief limp or a spasm.

Matter

Spies place a great deal of value on being surreptitious. As a result, much of their equipment can be disassembled for covert travel and reassembled before use. Matter mudras imitate the actions of taking apart or putting together such things as

firearms, parabolic microphones, bombs or detonators. Some such mudras can be concealed within actual work one is doing on mechanical objects, like radios or computers.

Examples: *Opening up and closing the battery panel on one's CD player in order to assist and conceal a quick assembly mudra. Mimicing the disassembly of a pistol, or actually doing it, as part of a rote to turn ammunition into clay.*

Mind

Just as Life focuses on living as another does, Mind focuses on actually donning another's identity. Mudras can use the technical aspects of stealing an identity (cutting out a picture in a passport to put in one's own, whiting out the description on a birth certificate) or the events that play out when living another's life (stammering excuses for odd behavior, reciting one's "life history"). The latter are often facial mudras that involve rapidly moving lips and a cringing face. Also used for the Mind Arcanum, often in conjunction with others, is the *vajrapradama* mudra, interlacing all one's fingers at the fingertips. Meant to confer great confidence, it is of inestimable use for one whose life may depend on his self-assurance.

Example: "Oh, I was born in Mississippi and lived there 'til I was three when my dad got a job in Kentucky . . . (facial mudra)." Crossing one's fingers at the right point while looking over them at a visitor, "Oh, really?"

Prime

There is no direct correspondence for the Prime Arcanum in the life of an agent. Instead, Guardian rotes for Prime center around remembrance of the Awakened City. Bringing the tips of all fingers on one hand together, or doing the same thing with both hands, symbolizes the ocean spire. An appropriate facial mudra involves looking upward as if at the spire and is often accompanied by laying one hand on the face in a gesture of respect, loss or sadness.

Examples: "Isn't that just a beautiful flag (looks up)?" Holding an object upward with all one's fingers. Looking upward, as if in thought and laying a hand on one's chin.

Space

Space is an important Mystery to the Guardians because of sympathy, something most agents try to avoid or, at the least, moderate. Appropriate gestures include planting or seeking electronic bugs (indicating symbolic sympathy through electronics), body language suggesting that one is being listened to or sketching the diagram of a building as if forming a defense plan.

Examples: *Warding the body by taking a deliberate step, as though through a metal detector. Locating a sympathetic bond by drawing a chart of the target's connections in the air.*

Spirit

Another Arcanum that has few mortal analogues, the Guardians of the Veil use variations on a couple specific mudras for these rotes. The *varada* mudra, holding the arm supine and in toward the body with the palm turned inward, helps them

make contact and communicate with spirits. Another mudra connects the thumb and middle finger and pierces that circle with the forefinger, indicating a world within the world; this symbolism is used in several full-body mudras that may be more concealable. Neither of these symbols is exclusively used by the Guardians.

Examples: *Working the varada mudra into a stretch during a long day's work. While sitting, resting one ankle on the knee of the other leg to form a circle and dropping one's hand through it.*

Time

The acts of setting a stopwatch, setting an alarm or triggering (or planting) a bomb's timer can all serve as mudras for the Time Arcanum, as can the facial mudra of counting silently down, as if for an impending explosion.

Examples: *Two mages synchronizing their watches (assisted casting). Destroying a document that has outlived its usefulness.*

Magical Tools

Guardians of the Veil train their initiates in the use of unique magical tools for spellcasting. When a mage of the order uses this equipment, it becomes easier for her to safely shape the Supernal laws she is channeling, reducing the risk of Paradoxes.

Cloaks and other heavy, concealing articles of clothing have always been favored by the Guardians, but they are referred to as cloaks regardless. They give the Guardians, who are exceptionally paranoid almost to a man, a slight feeling of privacy and security that their training leverages into additional focus for controlling spells. Usually the tan or black, nondescript trench coats that private dicks once favored are used. Though no motion is necessary to gain the tools' benefit, cloaks are used in casting to hide mudras and to make a spell's effect more plausible; pulling a sword or a roll of money from nowhere is less unexpected when you're the creepy guy in the big coat. Typical mudras using cloaks include deliberate rummaging behind the cloak's flaps or within a voluminous pocket.

Tools referred to as "veils" include scarves pulled over the mouth and nose, facial costuming (the ubiquitous presidential masks or more elegant dominoes), ski masks and actual veils. In some circumstances, gas masks, sunglasses, properly arranged hats or specific face makeup may suffice. They perform admirably for concealing facial mudras and a mage's identity, aiding a Guardian's spellcasting for the same reason as cloaks. Some use these tools to aid mudras by adjusting them to improve concealment or reveal a significant glance, or simply bringing attention to the fact that one's face is covered.

Some weapons qualify as magical tools for the Guardians of the Veil, specifically those meant to be concealed or used by assassins. Stilettos, very thin-bladed knives that are easily hidden up sleeves or in waistbands, are appropriate, as are derringers, also known as "hold-out" pistols. For some, having such a precision tool at their disposal fine-tunes their finesse for weaving a spell; for others, the edge of having hidden weapons gives them enough of a mental advantage to perfect castings.

Surveillance equipment can be used as magical tools. Cameras and microphones, especially small, concealed ones, can make a spell more successfully evade Paradoxes if activated as a part of the magic. To a Guardian, using such equipment to aid spellcasting gives him the feeling of having more information to work with, gaining a more complete picture from which he can evade the pitfall of a Paradox.

Sacraments

To be most effective, extended spellcasting needs a meaningful connection between the ritual performed and the Arcana being used. Many of the traditional Arcana tools (*Mage: The Awakening*, p. 90) can apply, but Guardians of the Veil find the most significance in items pertaining to spies, tradecraft and their position as police. Relevant sacraments differ by Arcanum. A few rare sacraments are particularly potent and might lend a +1 equipment bonus to the ritual spellcasting.

One sacrament that the Guardians of the Veil have learned to apply to extended spells of any Arcana is the *secret*. Something must be truly secret, that is, known only to one other person and the mage (or only the mage) in order to work in such a manner;

the secret also must be true. Then, the secret must be completely destroyed through exposure. It must be ritually disseminated to such a degree that it can never be considered secret again. Revealing that J. Edgar Hoover was a cross-dresser by triggering several books on the subject once qualified as ritual exposure of a secret. Guardians are careful not to expose secrets that threaten the Veil, using only completely temporal matters in their ritual casting. Using secrets as sacraments never gives the mage an equipment bonus, no matter how important or rare the secret is.

Death: Unraveling a noose or pouring the gunpowder from a round of ammunition symbolizes the execution of a traitor. The noose that hung a spy, or grinding to dust the bone from dead double agent (+1).

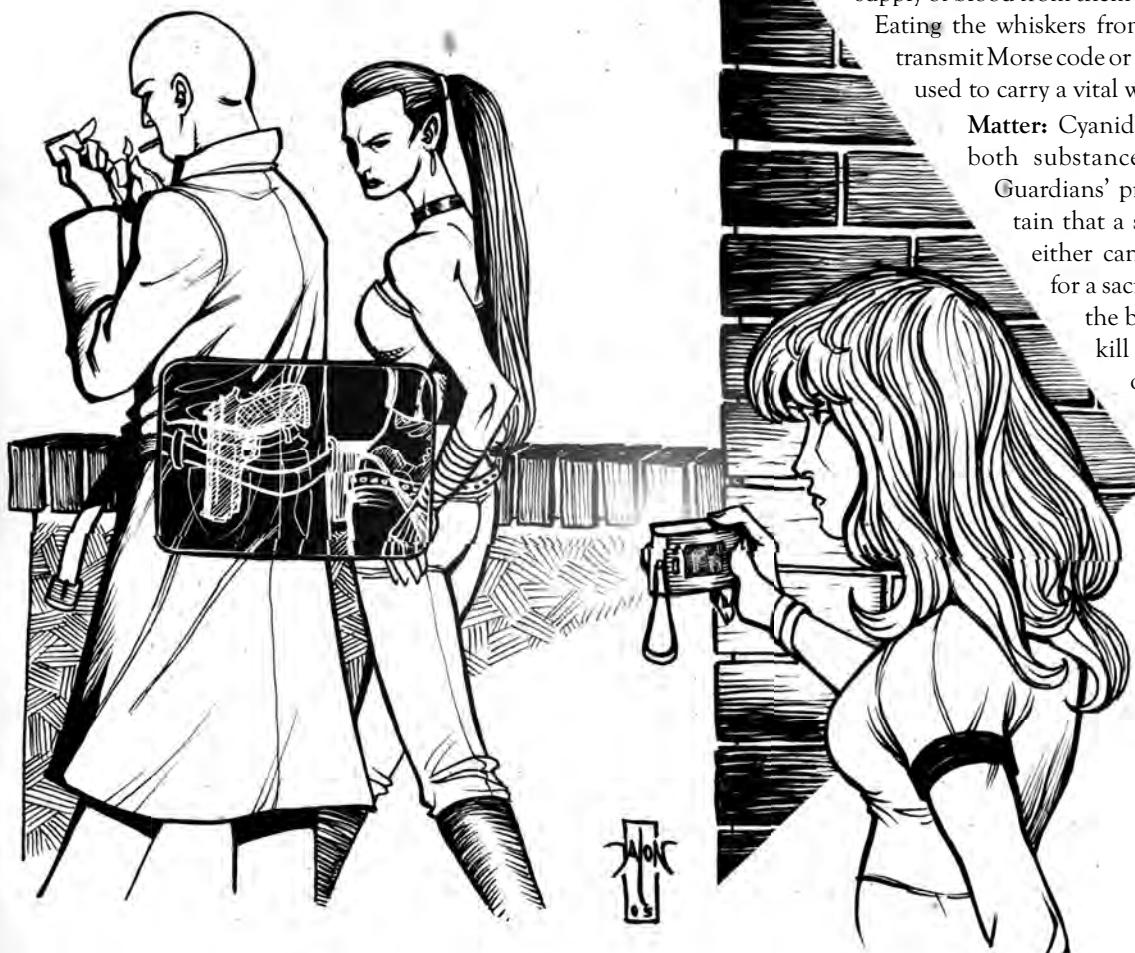
Fate: Coins and dice represent the small fortunes that agents sometimes need to stay alive, and crushing or grinding either into uselessness can act as the sacrament. Burning a bible or melting a badge with a bullet lodged in it, from when it saved a man's life (+1).

Forces: Breaking the lens of a spyglass, used to see what a spy otherwise could not, or burning confidential documents as if to hide them. Melting away the wire from a telegraph that communicated secret reports or destroying the carbon copy through which an important signature was stolen (+1).

Life: Many creatures, such as monkeys and mice, can be trained to assist criminals and spies, and a small supply of blood from them can aid in spellcasting.

Eating the whiskers from a mouse trained to transmit Morse code or fresh blood from a bird used to carry a vital wartime message (+1).

Matter: Cyanide and gunpowder are both substances important to the Guardians' praxis, and making certain that a significant quantity of either cannot be used qualifies for a sacrament. Melting down the blade of a knife used to kill two separate agents, or contaminating the dregs of a poison used to pull off a world-class con (+1).



Mind: Turning written documents displaying great cognition or the personal notebooks of spies to ash help with extended Mind castings. Solving and destroying the crossword puzzle that an intelligence agency placed in a national paper to communicate with agents, or destroying the remains of a famous sleuth's magnifying glass (+1).

Prime: Gemstones and crystal are used in Prime castings and are usually shattered to symbolize the Guardians' use of dispelation and countermagic. Destroying a shard of crystal leftover from a Matter spell dissolved by Disbelief (+1).

Space: Eating or otherwise destroying the remnants of mundane precautions Guardians use to keep their sanctums safe (tape on the doorknob, hairs on the lintel) and shattering tools they use to surveil from afar represent the abilities of Space. Consuming tape from the recorder that caught Nixon in the act, or permanently disabling an alarm that saved (or doomed) a spy's life (+1).

Spirit: Burning musical instruments and animal tokens are enough to connect a casting to the Spirit. Letting fire consume what remains of the incense that burned while a thief robbed a monastery blind, or a bit of ephemera given by a spirit of tradecraft or betrayal (+1).

Time: Watches that can be synchronized or were once stolen can be stomped upon (or otherwise destroyed) as good fuel for Time magic. A stopwatch used to time a robbery before the authorities could arrive, or the timer from a bomb, defused with seconds to go (+1).

Death Spells

•• Apprentice of Death

Corpse Unmasking (Death •• + Prime •)

One of the common and unpleasant duties of the Guardians of the Veil is to use the Death 2 "Corpse Mask" spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 136) to cover up physical evidence of a magical homicide. But rogue mages can use Corpse Mask just as well as the Guardians. This spell allows the mage to detect whether or not the spell Corpse Mask had been used on a subject.

Corpse Unmasking cannot undo the transformation done by Corpse Mask, but can let the caster know if the original cause of death was due to a spell.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The results of the casting roll are as follows:

Dramatic Failure: The mage not only fails to perceive if the subject has had a Corpse Mask placed upon it, but his attempt to penetrate the mask mystically "contaminates" the corpse, making it impossible for future spells to have a chance of determining if a Mask was placed upon it.

Failure: The results are inconclusive, and the mage cannot tell if the corpse had been Masked.

Success: The mage determines that the corpse has had a Mask placed upon it, though he cannot determine what the original cause of death was.

Exceptional Success: While the spell does not undo the physical transformation, the caster is able to correctly determine whether or not the corpse in question has been Masked, and if so, he is able to perceive the body in its original state, allowing him to make a true diagnosis of the cause of death.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Unmasking the Rogue

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Death

The Guardians of the Veil were the first to invent the rote for piercing the Corpse Mask, though other orders have since followed in the Guardians' footsteps. It is a common rote among Sentinels, though the actual Skills used may vary. (The Free Council frequently substitutes Science for Occult.)

Final Sight (Death ••)

This spell evokes ectoplasm from the eyes of a corpse, forming an ectoplasmic image of the last thing the corpse saw. The effect is visible for all present to see, including Sleepers.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

The spell requires the presence of a corpse. While the eyes do not need to be intact, the spell does require a more substantial corpse than mere ashes, though a decapitated head will suffice.

Although mages often use this spell in the hopes of discovering the identity of an unknown killer (since the spell is limited to the last thing the victim saw before dying), if the victim was shot by a sniper from far away or poisoned, the spell will not reveal the identity of the killer.

An exceptional success might reveal an additional clue. For instance, if the targeted corpse reveals that the person was pushed off a cliff and fell down onto rocks below, a basic success might only show an image of the bottom of the cliff. But with an exceptional success, the "last sight" might be the image of the killer pushing the victim. However well the caster may or may not have rolled, the images are from the point of view of the subject, so things outside his line of sight are not revealed. Most Guardians prefer to attack from behind for just this reason.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Posthumous Accusation

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult + Death

The Guardians of the Veil are well known for using this rote in their inquiries. Even if the final image is not directly useful as a clue, it can provide clues indirectly. For instance, a killer might have, as mentioned above, thrown someone off a cliff. But if the body fell into a river and washed out to sea, the location of the death may lead the willworker to the scene of the crime, where other methods (such as the Time 2 spell "Postcognition") might prove useful.

Fate Spells

•• Apprentice of Fate

Querulous Minds (Fate ••+ Prime •)

By reading the fates around him, a mage can detect those Sleepers who have had an experience with the supernatural.

Practice: Unveiling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Experiencing the supernatural changes a person, but the change is subtle and hard to detect. If the mage desires, he can scan the auras of those around him for any hint of a supernatural encounter. When the caster looks upon a person who has actually had a run-in with some aspect of the unnatural, her aura appears more conspicuous than others. Some mages see silver threads throughout the aura, others smell a specific odor or just have a sixth sense about the person. If the number of successes on this roll is equal to or less than the Potency of a relevant effect intended to hide a target, the mage using this spell sees only a normal aura, untouched by the occult.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Find the Leak

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Fate

Guardians use this spell to seek out those dedicated people (or unlucky individuals) who have been touched by the supernatural. Simply seeing them is just the start. A Guardian must perform additional investigation to determine the target's name and other information. Inquiries with the local Cultors usually follow, making sure the fellow hasn't already been taken into the Labyrinth.

Subjects found through the use of this spell (when they aren't already involved in the Labyrinth) often get visits from strangers in black, corporate men from mysterious companies and others who wish to interview them about their experiences. Some Guardians of the Veil simply activate this spell and spend time wandering the streets, the equivalent of a police car patrolling for suspicious activity.



Sniffing the Winds of Fate (Fate ••+ Death ••)

Akin to both Fate 1 "Sybil's Sight" and Death 1 "Grim Sight," but more powerful than either, Sniffing the Winds of Fate gives the caster a sense of the subject's ultimate destiny — grand or humble, good or ill — and how near the subject is to that fate. The "bigger picture," or ultimate outcome of the subject's life, whether for good or ill, is revealed by a golden aura or a gray shroud around her, the intensity of which reveals the magnitude of the net effect she is destined to have on the world. A true saint is seen wreathed in a near-blinding radiance, while a cannibalistic serial killer who targets children would be shrouded by a deep leaden gloom.

A mage can use this spell to read inanimate objects as well as living creatures to determine how pervasive the effects of entropy are on its structure and its ultimate fate, allowing the mage to determine whether a building is likely to stand for several more decades, fall into a lengthy state of disrepair before falling down (or being renovated).

This spell reveals what might be considered the subject's default fate — what will happen if destiny is allowed to run its course. With extraordinary action, the destiny revealed by this spell may be altered, at which point the spell may be used again at a later time to discern the subject's new destiny.

This spell does sense, among other things, if the subject possesses the Destiny Merit, and a general sense of how strong the Merit is in that individual.

Practice: Unveiling

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The basic Fate + Death version of the spell reveals how strong or weak the subject's effect on destiny will be — if he's a mover-and-shaker, or an average guy who will have little effect on the course of human (or cosmic) events.

An exceptional success on the casting allows the mage to ascertain more specific information, including the ultimate cause, and possibly even the immediate circumstances, of the subject's death. The mage might briefly see his subject as she will appear after death: with a bullet wound to the head, or gray and withered from the wasting of cancer or with the grimace and clutching at the chest of one laid low by a heart attack.

In the case of subjects whose destinies have been magically occluded, this spell's Potency must exceed that of the occluding magic.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Destiny's Revelation

Dice Pool: Composure + Investigation + Death

Guardians use this rote regularly to discern the merit of mortals they watch over. This rote lets them know whether a particular mortal would do well as a mage, or whether it's preferable to channel her away from the Awakening altogether. Guardians may allow a mage with a faintly shadowed destiny to survive, but any member of the Awakened limned with heavy shadow is likely to be targeted for death. By the same token, a mage targeted for destruction by the Guardians might get a reprieve if this rote reveals him to have a bright destiny.

Forces Spells

•• Apprentice of Forces

Alter Frequency (Forces ••)

The mage can increase or decrease the frequency of an existing sound, making it sound deeper or higher, as she desires.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

This spell can be used to speak or whistle in ranges completely foreign to the human larynx. A mage can get the attention of dogs and other creatures that can hear in different pitches. Some myths suggest that a good, loud whistle pitched above the human range of sound could startle (and thus reveal) unprepared supernatural creatures who might otherwise successfully masquerade as human.

Use is not limited to sounds the mage creates herself. She may alter the frequency of any sound within sensory range for the duration, for whatever purpose she desires. Using this spell on others' voices, or on other sounds that Sleepers expect to recognize, is a good way to make it Improbable.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Secret Whispers

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Forces

Some secrets are too sensitive to be spoken, but too important not to be recorded or shared with another trustworthy Guardian. When this is the case, the Guardians of the Veil may use their magic to narrow the field of who can eavesdrop. One Guardian uses this rote while another casts Forces 1 "Receiver,"

enabling the first to speak in a tone no human (or unprepared mage) will understand while the second listens.

Being observed talking without sound is suspicious, so some mages utilize recording devices. Some record their altered voices (in which case they must be sure that the device can capture that range) and use them as personal journals, from which others will only hear static. Used to communicate, the altered voice can be played while the mage makes filler conversation, and the second mage listens to the recording. This is more secure than the alternative, which involves recording normal sound and altering the recording as it plays back.

Life Spells

••• Disciple of Life

Enforced Silence (Life ••• + optional Mind •••)

The mage quells a target creature's vocalizations, eliminating its ability to make any noise with its voice. At her command, vocal chords seize up, the tongue is paralyzed, the lips fail to shape sounds; as a result, the target is unable to generate any sound louder than breathing. Not even hisses or tongue clicks are possible. The target can cough (and so cannot be made to choke while this spell is active), but his coughs sound like barely audible wheezing. The spell works on any living being that creates noise with its breath.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant and contested; the target rolls Stamina + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

With one success, a single target's vocal apparatus is silenced; extra successes allow multiple targets to be affected.

Extra Successes

Targets Affected

2 successes	Two
3 successes	Four
4 successes	Eight
5 successes	16

Those affected by the spell can still eat, breathe and swallow normally. Note that most animals and people will experience some distress upon finding they can't use their voice. Because the spell draws on the Life Arcanum, the spell won't function on nonliving beings such as spirits, ghosts, vampires or the walking dead.

If the mage also has Mind 3, he may prevent the target from speaking about a specific topic or articulating a specific word or phrase. The target can talk normally unless he tries to utter the specified words, or speak about the forbidden topic, even obliquely.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Hold the Tongue

Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Life versus Stamina + Gnosis

A guard dog's bark, a screeching parrot, a mage about to utter a word of power — the wrong noise at the wrong time can make it difficult for a Guardian to perform his duties. With this rote, an agent of the Dragon's Eye can prevent an enemy from shouting for help or blurting out an important piece of information.

Palsy (Life 4)

The mage robs her subject of motor control by afflicting him with powerful tremors and muscle spasms. The subject's muscles twitch and seize up uncontrollably. The subject's hands, only vaguely under his control, shake with a violent palsy, making it impossible for him to maintain hold on an item. The rest of his body suffers similarly, making it challenging to move with any grace and may even render him unable to stay on his feet.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant; subtract target's Stamina.

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

The mage must first grab hold of the target, with a roll of Strength or Dexterity + Brawl – the target's Defense. If successful, he can cast this spell as an instant action in the following turn. With Life 4, he can cast this at targets in sensory range.

While afflicted by this spell, the subject's Dexterity is reduced by the number of successes the mage's player attained on the roll. This impacts all traits that depend on Dexterity, including Defense. A subject whose Dexterity is brought down to zero (or less) is unable to maintain enough coordination to stay standing, and falls over into a twitching mass.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: St. Vitus Dance

Dice Pool: Composure + Medicine + Life – Stamina

The work of the Guardians occasionally requires them to neutralize or detain a subject without causing lasting damage. This rote is ideal for that use. It prevents the subject from running or attacking, but inflicts no more damage than what the subject might take from a fall. Likewise, weapons, magical or otherwise, fall from his hands, preventing him from being a danger to himself or anyone else. Best yet, it's perfectly suitable for use in front of Sleepers, who will assume that the unfortunate subject of the spell is simply having a seizure of some sort.

Adept of Life

Control Reactions (Life 4 + Mind 2)

Using a combination of emotional suggestions similar to the Mind 2 "Emotional Urging" spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 207–208), barely perceptible telepathic messages and precise physiological control identical to that provided by the Life 4 "Trigger the Lizard Brain" spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 191), the caster can evoke a particular, visceral emotional response in the target. For example, by combining emotions such as

greed with physiological reactions normally associated desire and interest, an otherwise honest official might be persuaded to accept a bribe.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Composure + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The most common use of this spell is to cause the target to have a particular positive or negative reaction to some specific event. A newspaper editor can be caused to dismiss a news story he might otherwise have published, and a police officer can be convinced to accept a somewhat dubious but non-magical explanation for a bizarre phenomenon that he just witnessed.

In addition to such subtle and precise uses, this spell can also be used to completely discredit someone that the Guardians consider to be dangerous. By provoking completely inappropriate but powerful feelings of fear, lust or anger, an individual can be made to appear overly emotional or even mentally unbalanced. If cast with a sufficiently long duration, the target might even remain unbalanced long enough to fail an initial examination by a psychiatrist and be committed for observation for a few days.

Even targets who avoid acting inappropriately still experience all of the physiological signs of the desired emotion, including nervous sweating, a tremor in their voices and other reactions that will cause anyone they are talking to take them far less seriously. Alternately, the caster can make targets seem far calmer and confident than they would otherwise feel. Depending upon the caster's intent, the target adds or subtracts one die to or from every Social roll he makes while this spell is in effect. For example, if the caster wished to make a lawyer nervous and shy, the lawyer would subtract one die from all of her Social rolls for the duration of this spell.

Since the target actually feels all of the emotional and physiological reactions produced by this spell, even if the actions that he takes while under its influence seem completely out of character, he is almost certain to come up with some reason for making this choice and will likely defend his motives and actions if questioned later.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Puppets of the Labyrinth

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Life versus Composure + Gnosis

This is one of the Guardians' most subtle and powerful tools. While the Guardians remain in the shadows, they make individual Sleepers seem far more or less credible than they otherwise would. The Guardians also carefully manipulate the reactions of important people to various ideas and pieces of information. In addition to allowing the Guardians to cause important people to dismiss all evidence of an incident of vulgar magic, this rote is also regularly used to render those determined to uncover the truth about mages and magic harmless by making them appear to be raving lunatics or harmless

and unstable crackpots.

Guardians who work closely with the Labyrinth are particularly fond of this rote, because it allows them to make and break the people who lead the various cults and other organizations that make up this complex morass. Leaders whom the Guardians deem unsuitable appear weak or insane, while people the Guardians support seem unusually confident and eloquent. There are rumors that some Guardians have used this rote to do far more than depose minor cult leaders. Although many such charges are exaggerations, a few Guardians have used this rote to change the course of national elections during political speeches and debates, causing one candidate to appear far more sensible and suitable than the others. Naturally, the Guardians deny all such uses of this rote.

Perfect Mask (Life 4 + Mind 3)

In her duties, a Guardian must sometimes not only appear to be someone else, she must know how to act like the person she's imitating. This spell allows her to draw from the memories of the person she mimics.

Practice: Patterning

Action: Instant; subtract target's Resolve.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

The person to be mimicked must be within sensory contact of the caster (preferably chained or otherwise detained).

This spell is based upon the Life 4 "Doppelganger" spell. While simply aping the shape of another person is often good enough to fool most observers, to the trained eye something is amiss, even if the perceiver has not rational explanation as to why someone is acting differently. Adding the Mind component to the spell allows the mage to pull enough knowledge from the target's mind to allow her to blend into her surroundings. The knowledge is appropriate to a certain location or set of circumstances, but isn't terribly detailed or specific; it's enough to get the "lay of the land" and know the routines of others who frequent the place or situation. This does not give the mage any special skills she does not possess, but allows her to pass herself off as if she belongs there.

Example: Freya needs to get into a locked psychiatric ward. She and her cabal kidnap a doctor who works there, and she casts this spell to become him, focusing on the doctor's knowledge of the hospital ward. If successful, she knows the layout of the ward, is familiar with its security routines and the other doctors and nurses on the ward. However, she does not gain any medical skill from the casting.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: The Reflecting Shadow

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Stealth + Life

Rumor has it that the Guardians invented this rote in order to infiltrate the court of Queen Victoria, believing that the Silver Ladder were attempting to control her with Mind magics. Whether the Guardians were correct or not has not been recorded, but the rote proved so useful that it has been handed down from master to apprentice since then.

Matter Spells

••• Disciple of Matter

Alter Raiment (Matter 3)

The mage can alter the garments he's currently wearing, creating anything from a subtle color change to a complete transformation in an outfit's size, shape and style (but not its material — denim is still denim, even if it looks like silk). New clothing cannot be created, but existing clothes can be significantly altered: a pair of pants could become swim trunks or work overalls; a T-shirt might become a winter coat or a bra (or vice versa). The mage can choose to change some, all, or just one piece of clothing.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

Though the affected material looks like the real thing, the Durability, insulation and other physical properties of the affected material don't change — a tuxedo transformed into a HAZMAT suit won't offer special protection against chemicals, for example. Fine details such as badges or military insignia will be accurate enough to pass casual inspection, but anyone with the proper expertise will spot the fake upon close examination and an instant Wits + Investigation roll.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Quick Change

Dice Pool: Wits + Crafts + Matter

Sometimes a Guardian needs to move from one setting to another as quickly as possible; with this spell, he can be properly attired to blend in with any crowd. If pursued by enemies, the mage can quickly duck out of sight and significantly alter his guise, while his pursuers search for sartorial details that no longer exist.

Backbite (Matter 3)

In the hands of a mage, a weapon can become a danger to its wielder. The mage alters the configuration of a weapon so that it doesn't attack a target — the weapon attacks its own user. A gun misfires, exploding in the hands of the wielder. A bow's string slices open one's forearm. A knife turns out to have a razor-sharp grip.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

When someone attempts to use a weapon that has had the Backbite spell cast upon it, the person suffers her attack successes as damage. The user's Defense does not apply, though Armor might, depending on the circumstances. (An armored vest will not provide defense when picking up a Backbite enchanted



knife, though the vest will protect against a backbiting gun.)

At this level, the casting mage must touch the jury-rigged object that is the target of the spell. With Matter 4, he can cast this spell at sensory range. Adding Space 2 to the spell allows the mage to affect weapons out of normal sensory range, useful before breaking into a place with armed guards.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Misfire

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Firearms or Weaponry (depending on the type of weapon affected) + Matter

The Guardians of the Veil have been known to let themselves be captured and disarmed, knowing that their weapons cannot be used against them (until they cancel the spell).

Perfect Lock (Matter •••)

Mages have historically been known for their need for privacy. While in ancient times, this was done by weaving Space, giving them Pocket Realms, or the use of secure sanctums, in modern times, sometimes all a mage may need is a little privacy. By fusing the molecules of a door or window together, it becomes impossible to open the door, window, gate, etc. Even the mage himself cannot pass through the doorway without first canceling the spell.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

No key or application of the Larceny Skill can open the Perfectly Locked door. The spell will not prevent the door (or window, etc.) from being smashed or broken through, though some mages combine this with the Matter 3 spell "Alter Integrity" to ensure just that.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Perfectly Locked Cell

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Matter

For all the Guardians' reputation as remorseless killers, the Guardians of the Veil do, on occasion, take prisoners. Mages are notoriously difficult to contain. However, this rote lets them briefly imprison any mage who lacks the Space Arcana. There are applications of this spell that combine with warding spells to create a temporary prison cell from which few mages (though certainly not all) can escape.

Mind Spells

•• Apprentice of Mind

Control Waking (Mind ••)

Through manipulation of a sleeping person's mind, the mage can send her target into a deeper sleep and ensure that he remain oblivious to the outside world, or she can wake him instantly.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant; subtract target's Resolve.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

If the mage so desires, the target of this spell wakes instantly. If he is under a supernatural effect that prevents him from waking, the number of successes on the spell must exceed the Potency of that effect.

A sleeping target might waken at even the slightest sound, depending on how deeply asleep he is. If the mage wishes to keep the target asleep, each success on the casting levies a one-die penalty to any perception rolls he makes to awaken whenever something disturbs him (sounds, people sneaking past his bed, someone trying to remove his locket, etc.). The successes also act as the spell's Potency when contesting another mage's use of Control Waking or other, similar supernatural effects.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Silent Night

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Persuasion + Mind - Resolve

A Sleeper unable to resist the lure of the Mysteries always leaves signs about, and the Guardians of the Veil are quite practiced at seeking and finding those signs. Some of most telling are best found in the Sleeper's residence or, among the exceptionally paranoid, on the Sleeper's person. And the best time for a Guardian to perform his investigation is at night, not just for the darkness that criminals favor but also for the solitude it affords the mage — no one wants to invoke Disbelief.

Because of this, Guardians of the Veil often end up searching suspects' homes or apartments during the witching hour. More likely than not, the suspects are home then (which is good, because the Guardians sometimes need to search the suspects, as well). Guardians make use of this rote to ensure that the subject remains asleep during the investigation.

Delayed Rest (Mind ●●; optional + Life ●●)

An apprentice of Mind cannot eliminate the need for sleep completely, but he can keep his thoughts organized long enough to get the job done.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Like any human, a mage may grow tired and fall asleep, even when he does not wish to. A successful casting allows the mage to remain clear-headed for the duration of the spell, regardless of how long he has been awake before casting the spell. During this period, each success rolled in the casting allows the mage to ignore one die of penalties caused by fatigue, but only for mental or social related actions, not physical actions. He must still roll to stay awake every six hours, per the rules for "Fatigue" in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 179–180.

This spell cannot be used consecutively within the same week more times than the mage's rating in the Mind Arcanum.

Mages who add two dots of Life to the casting can ignore

one die per success of fatigue-based dice penalties when performing physical actions.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: No Rest for the Wicked

Dice Pool: Resolve + Investigation + Mind

The Mysteries won't protect themselves, and as much as a Guardian of the Veil may need her sleep, it is rare that there is another Guardian available to take up the burden. Too many opportunities have been lost because of a night's rest. Instead, Guardians use this rote to keep themselves functional and awake longer than they usually could be.

Hurried Rest (Mind ●● + Life ●●)

By putting his mind into a supernaturally deep sleep, a mage can force a full night's rest into the space of a few hours.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Special

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Each success on a casting of this spell reduces the amount of time a mage needs to get a full night of rest by half. A mage who has remained awake for 24 hours or less needs eight hours; one success reduces the required sleep period to four hours, two successes reduces it to two hours and so on. If the mage is suffering fatigue (see pp. 179–180 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) to the degree that it increases the time she must spend sleeping, the spell divides however long she needs to sleep.

Note that this spell does not ensure that the character will sleep well, only that her mind and body needs less time than usual to awake refreshed.

This spell cannot be used consecutively within the same week more times than the mage's rating in the Mind Arcanum.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Freeing the Time of the Night

Dice Pool: Stamina + Investigation + Mind

The greatest of the order's strategists are constantly in demand. There are more decisions to be made than even twice their number could handle in the time they have. For them, there is no greater resource than time — and purchasing it with mastery of the appropriate Arcanum has too high a cost. Instead, the top brass utilize this rote to significantly reduce the amount of time they actually need to rest. Agents in the field also use it, sometimes out of a need for a quick rest, sometimes out of simple paranoia — the less time a Guardian spends in one place and asleep, the safer she is.

Inspire (Mind ●●)

The mage can telepathically insert a single idea into the mind of her target, who will believe that the idea came as a flash of inspiration. The idea to be implanted must be relatively simple, something that could be summed up in a single sentence. Examples might include "The map I'm looking for could be behind the bookcase" or "There's probably an alarm on that

door, so I'd better not open it." The target is not compelled to act on the inspiration in any particular way, but will react to it as he'd react to any idea: probably follow it (if it's reasonable), possibly try it (if it could be a lucky hunch) or dismiss it (if it's wildly inappropriate).

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resolve + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Targets with Mind 1 or greater are allowed a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to sense the intrusion of an outside thought.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: The Unspoken Hint

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Mind versus Resolve + Gnosis

Someone likely to reject unsolicited advice may follow the same course of action if he thinks it's his own idea. By choosing the proper suggestion and delivering it at the right moment, it's possible for a Guardian steer the target in a desired direction, while the target thinks he's acting of his own free will (because he is). The better the mage knows his target, the more effective his message becomes: someone who's afraid of dogs, for example, could be powerfully affected by the thought that there might be dogs nearby.

Moment of Doubt (Mind ●●)

The mage implants a brief but convincing sensation of doubt into the target's mind. The actual moment of uncertainty is brief, but its effects linger for the duration of the spell. The recipient becomes unsure of herself, making it difficult for her to complete whatever activities she's engaged in, or to initiate a new course of action. Though the sudden loss of confidence is imposed by the mage's will, it feels to the target like genuine self-doubt, even if it's out of character for her to second-guess herself.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant; subtract target's Composure.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Each success subtracts one die from the target's dice pools on any attempt she makes to perform an instant or extended action for the duration of the spell, as she becomes weighed down and distracted by uncertainty — until she succeeds at any roll, in which case the doubt is assuaged and the spell's effects expire. This spell cannot be cast upon the same target more than once per scene.

If the target is a mage with Mind 1 or greater, she makes a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to sense the presence of mental manipulation.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Internal Struggle

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Intimidation + Mind - Composure

Sometimes a person's worst enemy is herself. With this rote, a Guardian traps an antagonist in a struggle with her own inner critic, giving the mage an opportunity to escape or take action.

Disciple of Mind

Denial of Senses (Mind ●●●)

By reaching into a victim's mind, a mage can diminish the target's perceptions and make it less likely that he will notice anything that doesn't already hold his focus.

Practice: Fraying

Action: Instant; subtract target's Composure.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Each success on the roll reduces all of the target's *reflexive* perception dice pools (generally Wits + Composure) by one for the duration of the spell. Though the spell won't impede a determined search, the target is less likely to notice anything peripheral to her attention or react quickly to surprises.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Dimmed Sight

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Mind

Every spy and secret agent wants the power to affect those around her so that she may pass unnoticed. The Guardians of the Veil have it, and they use it to great effect. Although this rote becomes unwieldy or ineffective if there are crowds about, Dimmed Sight is quite good at getting the Guardian through slow bank lobbies and past bored security guards.

Eyes of the Master (Mind ●●● + Space ●●)

Some mentors cannot let their protégés remain unobserved. These masters feel the need to constantly mentally eavesdrop on their students. This spell allows the master to forge a long-term telepathic link with the recipient. While this spell does not require a formal mentor-student relationship, forging the necessary deep psychic connection to someone does require the subject's willing participation.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Extended

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

For the duration of the spell, the caster can perceive anything the target senses with her five mundane senses. The spell's Duration is prolonged, but it requires concentration for the caster to actively "ride" the target. This spell is often cast with advanced prolongation (requiring Mind 4), so that the rider can keep track of the target for a long period of time.

This spell is sometimes cast in combination with Mind 3 "Telepathy," allowing the mage to also speak to the spell's recipient across distances.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Horse and Rider

Dice Pool: Perception + Empathy + Mind

This rote goes back to just after the Fall. Afraid for their own safety, the Guardians of the Veil would send junior mages on errands for their masters, remaining in telepathic communication. This spell would frequently be supplemented by the Mind 3 "Mental Wall" spell, giving the "horse" a mental barrier for everything *except* the mental link.

Implant Subliminal Message (Mind 3+ Forces or Matter 2)

This spell implants a subliminal message in any piece of electronic media, including radio broadcasts, web pages and television programs. Affecting a print article, such as a newspaper story, requires Matter 2 instead of Force 2. Anyone who reads, watches or listens to the targeted piece of media will be subject to the affect of this spell.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Composure + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The subliminal message that the mage creates cannot be particularly complex. In most cases, it simply causes the viewer to be far more or less skeptical of this or some specific, related piece of media. This spell can also be used to produce other emotional reactions to specific pieces of media, including anger, belief or joy. None of these emotions are particularly powerful or complex — readers or listeners are simply more inclined to feel a certain way about the information. However, if a particular listener is strongly inclined to feel otherwise about the piece of media, this spell cannot override such a strong conviction.

Although the thoughts and emotions produced by this spell only directly affect the target while he is watching or listening to the media containing the subliminal message, the effects of these thoughts and emotions generally linger well beyond the end of the spell. If the mage is using this spell to affect viewers' reactions to a story or rumor other than the one that she is placing the subliminal message in, then the spell becomes more difficult.

Connection Between Spell and Story	Dice Penalty
The spell is used on the actual story.	0
The spell is used on a closely related story.	-2
The spell is used on a distantly related story.	-4
The spell is used on an unrelated story.	-8

A closely related story is one on the same topic, such as a specific UFO sighting or a particular fire in a warehouse district. A distantly related story is one that is about UFOs, fires or the warehouse district in question. Much of the power of this spell comes from the fact that Sleepers are trained to believe in the mass media. While this spell can be used to implant subliminal messages that make Sleepers less likely to disbelieve

evidence of magic, impose a one die penalty on any such rolls, because even the mass media has difficulty overcoming the great power of the Abyss.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Rumor Control

Dice Pool: Wits + Subterfuge + Mind versus Composure + Gnosis

The Guardians of the Veil do their best to make absolutely certain that information about magic does not make it into the mass media or onto the Internet. However, in these days of bloggers and electronic media, stopping everyone who has seen an act of vulgar magic from reporting it is no longer always possible. Instead, the Guardians must be content to discredit both the source of the information and the information itself. If the Guardians cannot use this rote on the actual source of information, either because it was a live broadcast or because it is a rumor spread by word of mouth, or printed in a book or newspaper, they implant information in all manner of related electronic media that influences the public's view of the original source. While it is often impossible to stop a rumor, Guardians who are skilled with this rote can often alter the nature of a story so that their revised version swiftly replaces the story they wish to suppress.

Guardians have numerous uses for this spell that do not directly involve causing the public to disbelieve a specific piece of evidence for the existence of magic. However, using this (or any other) spell to cause Sleepers to believe in magic more is one of the most serious crimes one of the Guardians of the Veil can commit, unless this is done inside of the strictures of an occult Labyrinth, where the Sleeper's belief in a conspiracy theory or occult phenomena might be the key to redirecting that Sleeper into falsehoods. In such cases, it may be necessary at times to foment someone's belief in the occult.

Know Thyself (Mind 3)

In the world of magic, one's own mind cannot be trusted. Mages can change memories, even basic personality issues. The Guardians of the Veil are well-known for editing the memories of Sleepers as well as those of mages who cross the line. Though memory-editing spells do not usually cause permanent changes in Awakened targets, even a temporary change could lead to disaster. Guardians who possess sufficient skill with the Mind Arcanum often regularly use this spell to sift through their memories, looking for gaps or more subtle discontinuities, both in memory or behavior. Mages who are truly paranoid might even use mental compulsions on themselves, forcing them to cast this spell on a regular basis.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Successes must exceed the Potency of any spell used to alter the mage's memories. If this occurs, the mage becomes aware of the gap or alteration in his memory.

Example: Franklin, a Seer of the Throne, casts Mind 5 "Psychic

Reprogramming" on Orion with a Potency of three, causing him to forget the past hour of his life and replacing his memories with false, innocuous memories.

Later, Orion, being a paranoid mage, casts *Know Thyself* as part of his evening rituals. If he scores four or more successes, he discovers the alterations to his memory.

Realizing that one's memories have been altered doesn't cancel the spell that did the memory alteration, however. That requires Prime 1 "Dispel Magic," or Prime 4 "Supernal Dispelling." Until then, the character's memory will be as the memory altering spell made it, although he now realizes there's a discrepancy.

With Mind 4, the mage can cast this upon others, allowing him to detect memory manipulations used upon them.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Self-Portrait

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Mind

The Guardians claim to have been the first to develop the process of mental self-examination, and are believed to be the first to have codified it into a rote, though the Silver Ladder and the Mysterium are known to have similar rotes.

Passion Link (Mind ●●●)

The mage peers into her subject's mind and forges a connection between one topic and one powerful emotion. For the duration of the spell, the subject's emotions are no longer his own when that topic comes up. The mere mention of the trigger topic might enrage him, delight him or send him into a downward spiral of depression. While this doesn't give the mage control over the subject, it gives him an edge when the subject is responding to the trigger topic. This is a highly versatile spell, and mages have used it for a variety of purposes, from breaking up relationships, to defending the Veil, to killing enemies.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Composure + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Prolonged

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

This spell connects one topic of the mage's choosing to a strong basic emotional response in her subject — anger, joy, shame, sadness or fear — and any time that topic comes to the subject's attention, whether in conversation or just through happenstance, it triggers a massive emotional response of the programmed type in the spell's subject. If a topic brings up joy, the subject might not be able to stop talking about it (because doing so brings up such joy). Likewise, discussing other topics might have an equally powerful impact with other feelings.

The emotional impulse generated by this spell doesn't give the mage any control over how the subject responds. The spell links one topic with one powerful emotion; the spell does not determine how the subject responds to that emotion. People might grow quiet due to shame, belligerent due to anger, talkative due to joy, detached or morose due to sadness or nervous and skittish due to fear — but the mage can't predict with any

certainty how any given emotion is going to affect a particular subject. While a mage might expect that a big loud oaf might get violent when he gets angry, and while that's probably the way to bet, the mage can't be sure unless he's familiar with how his subject responds to certain emotional cues.

To improve the mage's chances of using this spell effectively, the mage may make an extended Intelligence + Empathy roll to first study the target over time and predict how he is likely to react to a given emotion. The target number is equal to the target's Composure, and he can make one roll per hour of observation.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Secret Shame

Dice Pool: Composure + Subterfuge + Mind versus Composure + Gnosis

Sometimes it's imperative that a subject shows discretion regarding a particular topic that he might otherwise speak of too freely. This variant of the spell links that topic to the subject's deepest shame. The mage determines one topic that he does not want the spell's subject to talk about — magic, for example, or the name of the person who supplied a murder weapon or anything else — and for the spell's duration, that specific subject is wrapped in a cloak of shame in the subject's psyche. To talk about that subject feels like blabbing the most sickeningly embarrassing and awkward topic possible, although the spell does not actually prevent the target from talking about it, should someone convince him to speak his shame.

Read Trends (Mind ●●●; optional Time ●●)

This spell allows the mage to cast her mind out and gain a general sense of public opinion about a particular issue. Instead of reading individual minds and sifting through their thoughts, this spell allows the caster to get a vague and general sense of the attitudes and feelings of a large number of people. To cast this spell, the mage must be exceedingly familiar with the region where he is casting it. This region can range from a large apartment building or a neighborhood of few city blocks to an entire city.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Use the rules for area-affecting spells, p. 120 in *Mage: The Awakening*, but with the special chart below.

Size of the Region

A single city block or large apartment building

Target Number

Basic success

A neighborhood of up to half a dozen city blocks

+1 success

A small town or a neighborhood of several-dozen city blocks

+2 successes

A large town or small city such as Madison, Wisconsin

+3 successes

A large metropolis such as Chicago

+4 successes

When casting this spell, the mage can attempt to get an exceedingly vague and general impression of what the people in the region are thinking about. Used in this fashion, the spell only reveals thoughts shared by a significant proportion of the people within the area. In addition, this spell only provides a very brief and general impression of such shared thoughts—the caster might discover that most everyone within a single city block is thinking about the recent power outage, the widespread job cutbacks in the area, the noisy roadwork on a nearby street and rumors about a woman who appeared out of midair three days ago.

Alternately, the caster can use Mind 4 to determine if a particular name, image, sound, face or some other short phrase or simple sensory impression evokes a strong response from the people in the designated area. When used in this fashion, the spell both reveals the approximate proportion of the people who feel a particular way about the image or phrase and roughly how they feel about it.

With the addition of Time magic, this spell can also be used to determine how residents of this region responded in the past.

The complexity of receiving and analyzing so much information is the reason that this spell can only be performed as an extended action. When performing it, the caster typically sits down in front of a map or photograph of the area he is going to examine. He then sinks into a deep trance that continues until he either successfully casts the spell or gives up the attempt.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Read the Pulse of the City

Dice Pool: Perception + Empathy + Mind

This rote is regularly used by the Guardians of the Veil to determine the affect that significant incidents of vulgar magic may have had on the populace of a region. Guardians also use this rote to find evidence of such magic and to attempt to substantiate rumors of magic, Artifacts or other unexplained phenomena that might cause Sleepers to investigate matters that the Guardians would prefer to have them avoid. Because of the lengthy casting, this rote is only used when the Guardians have reason to believe that something unusual is occurring in the area in question. They often use successive castings of this rote to narrow down the exact area of the phenomena in question. To do this, one or more mage must perform this rote multiple times in different sections of a city, in an attempt to discover where exactly the phenomena in question occurred.

Telepathic Eavesdropping (Mind ●●●)

The mage “taps” a telepathic contact between two (or more) individuals, hearing all the thoughts and feeling the emotions without giving any evidence that she is doing so.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

A mage must have the Mind 1 “Third Eye” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 206–207) active in order to use this spell, or else she cannot see the mystical waves of thought well enough to target them. Once successful, the mage perceives every conscious thought sent across a mental link created by Mind 3 “Telepathy,” Mind 5 “Network” or a similar spell or power. Completely unidirectional links, such as those used in reading memories or telepathic control, cannot be tapped by this spell. In order for the person or people being spied upon to notice the intrusion, they must also have active “Third Eye” spells. Mages with this benefit are allowed a Wits + Composure roll to notice the tap; this roll is penalized by one die for each success the caster rolled to activate this spell.

With Mind 4, a mage can cast this spell with a prolonged Duration. With Mind 5, she can use advanced-prolonged Duration factors.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Mind Tap

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Mind

This rote hails back to the original Eye of the Dragon on the isle of Atlantis. This rote is one of many techniques the early form of the order used to watch over and keep safe the inhabitants of the island. Today, Guardian spies watch over the known Hallows and Demesnes of other orders for stray psychic streams; when any arise, Guardians tap them.

●●●● *Adept of Mind*
Memory Oath (Mind ●●●● + Fate ●●+
Time ●●; optional Space ●●)

This spell is identical to the more common Guardians’ rote, “Reshaping Yesterday” (“Breach the Vault of Memory,” p. 214 in **Mage: The Awakening**), except that this spell is cast using a conjunctional Fate and Time conditional trigger. These additions cause subjects to forget a particular piece of information only if they perform a specific action, which usually involves attempting to reveal this information to Sleepers or enemies of the Guardians.

Practice: Patterning

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resolve + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Whenever possible, the Guardians make certain that this spell is cast by a master of Mind, so that it can have the longest possible duration. In addition, willing users (who can choose not to contest the spell) are tattooed with a small Atlantean Patterning rune to further increase the duration. When possible, this spell is cast as an extended action to make certain that the duration is indefinite, so that once triggered the target never remembers that particular memory.

If Space 2 is added to the casting, the spell also includes a minor telepathy effect that instantly alerts the caster of the spell if the conditional trigger ever activates, regardless of his distance from the target.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Sacred Oath of Lethe

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge + Mind versus Resolve + Gnosis

The Guardians of the Veil hold many secrets, including secrets about the Labyrinth and about covert actions they have taken against mages from other orders. Some of this information is exceptionally sensitive, but even the most sensitive data must occasionally be given to individuals other than the order's trusted and highly placed members. To insure that they never reveal this information to anyone outside of the order, the leaders of the Guardians insist that anyone who is told certain pieces of vitally important information should be subjected to this magical oath. Such information includes the locations of items that might prove the existence of magic to Sleepers, the name of order members who have deeply infiltrated the ranks of the Seers of the Throne and other equally sensitive data. When taking this oath, the order requires that subjects also give up samples of hair, blood and fingernails, so that the subjects will be easy to find with Space magic if they ever break this oath.

Occasionally, this rote is cast upon an unknowing subject. While obviously less powerful if used in this fashion, Guardians sometimes perform this rote on members who have fallen under suspicion of being traitors or are simply exceedingly careless. In such cases, this rote is partly used as a test of loyalty. If the rote is never triggered, then the subject is obviously loyal; if it is triggered, then the caster is instantly aware of this fact and the subject is not able to reveal anything of importance to the order's enemies.

Severed Sense (Mind) ●●●●

A mage can effectively "turn off" a target's senses, leaving himself free to do as he pleases, undetected.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Instant; subtract target's Stamina.

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

For each success rolled, the mage manages to completely shut down one of his target's senses: sight, sound, taste, smell or touch. This can be used to protect someone from certain dangers that take effect through some sort of sensory stimulation, or it can simply ensure that someone is not a witness to whatever the mage plans to do next.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Sacrifice of the Mind

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Mind

As much as the Guardians of the Veil prefer not to use vulgar magic before witnesses, sometimes the alternatives are worse. A Guardian will use this spell on as many Sleepers as possible before a mighty vulgar spell, or series of effects, he knows is coming and cannot prevent. This is just another way that the Guardians help safeguard the Awakened world from the unwanted attentions of the Sleepers. With the spell's duration, however, the Guardian's timing needs to be impeccable.

●●●● Master of Mind

*The Book of Self (Mind) ●●●● +
Matter ●●●●)*

This practice dates back to Atlantean times, though the nature of the spell has changed through the ages. A mage nearing the end of his life would create a scroll (or, in later times, a book) that contained his very essence, written in Atlantean runes. The mage's consciousness is copied into the book, allowing the willworker a form of immortality.

Practice: Making

Action: Extended

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell works like the Mind 5 "Psychic Genesis" spell (see *Mage: The Awakening*, p. 218), and the book is created with an effect similar to the Matter 5 "Raw Creation" spell. The mage's mind remains intact, as the new creation is a mere copy, only knowing what the mage knew when the spell was cast. The simulacrum cannot, of course, use magic.

Anyone who picks up and reads the book can communicate with the mental construct in the book. The book can "hear" sub-vocalized thoughts directed at it. Its replies appear in print, though the book can provide pictures from its own memories. Some books show these pictures as elegant line drawings, others show photographs. The copy of the mage's mind remains in stasis until the book is opened and read, though it does remember conversations with previous readers.

The book's Social Attributes, Mental Attributes and Skills are allocated as they are with the "Psychic Genesis" spell (see *Mage: The Awakening*, p. 218), capped by the caster's own Attributes and Skills. The book possesses the caster's Virtue and Vice as well.

Note: This spell provides an exception for the usual rules for spell control, in that this spell can be cast again before the first spell expires, extending the book's life.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Soul Book

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Mind

The Guardians of the Veil are believed to have a hidden library, secreted in a pocket of space time, and only accessible by the most trusted members of the order. The library is rumored to contain Soul Books dating back even to the time of Atlantis, though that remains just a rumor to date. The Free Council is allegedly attempting to adapt this rote to electronic media using Forces instead of Matter.

Space Spells ● Initiate of Space

Angle Vision (Space) ●

The mage can see around objects, corners or other obstructions that are blocking his view. His vision shifts as if he'd changed his vantage point to look around the blockage.

Practice: Unveiling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

With Space 1, the spell can be used to direct the mage's sight around a single corner or obstacle, as long as the new vantage point is one that's within reach of some part of his body. He could hold a newspaper in front of his face, for example, and see over the top of it as if he'd craned his neck.

With Space 2, the mage can send his vision off like a mobile camera, around multiple, distant obstacles or through a series of twists and turns, like the bends of a ventilation shaft. The spell doesn't magnify or illuminate whatever's at the far end of his vision, it just provides him with an unobstructed view. This use of the spell requires the caster to concentrate for the duration of the casting.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: The Crooked Eye

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Space

While this rote helps a Guardian to see what might otherwise be hidden, it's also useful for disguising her intent. When the rote is active, no one can be certain exactly what the mage is looking at or where she's directing her attention. She may seem to have her head stuck in a paperback novel when she actually has a clear view of what's happening on the other side of the book.

•• Apprentice of Space

Intrusion Warning (Space ••)

Sometimes a mage doesn't want to prevent something from entering or leaving a place, she just wants to know when it does. Casting this spell creates a sensitivity that will warn her in such an event.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell alerts the mage who cast it whenever something passes into or out of the spell's area of effect. Once the spell settles over an area, anything that passes through its invisible, intangible barrier during the spell's duration alerts the mage who cast it, no matter where he is. This warning manifests as a slight tingling over the body, a pressure behind the eyes, a momentary case of synesthesia or several other minute impulses.

Successes	Area Affected
1 success	one-yard radius
2 successes	two-yard radius
3 successes	four-yard radius
4 successes	eight-yard radius
5 successes	16-yard radius

Mages can, at the time of casting, narrow the spell's definition by declaring some things exempt from notice. The exempt thing may be general ("insects and rodents" or "creatures of Size 2 or less") or specific ("one-armed humanoids" or "my friend Robert"), but the spell cannot differentiate based upon anything other than normal sensory input. Choosing to exempt "my friend Robert" from the spell draws from the mage's mental imagery to exempt anyone who appears to be Robert; the spell will not note that two people who looked like Robert passed through the barrier at the same time or delve into a person's mind to determine that the person is not *actually* Robert.

Intrusion Warning does not endow the mage with any knowledge of what did pass the boundary (though he'll know it wasn't something he exempted), just that the spell has been breached. If the mage wishes to know anything more about the intruder, he must use additional magic, such as Space 2 "Scrying," or mundane means.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Ensuring Solitude

Dice Pool: Composure + Investigation + Space

Guardians have many needs, and one of them is often privacy. An agent rifling through a Seer's wardrobe does not want to be disturbed or seen, and would like to know whether the Seer is concurrently sneaking into her apartment. Spies meeting in order to pass on information would rather know if they suddenly need to act naturally. Ensuring Solitude allows them all to be more secure in the knowledge that they will be aware of any intrusion.

Moving Target (Space •• + Time ••; optional Prime ••)

In addition to being able to locate a person or object to whom the caster has a sympathetic connection, this spell also allows the caster to trace the movements of the target of this spell. This spell allows the caster to track the past movements of the target (with Time 3, he can also predict where the target may go next). If the caster includes Prime in the spell, the spell also indicates when and where the person or object used or was associated with magic (but not what kind).

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant and contested; targets rolls Composure + Gnosis reflexively.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana (for the sympathetic casting)

When performing this spell as an extended action, the caster usually sets out a map and draws on it. When this spell is performed as an instant spell, the caster can either look at or visualize a map and the target's movements will appear on it. In all cases, the target's current location lies at the end of this path.

This spell does not allow the caster to see what the target is doing. For that, the caster needs to cast Space 2 "Scrying," to open a scrying window. This spell merely allows him to track

the target's location and movements, and, if Prime is used, to know just where he uses or encounters magic.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Mapping the Fugitive

Dice Pool: Perception + Investigation + Time versus Composure + Gnosis

In the careful and paranoid ranks of the Guardians of the Veil, this rote is used quite often. In addition to tracking the movements and location of important and powerful Artifacts, this rote is also used to spy upon the movements of mages that the caster worries might be using too much vulgar magic or otherwise disrupting the Sleepers or revealing magic to the Fallen World. This rote is also regularly used to keep track of the movements of suspected members of the Seers of the Throne.

In addition to tracking enemies and disruptive mages, members of the Guardians of the Veil also regularly use this rote to keep track of one another. Most Guardians have no greater fear than one of their number either betraying them to the Seers or the Banishers, so they regularly watch anyone who begins to act suspiciously. All but the most naïve Guardians are perfectly aware of this sort of spying, which further reduces the odds of a member helping the order's enemies.

••• Disciple of Space

Expanded Volume (Space •••)

The mage adds to the internal volume of any existing container or enclosed space of Size 3 or less, without expanding the space's external dimensions. Thus a jar, shoe box or jacket pocket could hold two, three or more times than what could normally fit into a container of that size. The interior behaves exactly as if the container had become deeper, which means someone reaching in might not be able to touch the bottom and fragile objects might break if allowed to drop into the container. Objects must be inserted and retrieved by hand, and must be small enough to fit through the container's opening. The item is capable of holding the full weight of whatever fits inside without breaking, but will become appropriately heavy as it's filled.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

Each success adds an amount equal to the containers' original volume to the total, so one success doubles its volume, two successes triples it, etc. When the spell expires, any contents of the container in excess of the original volume are expelled to the outside of the container, starting with what was at the "bottom." Anyone standing near the container may be subject to Knockdown (see "Knockdown," p. 168 in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Deep Pockets

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Subterfuge + Space

A Guardian tends to use this rote under two conditions. First, when he needs to carry extra equipment without calling attention to himself, and second, when he needs to smuggle something away without causing suspicion. Experienced users of the spell are careful to match the added volume of the container to their purposes, so they can retrieve the contents quickly without having to grope for what they need.

Time Spells

● Initiate of Time

Tempus Fugit (Time ●)

Time is relative: it crawls when you're stuck in traffic, it speeds by when you're visiting a lover. With this spell, the mage can influence a target's subjective experience of time.

Practice: Compelling

Action: Instant; subtract target's Composure.

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

For each success, the mage may add or subtract up to five minutes to the target's internal time clock. The target will feel with absolute certainty that the correct time is that much later or earlier, and act accordingly. So strong is this altered sense of time that the spell's recipient won't feel any need to check with a watch or clock for the duration of the spell. When the spell expires, the target's sense of time resumes its normal accuracy, but he won't sense that he's gained or lost time until he sees a clock or some other clue to the real time. (Should the target happen to see the correct time while the spell is in effect, he's free to act on that knowledge even though it contradicts his instincts.)

If the target is a mage with Time 1 or greater, he makes a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to sense that he's a victim of Time magic.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: Personal Time

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Time - Composure

As with many Guardian rotes, strategic application is key to getting the best results from this spell. Knowing the target's schedule — he needs to be at such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time — allows the mage to disrupt or manipulate him more effectively (someone taking a leisurely day off may not change his behavior much no matter what time he thinks it is, while someone on his lunch hour may bolt if he thinks his time is up). The rote can still be useful in the absence of such knowledge; causing a subject of surveillance to linger in one place long enough to be carefully observed, for example.

●● Apprentice of Time

Library of Time (Time ●●)

While the Guardians are known for their patience and deliberation, they also appreciate the need for speed. At times when

they must pore over tomes of lore as quickly as possible, the use of the Time Arcanum allows them to research in minutes what others would take hours to do.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Each success allows the caster to make one Research roll per 15 minutes for extended action research (see "Research," pp. 55-56, the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), instead of the usual 30 minutes per roll.

Guardians of the Veil Rote: The Right Book

Dice Pool: Wits + Academics + Time

An Eleventh Question mage (see p. 166-168) devised this rote after being forced to go through a suspect's rare book collection, looking for a specific clue about a breed of octopus used for a sympathetic connection to an acamoth. Because he was unable to find the information in time, the acamoth caused the deaths of three mages before its destruction. The Question vowed he would find a way to search for information more quickly and so developed this rote.

Enchanted Items

Many mages believe that the Guardians of the Veil have the largest stockpiles of Artifacts and other imbued items than any two orders combined. The Mysterium's Athenaeum's might compete – at least, many mages might think so. They believe it because one of the Guardians' more infamous practices is taking Artifacts away from other mages. In some cases, the Guardians confiscated the items as punishment for alleged infractions against the Lex Magica. While the laws do not officially give the Guardians the right to confiscate whatever they wish without due process, they often take the law (and the offending Artifact) into their own hands. The Guardians believe that whatever the ruling of the Consilium, the sanctity of the Veil must be maintained. In some instances, the Guardians simply take the Artifact away from mages the Guardians believe are not capable of handling the items. And there are whispers that the Guardians may take a prized possession away from a younger mage simply because they can.

In truth, the Guardians' reputation for taking Artifacts is more legend than truth. While they have been known to take powerful magical items away from inexperienced willworkers, such actions are never taken lightly and never for personal gain. (Almost never, that is.) The order's policies may seem draconian to outsiders, but they are harsher still when aimed at its own membership. If the order discovers that one of its own has been unjustly stealing other mages' property, the offended mage might find his tools returned to him, along with grim threats never to speak of the incident.

With that in mind, the Guardians do make it their business to know of every Artifact and enchanted item in their area. So long as the Artifacts are in proper hands, the Guardians

are willing to let their owners keep them. The Guardians are not above making quite generous offers to young mages who find themselves in possession of powerful items.

Additionally, the order spends a great deal of time chasing down rumors of lost Atlantean Artifacts, using their connections in the Labyrinth to hunt down lost treasures. They have also found themselves in possession of other mystical items, from odd mystical treasures to werewolf spirit-fetishes. More than a few conflicts between mage and werewolf have risen over one side mistakenly believing they had an ancestral claim to some Artifact. The order's official policy on theriomorphs is to avoid conflict with them when possible, but if necessary, do whatever it takes to keep Atlantean items in the hands of those who are best trained to handle them.

The Broken Mirror

Many believe that the Guardians have some secret warehouse full of Artifacts collected over the millennia deemed too dangerous to be in circulation and too difficult to destroy. While many Guardians do have special Space-magic Pocket Realms just for such purposes, the order as a whole does not maintain a central warehouse full of crated Artifacts.

That is, they don't anymore. Up through the late 1970s, a Guardian cabal was rumored to have a special Pocket Realm, laced with enough Time, Space and Spirit spells to make it almost impossible to discover or return from. The items, along with a small group of volunteer mages, were sent on a one-way trip to the Broken Mirror. However, at one point, the one-way delivery spells that sent the items to the Broken Mirror stopped working. To this date, no one knows what happened to the items, or their guardians.

When it comes to personal use, the Guardians keep to the cold pragmatism that permeates the order. Enchanted or imbued items tend to be very practical, and mask their mystical nature. Sometimes, Guardians even imbue magical properties into high-tech appearing items, just to mitigate the possibility of Sleeper witnesses perceiving a covert spell as Improbable. If a gun fails to make any noise at all, it's not too surprising if there's a silencer screwed into the tip. But, if necessary, they are more than willing to pull out ancient enchanted swords charmed with enough magic to choke an acamoth.

Artifacts

Bane of the Hoard (••••••••)

Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

This Artifact takes the form of a beautifully made flint knife with a handle of polished ivory. Against living targets, it is only

a normal knife. Against non-living targets, it can simulate the power of the Matter 5 "Annihilate Extraordinary Matter" spell (*Mage: The Awakening*, p. 204), cast as a sympathetic spell.

The knife wielder must physically stab an actual piece or shard from the item targeted (for a -2 die penalty to the Gnosis + Matter 5 roll) or a photograph of the item (for a -4 penalty to the Gnosis + Matter 5 roll). The targeted item will then suffer damage from the attack, regardless of its distance from the knife. The user must possess either an Intimate or a Known sympathetic connection to the item she wishes to destroy. Each activation requires one point of Mana, and the character can repeatedly activate this power by stabbing the item until it has been destroyed. Items destroyed with this Artifact disintegrate into a fine gray powder similar to ash.

Although the Guardians have mimicked this item with imbued items many times throughout history, the original Artifact is both the most powerful and the template from which all imitations are derived. This item also symbolizes the core ideology of the Guardians of the Veil. Although using this Artifact requires vulgar magic and thus poses a risk, it can eliminate dangerous enchanted items that have fallen into the hands of Seers or Banishers — or any mage whom the Guardians don't think should be allowed to possess them. Certain Guardians sometimes keep special libraries of minute fragments and photographs of powerful items and important books for just this purpose. Although they always attempt to actually recover such items first, if doing so proves impossible, they consult their library and destroy it from a distance.

When the Guardians discover that someone has taken videos or photographs of vulgar magic or possesses a piece of some magical residue, like the horn of a unicorn that wandered out of a Verge — anything that might be used to prove the existence of magic — they immediately attempt to gain some sort of sympathetic link to the evidence. Such links often include photographic negatives scrounged from garbage cans, a few hairs from the unicorn's mane that were plucked off the owner's sweater or similar traces. Then, a Guardian risks using vulgar magic with this artifact to destroy the offensive original.

Crown of Kings (●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 2, Structure 6

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

The Crown of Kings has an infamous history down through the ages. Despots and madmen have worn it, using it to fulfill their darkest desires. The only reason that the Guardians have not destroyed it is that it occasionally becomes useful, though its use is strictly monitored by a powerful cabal of Guardians of the Veil. The Crown is a plain gold headband, but it gives the wearer the ability to cast the Mind 5 spell "Psychic Domination" as a contingent power. To activate the power, the user (which can be a Sleeper) must speak the name (real or shadow) of the person he wishes to control.

Karnacki's Coffin (●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 6, Structure 10

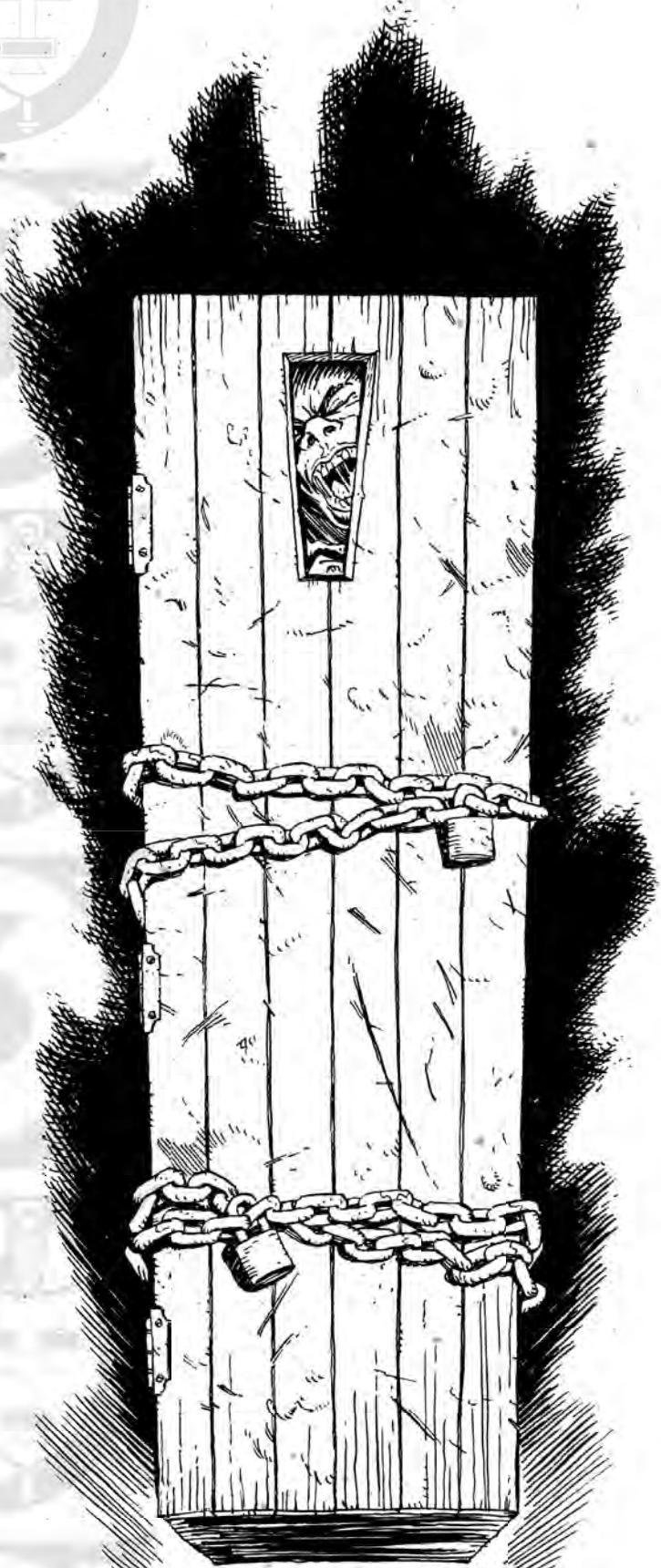
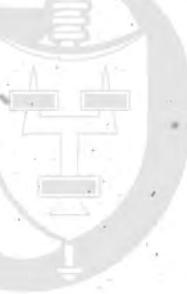
Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

This powerful and dreaded Artifact hasn't been seen by a reliable witness for decades, but those who know of it firmly believe it awaits use in some Guardian vault or subbasement. Whether or not that's true, the simple threat that the Coffin might be utilized is sometimes enough to convince a mage to cooperate with a Guardian's agenda. Karnacki's Coffin — whether it's named for the first mage to discover it, or for the Artifact's first victim, is a matter of debate — has been described by those who've seen it as a simple pine box, with rusted hinges and more than a few nicks, gouges and cigarette burns scattered across its top and sides. The Coffin is usually accompanied by a set of chains and a padlock, but these are mundane objects that are replaced as needed.

Though the Coffin seems almost fragile, anyone locked inside will find that, like many artifacts, the Coffin is much sturdier than it looks. Its built-in latching mechanism can only be opened from the outside. Breaking out of the closed Coffin requires that the victim deliver damage in excess of the device's Structure. If the Coffin is chained and padlocked as well, its Structure is effectively increased by four or five more points. (Each attack on the Coffin must achieve more successes than the Durability rating of the Coffin, or the combined durability of the Coffin and chains. See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 135–138.) The Coffin's latch is easily opened from the outside, though any locks, chains or other security devices must be removed or defeated first.

Mere confinement, however, is the least of the Artifact's purposes. When activated, Karnacki's Coffin subjects whoever's inside to the Space 5 "Oubliette" spell. The victim of the spell is tormented by horrific hallucinations and distortions in space and time. The mage who utilizes the coffin must spend one Mana and roll Gnosis + Space 5 to activate it, and then makes repeated rolls against the victim's contested Composure + Gnosis rolls. Each successful roll by the tormentor reduces the victim's Willpower by one point; at zero Willpower the victim becomes a traumatized wreck (see the spell description for details). If the victim successfully contests any of the rolls, he'll endure the ordeal with his faculties intact (the tormentor will have to activate the Coffin again for another attempt).

As with the spell the Artifact mimics, use of Karnacki's Coffin is likely to degrade a mage's standing on the path of Wisdom. But the Artifact holds another danger. Any mage who activates the Coffin becomes subject to a *geas*, per the Fate 5 "Chains of Fate" spell. The terms are simple: the mage must enter the coffin and subject himself to its terrors, or suffer the consequences. The mage can resist the imposition of the *geas* with a reflexive Resolve + Gnosis roll versus the coffin's roll of Gnosis + Space 5 (using the activating mage's own Gnosis). Should the Coffin win, the mage will be affected by a *geas* of indefinite duration that begins to exert its effects as soon as the Coffin's current victim is removed. What makes this phenomenon all the more difficult is that, should the mage willingly place himself in the Coffin, he himself cannot activate it. He'll need to recruit another mage to help him fulfill the *geas* — which in turn exposes that mage to the risk of the Artifact's curse. The fact each use of the Coffin could



PRIDE 05

entangle a chain of willworkers in this manner, rather than the moral implications of the use of torture, is likely the biggest reason that the Guardians are loathe to use it.

The Lord of Storms (●●●●●)

Durability 5, Size 4, Structure 9

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

The Guardians took ownership of this Artifact spear from an 18th-century mage who used it to summon a fierce set of storms that wracked the Spanish coastline. In the years since then, a group of mages believed to be Seers of the Throne took it from the Guardians. Rumors abound that the Seers also lost the Artifact in the late 20th century, and the spear has since been seen in various places around the world, always associated with horrific storms.

The spear adds five dice of lethal damage to its wielder's Strength + Weaponry roll, and requires a Strength of 5 to use without penalty. The head of the spear is made of Atlantean steel, and carved with High Speech runes concerning both storms and royalty. The weapon has a five-foot shaft of magically preserved wood, wrapped with a white leather. The wielder can also use a contingent Forces 5 spell "Control Weather." The spell is activated by the wielder holding the spear and speaking the following phrase in High Speech, "Let mine enemies feel the wrath of the Lord of Storms." It is believed that there may be other spells locked in the Artifact, activated by other phrases.

Pearl of Obscurity (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

Though called a pearl, this Artifact more closely resembles a piece of polished crystal the size and shape of a pearl. It is among the most easily overlooked Artifacts known to the Awakened, a power it shares with its possessor. The Pearl of Obscurity has one simple, but incredibly useful function: it adds three dots to its possessor's Occultation Merit so long as the mage carries it on his person. A mage who does not possess the Occultation Merit gains a rating of one dot so long as the Pearl of Obscurity is in his possession.

The Pearl of Obscurity has remained in the possession of the Guardians for most of its long history, although it occasionally disappears from mage lore for long periods, only to return to circulation in a different age, in a different setting, wielded by a different cabal.

Some mages allege that the Guardians have misused their mandate to police the Awakened to keep the Pearl in their possession, but when asked about the Artifact, the response is usually "The Pearl of what? Never heard of it."

Subtle Mirror and Creeping Mirror Doll

Mirrors contain truth for those who seek it. Behind its silver façade, a mirror reflects all that a person is and all that he could be. These two Artifacts are often mentioned together in the few available records of the legendry of Atlantis. Although

their original owner's name is unknown, it is believed that she was one of the founding members of the Eye of the Dragon and that she claimed these tools on an Astral journey to the Supernal Realm of Pandemonium. Since the Fall, these Artifacts have been seen separately all across the globe, usually, though not always, in the hands of a Guardian of the Veil. It is known among those who research Artifacts that the Guardians would do a great deal to discover and retrieve either one of these magical devices.

Subtle Mirror (•••••)

Size 8, Durability 4, Structure 12

Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

The Subtle Mirror is a simple, wall-sized, silver-backed mirror. It lacks ornate adornment, but Mage Sight allows a mage to view the Atlantean characters scrawled transparently on the mirror's surface. The words form a new koan each time a person looks at the mirror. If given the proper spoken command, the lettering on the Subtle Mirror fades and the mirror reflects more clearly than ever. The mage who possesses it can see the auras of everyone caught in its reflection, including herself. She sees their true natures and mental states (as with the Mind 1 "Aura Perception" and Prime 1 "Supernal Vision" spells), despite any efforts to conceal them.

Traditionally, when the Subtle Mirror has seen use, it has been placed in a location where the reflection can capture many people, allowing it to be a more effective tool for examining the unwary. Legend states that its original owner set it near Atlantis' busiest port and watched those new to the island.

Creeping Mirror Doll (•••••••)

Size 1, Durability 4, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

Six inches tall and crafted of solid glass, the Creeping Mirror Doll appears similar to a modern day artist's physical rendering doll, and can in fact be set in multiple positions in a similar fashion. When the Artifact is inspected closely, one can see that it refracts light strangely, such that there appears to be a point of pure darkness in the very center of the Artifact's head.

A spoken name, a mental command, physical evidence of sympathy to its intended victim of at least Known strength and a mirror of any sort is all a mage needs to animate the Creeping Mirror Doll. It then approaches the mirror however it can and climbs through it, disappearing entirely. At the same moment, it reappears out of the mirror nearest to its named target, no longer a six-inch glass doll but a precise replica of its victim. All its Physical Attributes are identical to its victim's, and the doll has five dots in Wits, Resolve and Composure while having one dot in all other Mental or Social Attributes. It has five dots in Brawl, Larceny, Stealth and Weaponry, and Skill Specialties in attacking the named target, which the Artifact uses to approach its victim quietly and kill him. If not already in the same room as the victim, the Creeping Mirror Doll seeks him out. (The powers used by the Artifact seem to mimic the Prime 5 + Mind 5 "Forge Tulpa" spell, along with Space 2 "Apportation" via a mirror.)

Fighting a relentless creature that resembles oneself can be severely disconcerting. Some victims may react poorly, suffering a penalty to their attacks against the Doll if they fail a Composure roll.

The enchantment lasts for an hour, after which the Doll returns to its normal form and can do nothing but seek out the nearest mirror or clear reflective surface and return to its master. The Doll cannot be set on the same person more than once; if it does not kill a target, it can never again threaten that person.

Example: The Creeping Mirror Doll is set upon Chiron, a tranquil and medically focused Mysterium mage. Upon traversing the mirrors, the Doll takes on Chiron's aspect and Physical Attributes (Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2) but has five dots (and Skill Specialties) in the Skills necessary to kill Chiron silently. If the creature fails to find or kill Chiron within an hour, the Doll returns to its normal form and must find a reflecting surface to flee back to its master. Chiron would henceforth be safe from the Creeping Mirror Doll.

The Unmaker (••••••••••)

Durability 5, Size 2, Structure 7

Mana Capacity: Maximum 14

The Unmaker, also known as the Executioner's Blade, is an ancient sword made of a white metal. It adds two dice to its wielder's Strength + Weaponry attack roll, inflicting lethal damage.

This Artifact has passed from Guardian to Guardian from time immemorial, wielded by mages with the Destiny Merit. Those who are chosen to wield it are highly favored, not just among the Guardians, but in the entire willworking society. Of course, those who bear the Unmaker do not live long lives. The sword was made to hunt down the foulest mages, and Guardians frown on its use for any other purpose.

The sword possesses the following contingent powers, activated by specific movements of the blade whenever it is held by someone with the Destiny Merit (those without the Merit cannot activate its powers): Prime 2 "Counterspell Prime" and "Magic Shield," Prime 3 "Channel Mana" and Prime 4 "Supernal Dispensation."

Enhanced Items

Invisible Rifle (Enhanced Item ••)

Size 3, Durability 4, Structure 7

Mages like to avoid the trouble that might come of not bothering to obey the meddling and difficult-to-remember gun laws that most nations have in place. Mages can, should the need arise, manipulate Forces or Minds to escape difficulty with the authorities, but that is an unnecessary risk to the mage and the Mysteries. Instead, when a mage needs to bring his weapons, he could use the invisible rifle.

An invisible rifle is not actually invisible, but it is constructed of lightweight ceramics, transparent to x-rays and undetectable by magnetic devices. The Matter Arcanum is used to change

a normal, functioning gun to ceramic and then increase the durability of the altered weapon to the point where it is as strong as any mundane Remington. The gun can also be disassembled to carry in a case. If a mage has the capability to construct a functioning ceramic firearm replica from scratch, the Merit cost would drop by one; at the same time, such a replica would have a significant Resources cost to create. Even when the weapon is discovered, a mage may be able to convince airport security that it is a curiosity of some sort.

Invisible rifles may be further enhanced with equipment bonuses, increasing the Merit rating necessary to purchase it.

Normal ammunition of the appropriate type functions normally in conjunction with an invisible rifle, and it is usually simpler to purchase ammunition upon arrival rather than trying to smuggle it with the weapon. When absolutely necessary, mages who can create invisible rifles can also create invisible ammo through the same method. A case of invisible ammunition can be purchased as a one-dot Merit.

"Toy" Gun (●)

Durability 3, Size 0, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

Some mages enchant items to become larger and more powerful. The Guardians appreciate when size may be called for, but they prefer more stealthy approaches. So, they developed methods for using Matter to reduce items, while still retaining their power. These "toy guns" may even appear to be toys, painted bright colors and covered with cheap plastic. But they remain just as deadly as their regular-sized counterparts. They require special, shrunken ammunition as well. Use the stats for firearms on p. 169 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, but reduce the Size of the weapon by 2.

New Enhanced Item Merit Rule: Decreased Size

Some mages may wish to compress an item, while having it still retain its normal properties.

Decreasing the Size of an Enhanced Item costs one Merit dot per -2 Size.

Imbued Items

Bonebreaker (●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 4, Structure 6

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

This weapon was once the property of the Guardian of the Veil called Hades. He was a cruel man, known for torturing information out of suspects. His walking stick, made of black wood and tipped with a silver skull, adds two dice to its user's Strength + Weaponry attack roll, inflicting bashing damage. The Artifact also has been imbued with the Life 4 spell "Enfeeblement." The spell is activated by striking the target and

saying "Pain" in High Speech. Hades perished in 1934, but his cane has been used by other Guardians since then, usually members of his extended family.

Bullet-Proof Cotton (●●●● or more)

Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

To help stave off Paradoxes, the Guardians tend not to wear flimsy clothing and attempt to pass it off as bulletproof. Instead, they wear regular reinforced clothing (Armor 1/0, Strength 1), weather permitting, and enchant it with a persistent Shielding spell from any Arcana (usually Matter 2 "Unseen Aegis"). The amount of armor points provided depends on the dot ranks of the item's creator, represented as Arcanum dots in the Merit cost. For instance, a three-dot casting of the Matter "Unseen Aegis" spell provides three armor points and adds three dots to the Merit cost. Mages may wish to wear enchanted Kevlar or flak jackets if they want more plausible protection from their clothing.

Canopic Jar (●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

This jar, while Atlantean in origin, resembles the canopic jars used by the ancient Egyptians to preserve organs removed from corpses prior to mummification. It is enchanted with the Death 3 spell "Soul Jar." Guardians have used canopic jars to contain the souls of condemned criminals who possess special knowledge and thus must be kept, locked in a tormented half-existence until they are no longer needed and subsequently destroyed.

Cloak of Isolation (●●●●)

Size 5, Durability 1, Structure 6

Mana Capacity: None

Any article of clothing that covers much of the mage's body, such as a cloak, trench coat or poncho, can be imbued as a Cloak of Isolation. Someone wearing the cloak gains the permanent benefit of being under the Space 2 "Conceal Sympathy" spell, making it harder for her enemies to discern who her friends and what her favored tools are. Mages with the facility to do so sometimes construct these for their family and Sleeper friends, protecting them as well.

Wearing the Cloak reduces the mage's apparent sympathy with people and things by a number of degrees equal to her Gnosis.

Clouded Crown (●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

The creation of this headpiece dates back to the 1600s, when a Guardian of the Veil needed to travel with a renowned member of the Silver Ladder, Marcus Delacroix, protecting him from his enemies among the Seers of the Throne. The Seers had previously been able to use the mage's high Destiny rating to aid them in their tracking. Therefore, the Guardian imbued Delacroix's headband with a persistent Fate 3 "Oclude Destiny" spell.

Cracked Mirror (●● to ●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 2, 3 or 4, Structure 3, 4 or 5

Mana Capacity: None

This object aids the Guardian who wants or needs to interact with dead souls — to contact them, communicate with them and, if needed, threaten them. Cracked mirrors come in Sizes 2-4; the larger the mirror, the more magic it's imbued with. Cracked mirrors tend to have an antique or aged appearance; the glass is warped and always has a thin crack across its face; the frame is chipped, burnt or scarred.

To activate each of the mirror's spells, the user must make a separate Gnosis + Death roll. A mirror that's Size 2 will be imbued with the Death 1 "Speak with the Dead" spell. With at least one success, the user can see any ghosts that are present by viewing them in the mirror (should a ghost attempt to conceal itself, consider that a contested action against the successes rolled to activate the mirror; roll the ghost's Finesse). The user can't perceive the ghosts directly, but their reflections will be visible in the glass (which usually means the viewer will have his back to the actual ghosts — a psychological drawback to using this item). As long as he can see them in the mirror, the viewer can hear and speak with them. No one but the person who activated the mirror can see or hear the ghosts (unless they're using magical abilities of their own).

If the mirror is Size 3, it will also be imbued with the Death 3 "Ghost Summons" spell. The user can send a general or specific call to ghosts in his sensory range (though he won't actually see them, or be able to communicate with them, unless he's activated the mirror's Speak with the Dead spell or something similar). Ghosts who don't want to heed the summons make a contested reflexive Resistance roll against the Gnosis + Death 3 roll that activated the call.

A Size 4 mirror adds the Death 3 "Control Ghost" spell. For each success on the Gnosis + Death 3 roll that activates this power, the user may issue one single, simple command to one ghost. The target contests with a reflexive Resistance roll. Using this spell presumes that the user can see and speak with the ghost in question — typically by utilizing the mirror's other powers.

Daredevil's Keychain (●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 0, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

Cars are an omnipresent fact of life, and there are many times when a mage needs to get somewhere in a hurry. This keychain, inscribed with the driver's shadow name, gives a driver the benefits of a persistent Fate 2 spell "Exceptional Luck," though only as it relates to driving the car.

Death Pointer (●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

This item is modeled on Australian legends of the death bone used by Aboriginal magicians to kill their enemies. This item is typically the size and shape of a large fountain

pen and is most often made of bone or ebony wood inlaid with silver wire. To use the item, the character must point it at the target and whisper a short phrase in High Speech (which gains the standard +2 dice bonus). On the following turn, the bone produces an effect similar to the Life 4 "Life Force Assault" spell. This effect causes the target to appear to have a heart attack.

The target's Stamina is subtracted from the Gnosis + Life 4 activation roll. Mundane armor does not apply, but the Shielding spells Life 2 "Organic Resilience" (stronger tissues) and Prime 2 "Magic Shield" will protect the target normally. Each success on the item's activation roll inflicts one Health wound of lethal damage. The effect of this damage resembles the symptoms of a major heart attack.

Although this effect is vulgar, the Storyteller should not levy the usual +2 dice bonus to the Paradox roll in the case of Sleeper witnesses, because Sleepers won't normally equate the bone with the resultant heart attack; the effect is internal and unseen by witnesses. Using a death pointer to kill someone means that his death will appear completely coincidental to onlookers. Medical scanning and even autopsies performed on the target will reveal nothing other than the fact that the target suffered a massive heart attack.

A few Guardians have adopted a grim slang in which phrases such as "pointing someone out" or someone "getting the point" means that the person has been marked for death by their order.

Familiar Strangler (●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

Sometimes the best way to deal with a recalcitrant mage is to separate her from her allies. Since many a mage's closest ally is her familiar, this device is a helpful tool for applying a divide-and-conquer strategy. This device allows the user to entrap, injure, even destroy a fetch or embodied familiar — the latter being an especially reprehensible practice that adds to the contempt many mages have for the Guardians and their methods. The strangler is a thick, spiked leather collar that would fit a large dog (except that the spikes are on the *inside* of the collar). A roll of Gnosis + the item's three dots of Spirit is required to activate the collar's spell; this functions as the Spirit 2 "Lesser Spirit Summons" spell, calling the nearest familiar spirit within sensory range (if the mage knows the familiar's name, he may call that spirit specifically, provided it's within sensory range). The mage can increase Target factors normally, by suffering dice penalties on the activation roll. Most familiars will contest the summons with a reflexive Resistance roll; they may add their bonded mage's Gnosis to this roll. Spirits that answer the summons are compelled to remain near the collar for the remainder of the scene (if the collar is moved, they must move with it).

Once a familiar is summoned, the collar's user may choose to activate its second spell: Spirit 3 "Harm Spirit." (Since this spell is vulgar, it might cause a Paradox.) Each success on a



Gnosis + Spirit 3 roll (minus the spirit's Resistance) inflicts one point of lethal damage. When this power is activated, the collar encircles the familiar (usually around the neck, if there is one) and tightens to inflict its damage. If the familiar is a fetch, it will seem to be constricting empty air, unless the viewer is capable of seeing spirits. Mages have a constant sympathetic connection to their familiars and can see through their eyes, so the familiar's master will likely know what's happening.

Hidden Sword (•••••)

Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: None

Guardians seeking to approach their targets unseen often need to appear unarmed. The Hidden Sword is one answer to this need. By use of a contingent Matter 4 "Reconfigure Object" spell, an innocuous piece of metal can be transformed into a sword. In olden days, mages would transform bracers or pieces of armor. In modern times, mages prefer to use something more innocuous, such as bands of metal that can be separated and hidden under their clothing, reassembled and then transformed into the sword shape as needed. To activate the spell, the mage speaks a command word; the item remains in sword shape for one scene.

Interfector's Mask (•••••)

Size 2, Durability 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

Used by some Guardian caucuses, the Interfector's Mask allows them to rotate the mage who holds the office without giving any clue to the person's identification. Donning the Mask activates

the Mind 3 "Imposter" spell, cast with the user's Gnosis + 3. The image conveyed by the Interfector's Mask varies from place to place. In Consiliis in which using this tool is expected, it is considered poor form to attempt to pierce the disguise through magic.

Jaw Locker (•••••)

Durability 1, 2 or 3, Size 1, Structure 2, 3 or 4

Mana Capacity: None

Popular with Guardians who have to trust Sleepwalkers (or at least work with them), Jaw Lockers are a form of magically imbued security device enchanted so as to prevent their wearers from speaking, or even thinking, about whatever topic, from general to specific, the mage chooses. Most Jaw Lockers take the form of lightly decorated steel torcs, but other forms of jewelry, from jeweled anklets to iron rings have also been used as a vehicle for the same enchantment.

Wearing the Jaw Locker interferes with thought and prevents the wearer from saying anything or even formulating thoughts, concerning a specific subject (determined at the moment the mage puts the Jaw Locker on its wearer).

Once the item is on, the wearer can't bring to mind anything to do with that subject, although it may feel as though it's on the tip of his tongue. Someone wearing a Jaw Locker that prevented him from talking about the number four, for example, would count "One, two, three, uh, that other number, five, six, seven . . ." and so on, and would find doing math nigh-impossible. While the wearer may find himself getting frustrated by his inability to retrieve certain ideas, the effect doesn't seem like anything more than a faulty memory. Sleepers might suspect Alzheimer's, but not magic.

The power of these objects is akin to a persistent Mind 4 "Telepathic Control" spell. To use a Jaw Locker against mages or other supernatural entities requires activation, with one activation lasting a full scene.

While Jaw Lockers don't literally lock onto their wearers, they do make their wearers loathe to ever take them off (with a desperation akin to that of a person bobbing in stormy seas fighting to keep on his life preserver).

Some Sleepwalkers wear Jaw Lockers knowingly and willingly, feeling it a small price to pay for being close to magic.

Junk Drawer Pockets (●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1

Mana Capacity: None

"For want of a nail, the war was lost," goes the old saying. Mages with an item of clothing with pockets (such as a jacket, pants or a button-up shirt with a chest pocket) with Junk Drawer Pockets never have that problem. After the user fishes in his pockets for a moment, he can pull out any Size 1 item he might need, from a screwdriver with just the right-sized tip to a ruby the size of a man's fingernail. One variant devised by a wiseacre mage required an incantation, which must be spoken by anyone but the mage with the pocket: "If only we had a (blank)," where (blank) is the item desired. The pocket is enchanted with the Matter 4 "Raw Creation" spell.

Light Eater (●●●●)

Durability varies, Size varies, Structure varies

Mana Capacity: None

Magic requires keeping the Sleepers "in the dark." While something of a cliché, it is true that one can't be said to witness a magical event if he cannot see it. Therefore, it is in a Guardian of the Veil's best interest to sometimes keep Sleepers literally in the dark. The actual form of this item varies by the personality of the mage who constructed it, ranging from a flashlight to a regular smoke-bomb. When activated, the Light Eater creates a field of thick shadow, using the Death 3 "Summon Shadows" spell. Though the creation of a field of semi-solid darkness is vulgar, the darkness can cover more vulgar castings from mundane eyes. Those mages who use a Light Eater often have a pair of "Night Eyes" (see below).

Magical Silencer (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

Regular silencers use vents to minimize the sound of expanding gasses from a firearm. However, they do still make some small amount of noise. A gun prepared by the Guardians of the Veil makes no sound at all. A mage could fire a whole clip and never even trip the most sensitive sound meters. This is a persistent Forces 3 "Sound Mastery" effect.

Night Eyes (●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

A Guardian is frequently trained to handle himself in total darkness. However, even mages will admit that a human's most natural sense is that of sight. This pair of glasses, imbued with the persistent Forces 1 "Nightsight" spell, allows a mage to function perfectly in total darkness.

Oath Writer (●●●)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1

Mana Capacity: None

An Oath Writer is an imbued writing implement (anything from a quill to a pen – so long as it is not erasable like a pencil) that, when an oath is written with it, activates the contingent Fate 2 "Swearing an Oath" spell. Many Guardians are called upon to witness mages' oaths, though not all possess enough skill with the Fate Arcanum to actually cast said spell.

Phantasmal Prism (●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

This small glass prism, about six inches long and an inch per side, allows the wielder to cast the Prime 3 "Phantasm" spell. The Phantasmal Prism is frequently used to "dress" a scene, adding small details to change a place's appearance (such as adding a layer of dirt over a body or putting an ornate picture over a hole in the wall). The Phantasm spell is contingent, activated by shining a light through the prism (or holding it up to sunlight) and allowing the rainbow to fall where the Phantasm is to be created.

Portable Thermostat (●●●)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1

Mana Capacity: None

A Guardian of the Veil from New York once found herself in Arizona during the summer. Unable to cope with the heat, she ripped the thermostat from the wall of her hotel room and imbued it with the contingent Forces 2 "Control Heat" spell. Since then, other mages have used similar creations for reasons other than comfort, such as thawing ice to reveal clues hidden inside it. The spell is activated by moving the switch on the thermostat.

Private Curtain (●●●)

Size varies, Durability varies, Structure varies

Mana Capacity: None

Most commonly made as part of a functioning white/electromagnetic noise generator, the Private Curtain's occult purpose is to preserve a mage's secrecy, not just from mundane snooping but from any mages who might want to listen in. Regardless of the Curtain's form (for some are made as books, tables, watches or lapel pins), it must be tapped once to be activated. This begins a "charging up" period; if the item is a mechanical object, it often makes a whine as it "warms up." The Artifact is building Potency for the ward it will construct. Treat this as extended spellcasting, making rolls once every three hours (or an amount of time based on the operating mage's Gnosis; see the "Effects of Gnosis" chart,

(p. 78 in *Mage: The Awakening*) until the mage taps the Curtain again to complete the ward activation. Paranoid mages may keep their Private Curtains constantly charging, insurance against an unexpected secret meeting. If the mage taps the Artifact twice quickly, the item casts the ward as an instant action instead.

The Private Curtain cannot make more rolls than the user's Gnosis + 2, and all successes apply to the ward's Potency, never other spell factors, such as Target or Duration. The ward remains only for one scene.

Puppet Gum (●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

A gumball or stick of gum may seem like an unlikely candidate for imbued power – which is probably one reason that agents of the Dragon's Eye like to carry this versatile item. A piece of Puppet Gum can be used to create an animated, phantasmic creature similar to the Prime 4 "Marionette" spell. The gum's magic is activated by chewing it while concentrating on the type of creature the user desires to create. Gnosis + Prime 4 is rolled; successes are added to the user's reflexive Intelligence + appropriate Skill roll to properly form the imagined puppet. (The reflexive roll reflects the user's ability to conceptualize the creation, not to actually shape it with his mouth and tongue. Appropriate skills could include Animal Ken to form animal shapes, Medicine to create a human-like shape, Crafts to draw on sculptural or design abilities). Each success on the activation roll allows the user to impart two dots of Physical Attributes to the puppet, distributed as the user desires (to a maximum of four dots per Attribute).

When the newly formed creature is fully envisioned, the gum is removed from its creator's mouth, whereupon it expands to a maximum of Size 5, as desired by the creator. The creature remains at that Size until the spell expires. The creator directs the creature's movement by active concentration; see the spell description for more details on how the puppet operates. When the spell ends, or if the creature runs out of Health, it reverts to the form of a piece of fresh chewing gum (dry and unchewed, thankfully), ready to be used again.

Ring of New Faces (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

Made in the form of a plain gold ring, inscribed on its inner surface with the Weaving rune, this imbued item serves as an alternative to the vulgar magic of the Life 3 "Two Faces" spell. Instead, this item provides a covert way to appear to be someone else. It combines an effect similar to the Mind 3 "Imposter" spell (see *Mage: The Awakening*, p. 211) with a lesser Mind effects similar to both Mind 2 "Emotional Urging" and "First Impressions" that cause everyone she interacts with to be certain that she is who she claims to be.

To use this item, the wearer must first touch the desired target or stand within 20 yards of the target and study him for at least a minute. Then, anytime within the next scene the wearer can say the target's name and turn the ring in a full counterclockwise

circle. This activation automatically fails if anyone can simultaneously see the wearer and the person she is disguised as. However, if the mage and the target are not simultaneously visible, even someone looking directly at the wearer when she activates the ring will simply decide that he must have either mistaken her for someone else or have looked away during the moment that the person the wearer is impersonating walked into the room.

Upon activation, the wearer's player rolls Gnosis + Mind 3 and then assigns successes to cover which senses are fooled by the Imposter spell. Anyone looking at the wearer, who knows the individual being impersonated can make a contested reflexive Composure + Gnosis roll, compared to the activation's successes. If the ring has more successes, the person is completely fooled. Because of the other Mind effects used by this item, viewers must subtract one die from all of their Composure + Gnosis rolls. Because of the use of the Weaving rune, the duration of this disguise is increased by one factor, to at least two hours. If desired, the wearer can accept a penalty on the activation roll to increase this duration further.

Daring Guardians who attempt to infiltrate the ranks of organizations of other mages, including both the Seers of the Throne and the Banishers, are rarely willing to trust their lives to this item, because some powerful mages can easily see through the disguise it produces. However, some of these brave mages use this item with a casting or the Life 3 "Two Faces" spell so that this ring can help them cover up any imperfections of mannerisms that might otherwise arouse suspicion.

Sentinel's Shield (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

Since the willworking community often calls upon the Guardians of the Veil to act as Sentinels, the Guardians frequently find themselves under attack by spells to which they may not necessarily be able to counter. Therefore, the order commissioned a series of "Sentinel's Shields," small badges of authority that resemble a police officer's badge, though no normal policeman would have a badge made of silver and carved with Atlantean runes. The shield carries the contingent Prime 2 spells "Counterspell Prime" and "Magic Shield."

Sharpshooter's Scope (Imbued Item ●● or Enhanced Item ●●, or Imbued and Enhanced Item ●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

Sometimes the best solution to a problem is a well-placed bullet. A regular rifle's scope can be replaced with one imbued with the Space 1 "Spatial Map" spell. Other mages use mystical techniques to give mundane telescopic sights up to a +2 equipment modifier to Firearms dice pools. A few rare mages combine the processes to create incredibly dangerous weapons.

Shivering Blade (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

A shivering blade appears to be an ordinary knife, typically a hunter's knife, sometimes a fighting or throwing knife. But in addition to its visible blade, this weapon has one or more other edges that exist outside of ordinary space. By spending a point of Mana, the user can use the knife's extra-dimensional blades to strike at any foe within sensory range, as per the Space 3 spell "Ranged Blow." This use of the knife is a ranged attack, with the range penalties of an aimed spell. Each attack requires the expenditure of one Mana. Activating the item causes the handle to vibrate slightly as the extra-dimensional blades rotate briefly into normal space; hence the name.

While most of these weapons include one normal blade, allowing the knife to be used for mundane purposes, some are crafted with a nonfunctional blade (the weapon seems to be a toy or stage prop) or no visible blade at all (it seems to be just a knife handle). Rumors exist of swords and other large weapons designed with similar properties. Such devices would probably be unwieldy, even dangerous, to use, not to mention difficult to create.

Spirit Blade (●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

Spirit blades were given to Guardians who would be expected to encounter hostile spirits but did not yet possess mastery of the Spirit Arcanum to handle said spirits themselves. While a potent weapon, the need to carry one is often seen as a sign of weakness. The blade has a persistent Spirit 3 "Ephemeral Enchantment" spell placed upon it.

Spirit Candles (●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

Spirit Candles come in two colors, red and black. While the two colors function similarly, they are different. Both types work only when they are burning, and neither type of candle ever actually burns down, a side effect, presumably, of the magic with which they are imbued.

When a red Spirit Candle is lit, it reveals the presence of any spirits within the area illuminated by the candle's light. This is a Spirit 2 version of the Spirit 1 "Spirit Tongue" spell (*Mage: The Awakening*, p. 246) that can be cast on others with an area of effect. Black Spirit Candles function the same, only they reveal the presence of ghosts (as a Death 2 version of "Speak with the Dead"). So long as the candle is burning, the exposed entities may be conversed with normally, though the item does not grant understanding of spirit speech.

Anyone in the area can see the exposed entities, including Sleepers, who would likely suffer from Disbelief, which might dispel the magic. The Guardians of the Veil have, at different times, made frequent use of these items and tried to hoard or destroy them. Their strategic use makes it very easy to establish cults for the Guardians' Labyrinth, but at the same time they are prone to exactly the kind of misuse that the Guardians rail against.

Spirit Whistle (●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1

Mana Capacity: None

While no mortal being may have witnessed certain events that occurred in a specific place, spirits might have seen them. Guardians of the Veil who wish to summon spirits to bear witness to past events (such as murders, thefts or other misdeeds) can blow this whistle. Doing so unlocks the contingent Spirit 3 "Greater Spirit Summons" bound into the whistle. Other



Guardians have used other instruments, such as drums, to call spirits, but the whistle is small and easier to carry around.

Thought Worm (●●●)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1

Mana Capacity: None

When a Guardian needs to influence someone's thinking, but doesn't possess the Mind Arcanum, a Thought Worm can make it possible. Each Worm appears to be a short length (usually an inch or less) of black or gray sewing thread. A Thought Worm shows no signs of animation until activated and placed on the target's bare skin, whereupon the Worm disintegrates, seeming to burrow its way into the target's nervous system where it inflicts an effect similar to the Mind 2 "Emotional Urging" spell. To activate the Worm, the user must choose the emotion she desires to impart, then roll Gnosis + Mind 2. Next, she must bring the thread in contact with the intended target (the Worm won't invade the user, even if it touches her skin).

The Thought Worm is too insubstantial to be felt on the skin, but if the user is unsubtle in placing the Worm or the target has reason to be on guard, the target could be granted a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to catch the user in the act of planting it. (A character could use the Larceny Skill to attempt to plant a Thought Worm on an alert or suspicious target.) Once the Worm makes contact, the target reflexively rolls Composure + Gnosis to contest the implanted emotion. A mage with Mind 1 or greater may also make a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to notice that she's the target of Mind magic. Each Worm can be used only once. Note there's no requirement to choose the target in advance or plant an activated Worm immediately, although its activation will expire after one scene. Some Guardians like to keep several Thought Worms on hand for quick use, each programmed with a different emotional payload.

Unfriendly Knife (●●●●)

Size 1, Durability 3, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

The perfect agent has no connections to anyone or anything. For those who haven't mastered the Space 3 "Destroy the Threads" spell, there is the Unfriendly Knife. A quick slashing gesture between the mage and the creature or object in question is enough to fray the bonds between two creatures or items, reducing the strength of the sympathy they share by one degree; the Knife's power must be activated multiple times to eliminate more powerful connections. Though the Knife is usually used by a Guardian of the Veil to ensure that he cannot be sympathetically traced by any connection he might have once had to people, places or things, the Knife can also be used to fray connections between other mages and other objects.

Whispering Glove (●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

Like many tools favored by the Guardians of the Veil, a Whispering Glove appears to be nothing more than a mundane

object; typically it's an unremarkable and somewhat worn driving or winter glove. The Glove is imbued with the power of the Spirit 1 "Coaxing the Spirits" spell, allowing the wearer to perform various tasks more easily by calling on a spirit dwelling within an inanimate object. The spell is activated by laying the gloved hand on whatever item is to be used to perform an action. Gnosis + Spirit 1 is rolled; each success halves the time needed per roll to perform an extended action, or, for an instant action, each success adds a + 1 dice bonus to a single dice roll made within the next scene. Note that the action that's being assisted needn't be something done with the hands, as long as the user can lay the gloved hand on the appropriate item before the action starts. Most Whispering Gloves come with a matching, non-magical mate. The only visible difference between the two is a small stitch across the palm of the imbued glove. When it's activated, the wearer will feel this stitch opening and closing, and may hear faint, whispering sounds emanating from it.

Mundane Equipment: Blood Ring (Resources •)

Durability 3, Size 0, Structure 3

The basic Blood Ring is not as gruesome an item as it sounds, and isn't necessarily an imbued item.

These Rings get their name from the thin groove they have on the inside of the band, the so-called blood gutter. If even a few drops of blood touch the inside of the ring, capillary action draws it in and holds it there until it dries. The Ring can then be given to an allied mage, for whom it acts as an automatic Intimate connection for the purposes of sympathetic magic (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 114). This is not lightly done, as Blood Gutter Rings can be stolen and used against the blood donor just as easily. Some Awakened demand Blood Rings from those who swear fealty to them, others create these Rings against the will of the "blood donor" just by getting enough of their foe's blood on their hands to fill the groove.

Blood Rings can be used repeatedly to provide a link to a series of individuals, but the blood gutter must be carefully cleaned with a fine-bristled brush before a new subject's blood can be put in. A mage can wear any number of Blood Rings, but a single ring can only contain blood from one person.

Many Blood Rings are also imbued with other, complementary, magical effects that benefit from the Intimate connection provided by the Ring. Some Rings grant the ability to communicate telepathically (as the Mind 3 "Telepathy" spell), others help the mage monitor the wearer's location or health. Any spell that benefits from the Space Arcanum can be made easier through the use of one of these items.

APPENDIX: ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

Everything that deceives may be said to enchant.

— Plato

This chapter contains an assortment of Guardians of the Veil intended to provide the Storyteller with ideas for various Contacts, Allies, Mentors or antagonists of the player characters' cabal. The Storyteller may use them when a player decides in the middle of an evening's session that he wants to speak with a Friend of the Dead (see p. 214) and the Storyteller hadn't considered that option. Or, the characters described here may give inspiration for a recurring ally or opponent who will become a regular fixture in an ongoing chronicle.

Many of the characters described here do not fulfill the active roles in a Storytelling chronicle that player characters might. The Guardians of the Veil (as well as all of the Pentacle orders) need mages who are better suited to supporting roles in a story. Playing a Cultor or Epopt who must maintain the convoluted networks of cults and secret societies that comprise the Labyrinth might not seem interesting to many players, who might wish to play more active or free roles in their order. The maintenance and oversight of these interlocking conspiracies would require a lot of a mage's time, and leave him little opportunity for the dynamic life of a player character mage. But said functionary might be a valuable ally or dangerous enemy to a player. If a mage were to need 50 Sleepers who would be willing to stage a protest out in front of a building owned by the Seers of the Throne, a Labyrinth administrator would be invaluable. Similarly, making this well-connected mage an enemy could mean that a mob of brainwashed believers could show up outside the player characters' sanctum, "praying for the sinners" inside.

Non-Combatants

Many mages consider all of the Guardians of the Veil to be heartless assassins and inquisitors. In truth, while all of the order must be ready to perform the cold-blooded duties of an assassin, not all of them are called, just as most police officers do not have to fire their weapons. The player characters might

encounter these Guardians at meetings of the Consilium, the player characters might seek out them out or these characters might contact the player characters, as hooks into stories.

These characters are presented as concepts rather than fleshed-out characters. The Storyteller should determine their names, specific features and even their sex (if he doesn't want to use the example provided).

Anybody

Quote: *Never mind who I really am – today, I'm your Uncle Greg. Aunt Evelyn says hi.*

Background: Many agents of the Dragon's Eye use disguises and false personas in their work. But few master the art of impersonation as well as Anybody, who can inhabit a role so well that not even the subject's closest friends or lovers will notice a difference. Anybody keeps his – or her – true identity well hidden even from the order itself.

Description: Man, woman, child, elder – Anybody has impersonated them all. What's even more disconcerting to those who are aware of Anybody's existence is the way the mage goes beyond physical disguise and expertly duplicates speech patterns, behaviors and the subtlest of personality quirks. His very nimbus can change based on his/her latest identity.

Storytelling Hints: How Anybody accomplishes his/her impersonations is unknown, but it's likely a combination of specialized magic and exceptional talent. Anybody may reveal his/her imposture to characters if the mage can expect to gain assistance in achieving a goal. Anybody takes great pride and pleasure in her/his skills, and is not above performing a masquerade just for the challenge, or as a prank. Sometimes she/he is overconfident or rushed, giving observant characters a chance to realize they're not dealing with the person they think they are.

Path: Thyrus

Abilities:

Disguise (dice pool 10) — They say that in many cases, Anybody is quite capable of a perfect impersonation without using magic at all.

Persuasion (dice pool 7) — Sometimes even the best disguise slips, but the right words can allow a dangerous misstep to go unnoticed.

Assassin

Quote: *I love my job — with a simple twitch of my trigger on a detonator, I can change the world.*

Background: Although he grew up loving the natural world, the Assassin was by nature a hunter. In his youth, he stalked birds and set traps for squirrels. When he was older, the lure of easy money, combined with his profound lack of connection to other people, led him into the shadowy life of a freelance assassin. His Awakening occurred during one assignment in which he was almost killed. After being shot in the arm, he attempted to drive the person into a trap and simultaneously experienced a violent mystery play where his prey was a vessel bearing vast animal wisdom, which he then killed and ate. He now strives to be an even better hunter. He joined the Guardians of the Veil because they can always use a quiet killer who has little concern for who he is asked to slay.

Description: He is a taciturn man in his late 20s. He has a rugged outdoorsy look, wears his hair shoulder length and has a beard. He dresses in jeans and plaid flannel but always keeps a dark-colored jacket nearby in case he needs to go hunting.

His nimbus manifests as a subtle darkness and a feeling of being watched. People who look closely may notice glowing animal eyes peering at them.

Storytelling Hints: The Assassin is a predator in a human skin. He seems superficially pleasant until someone notices the coldness in his eyes and the way he barely reacts when he observes human suffering. He is almost always carries both a pistol and several small explosive devices, and is reluctant to take any of them off. He regularly uses magic to conceal his weaponry.

Path: Thyrus

Abilities:

Shadowing (dice pool 8) — He has the soft steps and gliding movements of a cougar and can follow someone unnoticed until the opportunity for the kill arises.

Set Traps and Bombs (dice pool 8) — He is an expert in the use of explosives, poisons and other indirect methods of murder. He can create a poison needle trap that makes deaths appear accidental to all but the most skilled coroner, and can create powerful shaped charges that can kill people while producing little collateral damage.

Power Outage (dice pool 6) — He can use Forces to cut the power in a building to bypass its security.

Cat Burglar

Quote: *There's nothing like the first thrill of cracking a safe or the rush of climbing out a window carrying a fortune in jewels. It's like a drug, and it pays for my new car.*

Background: The Cat Burglar grew up in a poor, urban neighborhood. Petty theft helped her buy the treats she could not otherwise afford, and she climbed tall buildings to get away from the family troubles that lay below. When she was barely an adult, the rush of completing a big score from a jewelry store caused her Awakening. That night, she relived the theft during a dream, but what she stole this time was the secret to magic. Now, she uses her talents both for herself and for the Guardians of the Veil. They regularly ask her to break into buildings to destroy or steal items they wish to keep away from the prying eyes of Sleepers.

Description: She is a short, skinny woman in her early 20s. She looks even younger and uses this appearance of youth to her advantage. She dresses in brightly colored trendy clothing and speaks in quips and youthful slang.

Her nimbus manifests as an adrenaline response experienced by everyone near her.

Storytelling Hints: The Cat Burglar steals partly for the thrill and challenge of doing so. She prides herself on her skill at stealing and cares little for laws and rules. She has found electronic surveillance to be both a valuable way to help her plan a job and an enjoyable hobby. She keeps extensive video and audio files on everyone she likes or considers interesting.

Path: Thyrus

Abilities:

Climbing (dice pool 8) — Jennifer has a taste for heights and loves to climb everything from rock walls in gyms to the sides of skyscrapers. She carries basic climbing gear in her shoulder bag.

Lock-Picking (dice pool 9) — Jennifer enjoys picking difficult locks and disarming complex security systems.

Surveillance (dice pool 6) — Much of the money she makes goes to purchasing new miniature video cameras and shotgun microphones. She is an expert at using such systems and observing people from afar.

Conspiracy Nut

Quote: *You have no idea of the things that I know. You think the world is a safe and reasonable place? It's not, and I'm not afraid to face this fact. How about you?*

Background: Driven by both an overwhelming need to understand the world and a conviction that the conventional truths she learned are lies told to fools, the Conspiracy Nut drifted into the twilight world of conspiracy buffs and similar eccentrics. Online and in small meetings in dingy rooms, she talked about supposed truths of the world until her Awakening. Her Awakening consisted of a mystery play in which she stalked a military contractor that she was certain was working with UFO technology. In her mystery play, she actually found the evidence she was searching for and then discovered it was all false, and, for a brief moment, actually saw the truth in all its terrible glory. Now she knows that she must protect the truth from the masses who were not ready for it and who would defile it with their petty minds.

Description: She is a tall, skinny and somewhat unkempt woman in her middle 40s. Her long, dark, frizzy hair is always

slightly disarrayed. She gives little thought to her personal appearance and typically dresses in overalls or somewhat worn jumpers. Despite her unassuming appearance, she speaks with both passion and conviction when she is talking about anything that interests her.

Her nimbus makes everything look unreal; when she works powerful magic, nearby people and objects are bathed in an unearthly light coming from above.

Storytelling Hints: The Conspiracy Nut loves knowing secrets—she enjoys helping to run the Labyrinth and controlling the flow of truth and lies so that people only know what she wants them to learn. She is passionately loyal to the Guardians of the Veil and is convinced that all the other orders are hiding important knowledge from them.

Path: Acanthus

Abilities:

Solving Enigmas (dice pool 8)—Dolores excels at solving riddles and similar mysteries. For her, every mystery hints at another conspiracy she does not yet know about.

Sneaking (dice pool 9)—Dolores is easily overlooked and is practiced at sneaking into places where secrets are kept.

Crazy Man

Quote: *Forgive me. Please, please forgive me!*

Background: His original shadow name is lost, known only to a few. Rumors surround the unhinged mage, though the consensus is that he was once a Sentinel. He loved a fellow mage (in the rumors, most frequently a member of the Silver Ladder), and she loved him. Prophecy and magic led him to believe she was consorting with acamoth. He slew her only to discover too late that she was hunting the demonic spirit, not to gain infernal powers but to save him from a doom she had foreseen. His mind shattered at the revelation, and his control of Time was lost. He spends his days casting into the future, looking for some hope that he can atone.

Description: From a distance, Crazy Man could be mistaken for a homeless street person. He (or she) shambles down the road, crying and begging anyone who stops to listen to him to absolve him of his sins. Only his eyes show a hint of the power lost to the madness. Mages who look him in the eye often see their reflections as young children or aging elders.

His nimbus is the sound of a bird's wings flapping. In his rare moments of clarity, it appears as ravens that hover just out of the field of vision, only visible out of the corner of the eye.

Storytelling Hints: A walking symbol of the lines that the Guardians of the Veil may cross, Crazy Man offers numerous storytelling opportunities. He can be a prophet of doom, warning a player of a coming storm. He can serve as a different sort of warning as well. Guardians playing too casually with life and death may see their eventual fate if they do not act carefully.

Path: Acanthus

Abilities:

Streetwise (dice pool 5)—Though mad, he has adapted to living on the streets. He knows when he must hide from mun-

dane and arcane pursuers and how to survive living rough.

Prophecy (dice pool 7)—Crazy Man's long use of the Fate and Time Arcana has given him special insights to future events. If someone is able to pierce his veil of madness and get him to cast magic, he might reveal insights as to probable futures.

Dead Room Liaison

Quote: *Ah yes, you want the special reading room.*

Background: The Dead Room Liaison has always lived in books. Like many shy people, she preferred books to people. She majored in library science, and was happy running a small branch library. Then the dreams came, and she wrote her name on the golden Watchtower.

A miscast spell in front of no fewer than three master mages kept her from becoming one of the order's archivists, and she ended up with a different role. The Guardians frequently need a place to meet and discuss things in private. She became the assistant to the keeper of a "Dead Room"—a naturally occurring magical dead zone. To her surprise, it was in the basement of a public library. The job initially seemed a punishment, but she turned the position around, using contacts in the order to ensure that the Dead Room was not only secure from magical sight, but from mundane eavesdropping, using techniques stolen from intelligence agencies around the world. Her record of accomplishment led to her promotion when her mentor sought greener pastures.

The Dead Room is known to the Guardians of the Veil, as well as certain (relatively) trusted members of the local Consilium, who use the Dead Room for secure meetings.

Description: She is young and attractive, with a sunny disposition. She dresses conservatively and wears reading glasses for effect, and delights in talking about literature.

Her nimbus is the sound of pages flipping, as if someone were paging quickly through a book.

Storytelling Hints: Guardians may encounter the Dead Room Liaison in passing when other Guardians of the Veil wish to have a meeting in a secure location. She is very professional in manner with any mages who wish to use the Dead Room (or the library for that matter). She frequently advises mages to dress "like normal people" when they use the Dead Room, to better maintain their anonymity. The whole point is to not draw attention to oneself, and mages who enjoy standing out in a crowd are encouraged not to return until they are properly dressed. She has perfected the icy glare that can silence even the most self-absorbed mage.

Path: Obrimos

Abilities:

Research (dice pool 7)—A natural academic, she is not an expert in any subject, though she has the quality key to any good librarian: she knows where to find the answer, or, in many cases, who knows it. This carries over into her knowledge of the occult. Though the library has no real occult tomes on site, she was in line to be one of the order's chief archivists.

Security Systems (dice pool 7)—Denise's major improvement to the Dead Room has been in the realms of mundane

security. Her “ordinary public library” happens to have a security system that is the equal of a major museum, or a private collector. This security system differs from most setups in that it is not designed to keep people out. It’s designed to detect eavesdropping, and nothing else. There is nothing to steal (other than mundane texts that are easily replaced).

Double-Lived

Quote: Yes. I'll make the soccer game. Look, I've got a call on the other line honey.

Background: This go-getter Awakened late in life. A civil lawyer with one of the state’s most prominent legal firms, he left on a business trip and never arrived. His mentor, a master of the Mind Arcanum, accompanied him when he returned to his normal life and edited his family and friends’ memories, to better facilitate the Double-Lived’s re-entry to his old life. The Guardians needed his contacts in the local community to remain intact, as the firm’s connections throughout the city and state facilitate the order’s access to the halls of power. Attorney-client privilege is irrelevant when the Guardians need to know something.

When he returned, he hoped that he would somehow be able to juggle his old life with his new. It’s becoming increasingly difficult, though. He has been forced to erase or smooth over certain awkward memories, for his family’s own protection and to cover for an occasional lapse on his part. However, the long-term effects on both his wife and child are starting to add up. It has become an ever-quicken cycle of memory fractures and repairs. So far, he has yet to slip up where his cabal can find out, but he fears such a mistake will be inevitable. His once-spirited wife is little more than a “Stepford Wife,” with little independent personality left, and his child cycles through love, fear and hatred for her father.

The Double-Lived presently handles various aspects of the Labyrinth, making sure that many mundane aspects of conspiracy remain aboveboard and fail to attract attention, either from mundane agencies or the Seers of the Throne.

Description: This mage appears to be an average businessman in expensive suits that don’t quite fit too well. He is balding, with the remaining hair on his temples shaved very closely. He wears gold-rimmed glasses that he fidgets with when in deep thought. He fiddles with his wedding ring constantly. His desk (and wallet) is full of pictures of his family, though they’re noticeably a few years old.

His nimbus causes printed material to momentarily change from whatever the text was normally to unreadable runes. The runes appear to have Arcane significance, though they have no real meaning.

Storytelling Hints: This mage can be a familiar face to Guardians of the Veil in an extended area. His legal abilities and knowledge of the Awakened world make him a valuable resource to the Guardians. He makes a constant effort to keep his enemy list (within the Consilium) as small as possible, and has frequently given favors without equal payment in return, just to accrue as much personal goodwill as he can.

curry. Though not considered by many to be a stellar mage, he is known to be an Adept of Mind, and mages seeking out a mentor in that area might consider him a friendly resource. He kindly refers seekers to other “better qualified” teachers, wanting to keep other mages at a distance, for fear they’ll discover his secret.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Law (dice pool 7) — He is a knowledgeable legal scholar, with years of experience both in civil and criminal affairs. He is able to negotiate dense legalese and provide his allies with the best legal representation available.

Occult Contracts (dice pool 6) — His skill at coming up with well-worded contracts have carried over into the supernatural realm. He frequently crafts contracts between Guardians and Spirits, making sure that the Guardians always end up on top.

Friend of the Dead

Quote: I was sorry to hear about your loss — if it's any consolation, I'm told your lover is even more upset about his death than you are.

Background: Those seeking to hide from the Dragon’s Eye sometimes try to cover up their transgressions by eliminating any witnesses. But dead men do tell tales, at least when the Friend of the Dead is asking the questions. And even when murder isn’t involved, the dead know plenty of secrets that are useful to the order’s purposes. The Friend of the Dead has an extensive network of informants, allies and contacts among the departed, extending the Guardians’ influence across the border that separates life and death.

Appearance: Affable and talkative, the Friend of the Dead seems an unlikely Necromancer — until she starts conversing with entities you can’t see. Unlike some on the Path of Doom, the Friend of the Dead favors bland, neutral apparel rather than mourning garb. That’s not to put the living at ease, but because she doesn’t want to upset the dead with memories of their funeral services.

Storytelling Hints: The Friend of the Dead makes little distinction between her dead and living acquaintances. She expects the living to treat the dead with respect, and trade favors for their services just as they would with each other. Characters who want her assistance may find themselves performing strange, even disturbing tasks for the shades she’s in contact with.

Path: Moros

Abilities:

Forensics (dice pool 5) — Figuring out how someone died can be the first step in establishing a useful relationship with him.

Persuasion (dice pool 7) — She always knows the right thing to say; living or dead, few can resist her charm.

Investigative Journalist

Quote: You may think you’re safe now, but I'll eventually find out the truth about why those bodies were buried in the woods.

Background: This character was always driven to uncover others' secrets—becoming a reporter was a natural choice. She Awakened shortly after she got her first job at a newspaper, a few hours after a mobster threatened to kill her if she didn't stop following his boss around. She followed this mobster and in doing so embarked on a mystery play, where she was on a quest to obtain a hidden treasure from a foul and terrible ogre. In the end, she had both Awakened and used her shotgun microphone to record the mob boss ordering his thug to kill her if she continued to trouble him. She still works as a reporter and searches for secrets, but now she primarily looks for secrets that might endanger the Guardians of the Veil.

Description: She is a pale, slender and otherwise relatively nondescript 30ish woman with long, pale blonde hair and piercing blue eyes. She dresses casually and does her best to be overlooked when she is attempting to uncover a story.

Her nimbus appears as a subtle change in lighting that causes everything near her to appear in stark focus, where all details, and especially every flaw, is exceptionally visible.

Storytelling Hints: The Investigative Journalist is dedicated, opinionated and headstrong. She has no patience with orders or rules that she disagrees with, and is ceaseless in her drive to uncover secrets. However, she is also keenly aware of the power of some of the secrets she has uncovered and only reveals them to those who she knows will not abuse them. She has made an extensive study of both vampires and cryptids and knows a great deal about the habits of both in and around her city. However, she will normally only share this knowledge to other mages.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Sneaking (dice pool 9) — Laura excels as not being noticed. She is well aware that one excellent way to learn things people don't want her to is to get close enough to overhear when others discuss them.

Fast-Talking (dice pool 7) — Laura is skilled at talking her way past opposition. Through a combination of making people underestimate her and an ability to tell lies with complete conviction and every appearance of honesty, most people she lies to never realize this fact. (If she uses her Mind magic, add +2 to the roll.)

Jittery Fixer

Quote: *Stop distracting me – do you realize how much trouble you'll be in if this doesn't work?*

Background: Usually, when a mage screws up, the consequences are his to face. But if the stakes are high enough, the Veil is seriously threatened or the mage has the right connections, the order may decide to intervene. That's where the Fixer (also called a "Cleaner") comes in: a skilled mage who specializes in covering tracks, erasing mistakes and making colossal threats just go away. But the constant pressure to pull off last-minute miracles has left him anxious and tense. In his drive to get the job done, he just may decide the players' characters are part of the problem, not part of the solution.



Description: The Fixer is all about efficiency: he dresses in whatever's practical for the situation, without any unneeded accouterments. He seems confident and in control when he arrives on the scene, but soon signs of his inner turmoil leak through the facade: he taps his fingers incessantly, sweats profusely or paces constantly as he works out an answer to the problem at hand. Only when he's implementing his solution does he calm down again.

His nimbus makes things that he touches appear smudged or rubbed out of existence.

Storytelling Hints: The Jittery Fixer always operates under the assumption that his failure would result in dire consequences, and he'll do his utmost to convince the characters that this is so. If the situation doesn't appear as threatening to the Mysteries as the Fixer makes it out to be, he'll be sure to inform the characters that doing as he says is their only way to avoid severe discipline from the local leadership of the order. His neurotic behavior may cause the characters to underestimate the Fixer's abilities, or question his judgment. This typically makes the situation worse, as the Fixer may conclude that the characters are an impediment to his mission.

Path: Mastigos or Obrimos

Abilities:

Larceny (dice pool 8) — Locked doors and alarm systems are no impediment for the Fixer, who can go wherever he's needed without leaving a magical trail.

Occult (dice pool 7) — Magical problems sometimes require magical solutions. Having witnessed countless examples of other mage's screw-ups, the Fixer has picked up lots of obscure knowledge that can be useful in a pinch.

Labyrinth Administrator (Cultor)

Quote: *And now my son, sip from the chalice of power and take its eternal powers. You are now a Brother to Owls. Soon, you shall walk the dragon's path.*

Background: This mage was always a joiner. From a childhood filled with extra-curricular activities to a college career in which she was on every third committee to a life filled with clubs, teams and organizations, she always wanted to belong. As her Awakening began, she fell into the nets cast by the Guardians of the Veil, and worked her way through the Veils. A natural manager able to shepherd people exactly where they needed to go, she was amazed to discover the complexity of the Labyrinth. To her mentor's delight, the Labyrinth Administrator not only understood the convoluted organizations, she immediately saw ways to improve their administration. Since her mentor loathed the day-to-day affairs of managing the Labyrinth, he quickly offloaded all of her responsibilities onto her eager protégé. The Labyrinth Administrator now shuttles all over the city, making sure that the local Labyrinth is maintained and reporting to the local Epopt.

Some of her superiors quietly encourage her to maintain a professional distance from the cults and secret societies she manages, but she prefers to "get her hands dirty," working on the details and becoming involved with the membership. A

part of her feels bad for the constant deceptions, but she truly believes that she's saving them from themselves. She may be feeding them lies, but they are *safe* lies, like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. The lies don't hurt them, and make the cult members feel better about themselves.

Description: She is a stocky, middle-aged woman with a sunny disposition. She dresses to fit whatever role she is expected to play, from Mother Morning of the Sun-Blessed Society to Mistress Black of the Pain Eaters. She rarely has any free time, but she enjoys taking cooking classes and sharing her latest experiments with others.

Her nimbus causes her skin to take on a shiny polished sheen. Those looking at the sheen can see fuzzy reflections of themselves.

Storytelling Hints: The Labyrinth Administrator would make an invaluable ally for a mage in need of deniable assets with no direct connection to them. While she prefers not to send her charges into the lion's den, she's comfortable with having them be distractions and delivery men. She is warm and friendly, and enjoys talking to people from all walks of life. She has an intuitive grasp of character, heightened by magical perceptions, and can quickly tell when someone tries to play her. She doesn't like to play politics among mages, feeling that they should be above such games.

Path: Thyrus

Abilities:

Occult (dice pool 4) — She is forced to keep multiple mutually conflicting sets of dogma and fake magical practices straight. She does it as best she can, but even with meditative practices and the Mind Arcanum, she sometimes "skips a track" and recalls some of the nonsense she fills her charges with instead of the real thing. She is good-humored about this, and usually gets the right answer the second time (treat that as a dice pool of six, if she's confronted with an error), but the constant misleading of minds has an effect on her actual occult training.

Socialize (dice pool 8) — With a wardrobe change, she can slide into any role, from disaffected housewife seeking "a higher calling" to the dark priestess of a blood cult.

Subterfuge (dice pool 7) — She is able to lead many well-meaning seekers into the occult down false paths away from true magic. While her knowledge of the Mind Arcanum helps, most of her work relies on ordinary skills.

Lost in the Veil

Quote: *What did they tell you to tell me?*

Background: This mage once thought he understood it all. He was top of his class from kindergarten through his MBA. He understood things. At least he thought he did. When his Awakening began, he thought he was going mad, and recent events haven't seemed to help. As he shuffled through the Veils, at each step, he thought that *finally*, he understood what was happening to him. Finally, the last Veil parted, and he was inducted into the Guardians. Except he doesn't quite believe that this is the last step. He's utterly convinced that another

level of reality will appear as soon as he passes whatever test "they" have lined up for him.

Description: Lost-in-the-Veils dresses like a successful businessman, in gray suits that match his graying hair. He gives off the air of one who believes that life is a joke that no one will let him in on. He's very suspicious of mages outside the Guardians of the Veil, believing that "they" are testing him by having him interact with other mages.

His nimbus briefly alters mirrors and reflective surfaces, causing them to create distorted reflections.

Storytelling Hints: He is quite good at his job, even though he often believes that whatever is currently happening is a test of some sort. This has led him to make some incautious choices, but so far, "they" haven't killed him off yet.

Path: Acanthus

Abilities:

Politics (dice pool 6) – At one point, this would have been much higher, but his belief in the ever-more-complex conspiracies makes it more difficult for him to actually use his political acumen. Sometimes, he will make an outrageous connection that actually turns out to be true.

Nobody

Quote: *I've been sitting right here the whole time. Didn't you notice?*

Background: Among mages who use invisibility and forgetfulness as their stocks in trade, Nobody stands out. Or, rather, he fails to stand out: a master of the low profile, Nobody is rarely noticed when he doesn't want to be. He blends into the background expertly, and sometimes literally, using a combination of magic and skill to stay off the most sensitive radar and evade the most thorough surveillance. When the Guardians need a fly on the wall at some clandestine meeting or in some well-fortified sanctuary, Nobody is probably already there.

Description: Maybe it's due to some magical device or Legacy Attainment, or maybe he's naturally nondescript, but there's considerable confusion about what Nobody looks like. Even those who spend hours in his presence have trouble recalling any but the vaguest of details afterward: he's male, between the ages of 30 and 60, not too tall, of average build. Wait too long to ask for a description, and those who've seen him may not remember meeting him at all.

Storytelling Hints: Nobody leads a mostly solitary existence, since making permanent connections with people would undermine his anonymity. Characters who seek him out for help or information may find he's in the mood for company and starved for conversation. Alternately, he may interpret attempts to contact him as threats to his privacy, and retreat until the characters can prove they're not hostile.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Stealth (dice pool 8) – Even without magic, Nobody is quite capable of going unseen and unheard.

Investigation (dice pool 6) – While those around him fail to register his presence, Nobody takes in everything, in great detail.

Paranoid Ex-Operative

Quote: *I'm sure you were followed here, because they follow everybody. Of course, they know I know that, so they may have decided not to.*

Background: Once he was a valuable member of the order, but decades of deep cover assignments and multiple identities have left the Ex-Operative unable to cross the street without looking over his shoulder. He's convinced that the Dragon's Eye, or some faction within it, wants him eliminated because of the secrets he knows. And maybe he's right.

Description: The Ex-Op keeps his head down and his back to the wall – and he always positions himself where he can see all the exits. He talks in a low voice, dresses so he won't call attention to himself and his tired eyes betray the fatigue of a lifetime of hiding and running.

His nimbus appears as a series of eyes watching in all directions.

Storytelling Hints: The Ex-Op may offer to help characters who've run afoul of the Guardians – or, more commonly, the characters may hear rumors of his existence and seek him out for help. In either case, the Ex-Op will only agree to meetings on his own byzantine terms, requiring characters to switch vehicles multiple times, change locations at the last moment, pass through magical dead zones and/or submit to an array of detection spells. He'll demand a steep price for aid or information, and, in the end, may sell the characters out to the Dragon's Eye to take the heat off himself.

Path: Any

Abilities:

Survival (dice pool 6) – The Ex-Op sometimes has to leave town and lie low – very low.

Research (dice pool 5) – Information is power, and the Ex-Op never makes a move without knowing what he's getting himself into.

Intimidation (dice pool 6) – Sometimes a strong bluff is the only way out of a tight corner.

Police Negotiator

Quote: *Drop the gun and, we can all walk away from this – I know you don't want to hurt anyone.*

Background: This character was always intensely curious and interested in both justice and doing the right thing. No one was surprised when he went into the police force after finishing college with a degree in psychology. He Awakened after his first major failure. That night in his dreams, he managed to save the life of both the hostage-taker his fellow officers had shot and the hostage she killed. At the end of this dream, God spoke to him and he wrote his name in a sacred book. Afterwards, he turned his talents into tracking down both mundane criminals and rogue mages such as Seers and Banishers. Because such mages rarely care about mortal laws, he is often able to combine his work for the Guardians and the police force. Today, he works as a negotiator in hostage situations and excels at convincing people that violence is not the only solution to their problem.

Description: He is a tall, muscular, black man in his late 30s. He is in excellent physical shape, and, after almost 20 years on the police force, he has the hard eyes of an experienced cop. He is precise in both his movements and his dress, and takes pride in his appearance.

His nimbus outlines him in a faint golden light.

Storytelling Hints: The Police Negotiator is used to being in charge and knows how to keep his head in dangerous situations. He feels quite protective towards Sleepers. However, he has no qualms about harmlessly knocking Sleepers out or altering their memories; he is convinced that anything that strengthens the Abyss harms everyone.

Path: Obrimos

Abilities:

Oratory (dice pool 9) — He is an excellent speaker and can often convince a hostage-taker into surrendering or cause a group of gang members to disperse merely by talking to them.

Intimidation (8 dice pool) — When simple talk won't work, Brian uses his size and his training to look dangerous enough to cause people to back down.

Mind Reading (dice pool 5) — He often scans people's minds as he interrogates them, to make sure they're not lying.

Political Campaign Manager

Quote: *Don't worry about that incident with the intern, we'll have your poll numbers back on track by next week at the latest.*

Background: Always a smooth talker, Political Campaign Manager could lie his way out of almost any problem. He was drawn to politics by the lure of money and power. He soon discovered that he had little interest in actually attempting to impress voters himself, but loved the challenge of managing others' campaigns and manipulating the public and the media into thinking and saying what he wants them to. His Awakening took almost a week. The last few days of a particularly tough campaign became a mystery play in which he was attempting to uncover secrets from a vast and ancient library. In the end, he both Awakened and used a combination of skill and Mind magic to ruin his candidate's opponent by revealing that this person had embezzled almost a third of his campaign funds. The Political Campaign Manager's magic brought him a new understanding of the larger picture and served to increase both his skill at his job and the contempt he feels for the public and the press.

Description: He is an attractive and extremely well-groomed Hispanic man in his middle 20s. He wears stylish and expensive suits when he's working and designer sportswear in his free time. His mannerisms are elegant and understated, and his face reveals only those emotions that he wants to display, which are rarely what he actually feels.

His nimbus seems to make everything around him look somehow twisted or deformed.

Storytelling Hints: The Political Campaign Manager sincerely believes in the Guardian's mission, but even his loyalty to them is not particularly strong — his greatest loyalty is always to himself. He enjoys manipulating people, even his friends,

but few realize what he's doing.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Read Body Language (dice pool 8) — Jonathon is a keen observer of people and is especially good at understanding what people want and what might entice someone to do something he normally wouldn't.

Fast-Talk (dice pool 9) — As the saying goes, Jonathon could sell snow to Eskimos. Using a mixture of lies, half-truths, vague promises and his own charisma, he makes people want to believe him.

Professional Debunker

Quote: *Real? Hardly. Let me explain how he did it.*

Background: This mage is something of an oddity among the Guardians: he's a famous PhD. Young, with a telegenetic smile, he frequently appears on talk shows and in the news media when some new psychic or amateur magician tries to prove his psychic powers. The overwhelming majority of the time, the Professional Debunker doesn't even need to call on his mystic abilities to explain away the trickery. But when some real supernatural event needs a mundane explanation that the viewing public will buy, he is on the scene.

Description: He is in his mid-30s and has rugged good looks. He dresses in flannel shirts and jeans most of the time, the better to portray an "everyday Joe" image.

His nimbus appears as a rainbow halo that flickers around his face and hands.

Storytelling Hints: Professional Debunker shows up when mages have screwed up. He is not part of whatever group the Guardians may have sent to capture or punish the mages involved. Instead, he's the other side of the "clean-up crew" — making sure that whatever happened has a reasonable scientific explanation.

Path: Moros

Abilities:

Legerdemain (dice pool 7) — He is a talented amateur magician. He frequently carries props so that he can do little tricks of legerdemain as part of his explanation.

Science Talk (dice pool 8) — He has a PhD in Materials Science, which, in combination with his knowledge of the Matter Arcanum, is quite effective.

Debunking (dice pool 7) — Dr. Munroe has become quite practiced at spinning plausible tales to the media and bystanders about magical deeds.

Reticent Watcher

Quote: *Don't mind me — go on about your business.*

Background: You walk outside to get the morning paper — she's there. You approach the hidden entrance to your cabal's sanctum — she's there. You step off the plane to begin a three-week tropical vacation — she's there. The Reticent Watcher turns up again and again, observing what you do, yet unconcerned that you've detected her presence. Sometimes

she takes notes, or speaks into a hidden microphone. Why is she watching you, and when you don't see her, can you be sure she's not there?

Description: The Watcher is always dressed appropriately for her surroundings, and always looks and acts as if she belongs wherever she is. Her face betrays no emotion as she keeps her targets under surveillance; when her presence is noted, she may give a polite nod but will keep on watching. Sometimes she'll use a disguise, but it will be designed to enable her to move freely among the Sleepers rather than to conceal her from the mage she observes.

Her nimbus is subtle, appearing as a seeming shift in the direction that her shadow falls.

Storytelling Hints: When the characters inevitably confront her and demand to know what she's up to, the Watcher will calmly identify herself as operating under the orders of the Dragon's Eye – and warn the characters not to impede her duties. She's well defended against magical attempts to uncover her intentions, and if threatened with violence will simply vanish – only to reappear days or weeks later. Perhaps she's not even truly there, but uses the Space spell "Co-location" to observe without establishing a true physical presence. Used properly, the Reticent Watcher can become a catalyst for the characters' unease and paranoia.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Stealth (dice pool 6) – The Watcher can get as close to her target as needed, or melt away when the situation gets sticky.

Subterfuge (dice pool 7) – Sometimes the Watcher must use lies or a disguise to position herself for the best possible view.



Combatants

Kurotsuki ("Black Moon")

Quote: Death can be very beautiful. The one I am about to grant you will be most lovely.

Background: Born to very traditional parents working in the corporate sector, Kazuko Mifune was unusually precocious even for an only child. From her aloof parents, she learned early on to create a discrete emotional distance between herself and others. Kazuko had a rich inner life that she never felt drawn to share with others, and one that she didn't particularly want others to share with her.

Once she reached adolescence, Kazuko realized that her beauty gave her a powerful weapon to wield with men (and some women), and she reveled in the power she had over others. While she was never malicious, she was perfectly content to accept adulation and use it to her advantage where possible. She gave her admirers just enough attention to keep them coming back, but never any more than that.

Kazuko's manipulative tactics backfired on her when she tried using them on a young man who steadily and increasingly grew obsessed with her. He began stalking her, and, for the first time, Kazuko truly knew fear. One night her stalker, Tatzuhiko, chased her through a patch of woods near her town, cornering her near an old and powerful Shinto shrine. Kazuko's grandfather had been a devout Shinto priest, and she struggled to recall everything he had ever told her about



calling on the spirits for aid. She was suddenly not at the shrine in the woods, anymore, but in the Realm of the Primal Wild. Her Awakening was a powerful, primal experience. Writing her name on the Watchtower of the Stone Book was a defining moment for her, and when she returned to her body, she was no longer prey, but the predator.

Kazuko's use of magic is extraordinarily subtle, and her discretion and judgment made her a natural for the Guardians. Even as she made her way through the Veils, Kazuko used her beauty to manipulate and sway the mages who were recruiting her. As she gained an understanding of the social and political realities of the Awakened world, she was immediately drawn to the Faceless, those mages who can be anyone — but themselves. In their service, the young woman's icy demeanor finally found a cause.

Description: Kurotsuki is a petite Japanese woman who dresses in a very conservative style that younger Japanese women may find just a few months past stylish. Her formal mode of dress, however, does nothing to detract from her startling beauty. Kurotsuki is astonishingly beautiful in a winsome, feminine way.

Kurotsuki's nimbus gives her face the appearance of a fox about to pounce on prey: her already-fine features seem finer and more elongated, and her eyes gain a vulpine glimmer. Since she prefers to act through the most subtle means at all times, and since she almost never uses vulgar magic, very few mages have ever seen Kurotsuki's nimbus.

Storytelling Hints: No one who has interacted with her would ever connect Kazuko Mifune with anything so ridiculous as magic. She has found that others trust blandness and fear individuals, so she avoids the appearance of being unusual in any way, preferring to appear slightly behind the times rather than seem at all innovative (although what goes on in her mind is anything but bland or average). Her ego is subordi-

nate to her work for the Guardians, and she's perfectly happy — comfortable, in fact — going unrecognized among Sleepers for her real brilliance. Because of this, she took to the Masque readily; she has mastered three identities thus far and hopes to study many more.

Kazuko is a master of social games and intrigue; flirtation and ingratiation are her weapons of choice, and they open doors for her that are locked to most others. Kazuko has now been an Interfector for nearly five years, and she thinks no more about the acts she performs in pursuit of her duties than she does about showering in the morning. As a staunch believer in reincarnation, she does not see what she does as murder, but as a form of pruning souls for better subsequent lives.

Real Name: Kazuko Mifune

Path: Thyrus

Order: Guardians of the Veil

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Investigation (Gathering Blackmail Material) 4, Medicine 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Larceny 2, Stealth (Crowds) 4, Survival 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy 2, Expression 1, Persuasion (Seduction) 5, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Misdirection) 5

Merits: Contacts (Yakuza), High Speech, Language (English, Mandarin, Native: Japanese), Library (Shinto Spirit Lore, Prophecies of the Hieromagus), Masque (Hearthkeeper, Holy Concubine, Wounded Monk), Meditative Mind 1, Occultation 1, Resources 3, Order Status 3 (Guardians of the Veil), Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 5

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Death 2, Fate 3, Life 3, Mind 3, Spirit 2

Notes: *Fate* — The Evil Eye (•), The Perfect Moment (•), Superlative Luck (•); *Life* — Body Control (•), Self-Healing (•), Control Median Life (•); *Mind* — Alter Aura (•), First Impressions (•), Misperception (•), Augment the Mind (•), Imposter (•), Telepathy (•)

Mana/turn: 13/4

Armor: 3 ("Misperception," Mind •)

Panoptes (Sentinel)

Quote: You're less fun than my first wife.

Background: Leonard Sloane, called Panoptes by mages, has been a Sentinel practically as long as he has been a mage. His mentor was a Sentinel of some repute. However, Leonard's teacher died under questionable circumstances, and the death has always clouded Leonard's reputation. While no one has come out and said that Leonard was in any way responsible for his mentor's death, unresolved questions remain. Leonard's reputation at the time as a lone wolf and his smart mouth had often gotten him in trouble with mages in positions of power. However, his reputation since his master's death has been exemplary. So long as he continues to produce results, the Consilium will keep him in his position, but he knows that his first screw-up will be the end of his Sentinel career. And since all he has is his "job," he won't let that happen.

Description: Leonard has a well-worn face, with plenty of character lines. He has the eyes of someone who has seen it all, and nothing, no depth of depravity or mad scheme, surprises him anymore. He tends to have a sardonic grin plastered on his face, as if he's amused by a degenerate universe.

His nimbus causes him to appear as if he had eyes all over his skin. These are not actual eyes that allow him to see, though they appear to stare at whoever looks at him.

Storytelling Hints: Panoptes is a well-entrenched member of the Consilium, and a familiar face around town. He has been a Sentinel for well over a decade. He realizes that willworkers never want to see him, because it means that something bad has happened. He's known to be a bulldog during an investigation, never letting go until a rogue is captured.

Dedicated Magical Tool: His wedding ring, a plain gold band, dented and worn.

Real Name: Leonard Sloane

Path: Moros

Order: Guardians of the Veil

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3



Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation (Magical Crimes) 4, Occult (Acamoth) 2, Politics 1, Science (Forensics) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Larceny 2, Stealth (Shadowing) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation (Interrogation) 3, Persuasion 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Detecting Lies)

Merits: Barfly, Contacts (Occult Circles, Police Department, Street), High Speech, Imbued Item (Sentinel's Shield, see p. 208), Occultation 1, Status (Consilium 2, Guardians of the Veil 2), Stunt Driver

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 6

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 8

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Death 2, Fate 2, Forces 1, Mind 3

Notes: *Death* – Forensic Gaze (•), Grim Sight (•), Entropic Guard (•), Ghost Summons (•); *Fate* – Interconnections (•), The Perfect Moment (•); *Forces* – Influence Sound (•), Nightsight (•), Tune In (•); *Mind* – Aura Perception (•), Incognito Presence (•), Mental Shield (•)

Mana/Per Turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Dice Pool
Heavy Pistol	3(L)	30/60/120	7+1	8

Armor: 2 ("Entropic Guard," Death •)

Magic Shield: 2 (from his Sentinel's Shield imbued item)

Romanov

Quote: *I will not be your friend, because I do not want to ever have to betray you.*

Background: Romanov has been a spy in both his lives, Sleeping and Awake. When he Awoke, he had been behind the Iron Curtain in Moscow for 10 years. He was British, but he reveled in the opportunity to live any life but his own, escaping his personal demons. His actions during the mystery play that brought him to tread upon the Path of Doom betrayed him – he spoke too much English in the presence of his Russian superiors – and Jermija Gasanov disappeared late in 1976.

When the Guardians of the Veil approached him and quietly proposed that he put the skills of his mortal life to use, Romanov agreed. The next invitation, from the Adamantine Arrow, Romanov accepted. Romanov was an excellent student, methodical and relentless if not fast, and an excellent spy, never revealing his true intentions. For almost 30 years, he has maintained his



loyalty to the Guardians all the while pretending to be a true Adamantine Arrow. But his growing friendships among the Arrow contrasted with the few impersonal contacts he had had with the Guardians of the Veil, and it wore at him. Eventually, Romanov demanded that his assignment come to a close.

His Guardian superiors still felt that his cover could be useful, but Romanov was adamant. He was nearly a master of Mind; even if his threats to abandon his post and become an apostate did not move his Guardian superiors, a master of the order would draw significantly more backlash when his true allegiance became known. With his superiors' permission, Romanov withdrew from the Adamantine Arrow and returned to the Guardians to teach them what he knew of the other order's secrets. His face has been changed permanently by a surgery, complemented by Life spells that allowed the operation to heal with no sign of scarring.

It has not yet been a year since he left the ranks of the Arrow. Many of Romanov's former friends consider him a traitor of the worst kind. His shadow name has been changed, but some Arrows still devote a great deal of time to hunting him. Today, Romanov has become something of a warrior-monk, clearly affected by his time among the martial mages of the Adamantine Arrow. His energies are dedicated to protecting the integrity of the Mysteries in those rare instances when nothing but a display of force will do.

Description: A tall and broad 20-something man. His scalp is kept shaved, but he wears a blond goatee. His clothing tends toward the understated and unnoticeable; when he does not need to wear contemporary clothing for anonymity, he wears the robes of a Buddhist monk.

Everything that comes in contact with Romanov's nimbus seems to wilt: plants droop, paper loses its crispness, light dims. His sense of guilt seems almost tangible to the more perceptive people who view the nimbus.

Storytelling Hints: Though he appears young, Romanov is

nearing 70. He has maintained several identities, professed to a half-dozen conflicting ideals and hurt many, many people who considered him a friend. He is tired of that life. It is very hard for him to accept that the ideal that drove him to remain steadfast for all those years might be wrong, so he struggles against that epiphany. Although he seeks the peace of meditation and the righteousness of warring for the Mysteries' security, he is tormented by those whose trust he has betrayed. Romanov affects tranquility in search of the real thing, but his soul is still that of a spy: tradecraft is ingrained in him, and the observant will notice it in his actions.

Dedicated Magical Tools: Stiletto from ancient Rome, an astrological chart predicting his death from an accomplished fortune teller (Death magic), a private note from his psychoanalyst frantically urging Romanov to return for another session (Mind magic)

Real Name: Arlington Sheppard

Path: Moros

Order: Guardians of the Veil

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation (Undercover Work) 4, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Brawl (Savate) 3, Firearms 1, Larceny (Opening Locks) 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Lying) 5

Merits: Contacts (British Intelligence, Russian Intelligence), Language (Russian), Occultation 3, Order Status (Guardians of the Veil) 2

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 6

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Death 3, Fate 1, Matter 1, Mind 4

Notes: Death – Shadow Sculpting (•), Decay (••), Entropic Guard (••); Mind – Aura Perception (•), Alter Aura (••), Incognito Presence (••), Mental Shield (••), Augment the Mind (•••), Psychic Assault (•••), Psychic Sword (••••)

Mana/turn: 11/2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Savate	0 (B)	7	–
Brass Knuckles	1 (B)	7	Used with Brawl
Lt. Pistol	2 (L)	5	–

Armor: 3 ("Entropic Guard," Death ••)

Veritas

Quote: Turn your heart away from these wicked ways my friend – let me lead you into the path of light.

Background: Harrison Wilson was a silver-tongued young man who used his intelligence and his charisma to drift through life casually taking advantage of others. By the time he was in his early 20s, he considered most people to be blind sheep. He became a minister with an evangelical church because it looked like a quick and easy path to wealth and status. However, his ministry included more than just making skilled speeches to crowds he was attempting to extract money from – his parishioners occasionally approached him with all manner of problems. Although he told himself that he was only doing it for the good publicity, he started helping some of the parishioners after the stories of their problems touched his heart.

Although he had never believed in the supernatural, he was now confronted by people asking for help with possessions and fears of evil magic. Harrison attempted to comfort them, but he didn't believe their stories. Then, one day he caught a brief glimpse of something that looked like a spirit harassing a child. That night, he was tormented by dreams of what he had seen. The next morning, he felt called to help. He went over, saw the materialized spirit and burned it out of the child with a blast of Celestial Fire. Soon after, Stalwart, an Obrimos who worked with the Guardians of the Veil, approached Harrison. After completing his initial training, Harrison was given the name Veritas and he went back to work in his church.

Today, he works for the Guardians of the Veil because he is firmly convinced that Sleepers must be kept safe from the supernatural. He works to keep Sleepers from witnessing vulgar magic as well as uses his abilities to drive off spirits and other hostile supernatural beings. He occasionally still considers himself to be as much a con artist as a minister, but few agree with him. He now uses his silver tongue to convince Sleepers not to believe

stories of magic; his church has become part of the Labyrinth. He is fierce and tireless in his determination not to allow anyone to harm or abuse his flock. To further increase his ability to help others, he recently joined the Bearers of the Eternal Voice (see pp. 163-165) and learned that Legacy's first Attainment.

Description: Veritas is a slender, clean-cut, handsome young man with fashionably short hair and dark skin. He dresses casually but well and is conscious of his appearance without appearing to be. His speech is educated, and his manner is always open and friendly.

When he uses vulgar magic, he is outlined in a glowing halo that surrounds his entire body with pure golden light – this halo is brightest around his head.

Storytelling Hints: Veritas is extremely outgoing, but he is also an excellent listener and is always curious to learn about others. He tends to trust Sleepers more than mages, and is extremely protective of his congregation, and to a lesser extent, of all Sleepers.

Dedicated Magical Tool: A large gold cross

Real Name: Harrison Wilson

Path: Obrimos

Order: Guardians of the Veil

Legacy: Bearers of the Eternal Voice

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 1, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult 1, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Speech Writing) 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Preaching) 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: High Speech, Resources 1, Status (Clerical Standing, Minister) 1

Willpower: 4

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Prime 3, Forces 1, Life 1, Mind 2

Notes: Life – Cleanse the Body (•); Mind – Aura Perception (•), Emotional Urging (•); Prime – Dispel Magic (•), Supernal Vision (•)

Attainments: 1st: The Perfected Conversation

Mana/Per Turn: 12/3

Armor: 2 ("Misdirection," Mind ..)

Magic Shield: 3 (Prime ..)



Zero Zero

Quote: Your clumsy formulations upset the elegant balance of reality — please cease what you're doing or face serious repercussions.

Background: Owen Otherson did not have an easy childhood. He was mentally gifted — and born with Asperger's syndrome, a developmental disorder that made it extremely difficult for him to understand and respond to the most basic of social cues. Owen's parents lacked the sensitivity to try and understand his puzzling affliction or nurture his extraordinary intellect, and treated him as a curse that had been unfairly visited upon them.

Schooling was a nightmare that exposed Owen to countless humiliations, including the nickname "Zero Zero" (which he'd later claim as his shadow name). But Zero excelled in his studies, especially math and physics. He earned a PhD at age 15, and by age 18 was granted a research position at a prestigious university. While working obsessively on an obscure, incomplete theorem, Zero had his Awakening. Invisible forces and abstract concepts suddenly became tangible, carrying him across a dark abyss of quantum uncertainty. Deposited before an incomplete algorithm that seemed to stretch to infinity, he added a set of variables that represented himself.

Owen attempted to express his new understanding of reality to his fellow scientists, only to find them incapable of comprehending. Worse, their skepticism somehow disrupted his ability to translate his altered perceptions into empirical evidence. Soon afterward, he was approached by a group of Awakened academics called Faculty Alpha. They steered him towards a teacher and, when he was ready, accepted him into their cabal.

Description: Zero is a young man who dresses as if he's a middle-aged, absent-minded professor: rumpled trousers, nerdish button-down shirts, ratty suit jackets and ugly ties. He's not much on grooming, either, and typically sports a two- or three-day beard and a serious case of hat hair. He's learned to make himself unobtrusive in social situations (a skill honed in high

school to avoid persecution). But in conversation, Owen tends to be oblivious of social norms; he tends to stand too close, avoid eye contact, talk too loud and interrupt without apology.

Zero's nimbus appears as a cloud of small glowing particles of various colors that fly off of and around his body, sometimes colliding with each other and flying into new directions. They leave brief trials of light, like shooting stars, and the trails sometimes look like mathematical symbols or digits.

Storytelling Hints: Having been burned many times by people trying to take advantage of his social cluelessness, Owen rarely takes anyone at their word. Owen's adherence to the Guardians' credo is rooted in his suspicious nature: Sleepers are just too petty and malicious to be trusted with any understanding of the Supernal arts. He's also motivated to protect the Mysteries because, in his mind, the growth of the Abyss introduces unacceptable errors into the otherwise perfect equations of Creation. Owen has proved himself a relentless investigator for his order, one who won't be swayed by emotion or misled by dubious evidence.

Dedicated Magical Tools: Path tool: stainless steel-plated mechanical pencil; Arcana tools: *Forces* — bar magnet; *Prime* — pocket notebook filled with equations; *Space* — eyeglasses

Real Name: Owen Otherson

Path: Obrimos

Order: Guardians of the Veil

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Research 3, Computer 3, Investigation (Equations) 4, Occult 3, Science (Physics, Mathematics) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Stealth (Crowds) 3

Social Skills: Subterfuge (Spotting Lies) 3

Merits: Ambidextrous, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, High Speech, Library (Shared) 4, Language (Latin) 2, Natural Immunity

Willpower: 5

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 8

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Forces 3, Prime 3, Space 2

Notes: *Forces* — Tune in (•), Unseen Shield (•); *Prime* — Supernal Vision (•), Magic Shield (•), Celestial Fire (••); *Space* — Omnidivision (•), Spatial Map (•)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Armor: 3 ("Unseen Shield," Forces ••)

Magic Shield: 3 (Prime ••)



Who are we?

Don't ask for secrets

if you cannot keep them.

Do you wish to take this step?

Good.

We are the secret police of the Awakened, charged with our task by the kings of lost Atlantis. We watch and judge the Gifted for any sign of malpractice of their Art, for we knew of old that the Abyssal taint of miscast spells risks the very universe. To remain pure, magic must be kept secret — and we make sure it stays that way.

— Coatlicue, famulus Susceptor of the order

This book includes:

- The history, culture and society of the spies of old Atlantis
- Factions within the order, the three Veils of initiation and the 49 Masques worn to change identities
- New spells, enchanted items and Legacies



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